

Honduras: The War On Campesinos To Produce 'Agro-Fuels' For Global Markets

By Eric Holt Gimenez, Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy,
Feb.12, 2012

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eric-holt-gimenez/honduras-the-war-on-peasa_b_2632033.html

Two more peasants were assassinated by paramilitary units last week in Honduras. This brings the murder of subsistence farmers and indigenous leaders to over 60 since the Honduran coup d'etat in 2009. Juan Peres and Williams Alvarado were members of the Peasant Movement for the Recovery of the Aguán (MOCRA), an organization that seeks to protect peasant cooperatives from the rash of land grabs being carried out in Honduras.

In a country where a quarter of the arable land -- the best land -- is already monopolized by less than 1% of the farmers, the Honduran "agro-oligarchs" want to acquire the 10% of Honduran land still owned by its peasantry (who make up 70% of the country's farmers).

It is easy to understand their voracity. The global demand for palm oil has tripled from two million to over eight million tons over the last decade. Thanks to renewable fuel targets in the U.S. and Europe (that neither can fill with their own stock) lucrative markets are opening for agrofuels. Financial investors view agricultural land as an \$8.4 trillion market. The planet's land rush is heating up and Honduran elites are not going to be left behind in their own backyard. The Aguán Valley -- where the two peasant activists were murdered -- is the theater for relentless grabs of peasant land.

Women have also been threatened -- a form of intimidating whole families. On October 23, 2012, Karla Yadira Zelaya, spokesperson of the Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán (MUCA) was kidnapped at 6:30 am in a bus stop in the area of El Carrizal. Karla was blindfolded while her captors interrogated her for three hours about whereabouts of MUCA's leadership, before she was thrown out of the car.

The Afro-Indigenous communities in the Moskitia region are also being affected. A letter (<http://hankjohnson.house.gov/press-release/rep-johnson-57-colleagues-call-investigation-dea-related-killings-honduras>) sent by Hon. Hank Johnson (GA) and 57 other Congresspersons to the Department of State and the Department of Justice on January 25, called for a credible investigation into the DEA-instigated killings of civilians in Ahuas, including a youth and one pregnant woman. They also mention that Miriam Miranda, the Afro-Indigenous/Garifuna leader who has denounced collusion between government and narco traffickers in land seizures, has received death threats.

Indigenous and peasant people are caught between the land grabbers and the War on Drugs. On May 11, 2012, four indigenous villagers, including a 14-year-old boy, were killed during the course of a drug interdiction raid in Ahuas (Moskitia), Honduras. Three others were seriously wounded. At least ten U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents participated in the mission as members of a Foreign-Deployed Advisory Support Team (FAST), a DEA unit first created in 2005 in Afghanistan. According to the New York Times, Honduran police agents that were part of the May 11 operation told government investigators that they took their orders from the D.E.A.

How did the poor people living on Honduras' vast extensions of land become so "expendable?"

This did not just happen overnight. The country has been militarized for over half a century, allowing the country's infamous "10 families" to carry out national business with impunity since the Cold War. During Ronald Reagan's war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua in the 1980s, vast areas of the border zone were occupied by U.S. trained "contras" that violently displaced thousands of subsistence farmers.

There are three new elements at play today, however, that have reset the stakes and increased the human rights abuses in Honduras: The global pressure for agricultural land, the drug wars and the Honduran coup of 2009.

The coup that deposed democratically-elected Manuel Zelaya in June, 2009 was angrily denounced by Latin American governments. The United States

temporarily suspended aid to the coup government. An election largely recognized as fraudulent was held in November, thus allowing the Obama Administration to resume aid to the country. President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo was in Washington D.C. for a photo-op in October 2011, in an effort to let the world know that Honduras was open for business.

He quickly pushed legislation to favor investment in agrofuels, tourism, forestry and mining. This turned up the pressure on Honduran land.

Honduras is one more case in the epidemic of global land grabs (what the World Bank likes to call "large scale land acquisitions") sweeping the planet. Hundreds of thousands of peasants and indigenous people are being violently displaced to make way for massive agrofuel projects, hydroelectric dams, paper mills, gold mines and tourist resorts. In many cases buying up land is simply a hedge for investors. Estimates vary, but somewhere between 50 million and 227 million hectares have been grabbed, globally.

The difference in Honduras is that its land is being grabbed primarily by Hondurans... The agro-oligarchy set their sights on peasant's land back in the 1990s. The peasant organizations fought back through legal means, and were making progress towards reclaiming grabbed land and resolving disputes under the administration of Manuel Zelaya (All of this was reversed under Porfirio Lobo, suggesting that crushing the peasant movements trying to reclaim their lands was a driving motivation behind the 2009 coup).

The Honduran congress has found novel way to open up land to foreigners through its new "Charter Cities" law. Large areas of privatized territories governed autonomously and bolstered by foreign investments. In what many are calling a "mini coup", the second version of this law was passed after firing the four judges who ruled the first attempt unconstitutional. The "uninhabited" lands targeted by Charter Cities are, as it happens, the ancestral territories of Honduras' Afro-Indigenous peoples.

One Canadian investor, known as the Porn King (<http://hondurashumanrights.wordpress.com/2011/12/15/garifuna-communities-of-trujillo-take-legal-action-against-canadian-porn-king/>) because of how he made his fortune, has driven Garifuna inhabitants from their lands

around the once pristine bay of Trujillo, in order to build a jetty for tourism cruise ships.

The rulers of Honduras are able to carry out these land and power grabs, largely thanks to the country's renewed militarization with the War on Drugs. For over a decade, the Atlantic Coast of Honduras has been a drug superhighway, whose traffic, economy and cartel control were only gingerly disputed by the DEA and the Honduran military. With the coup, the Soto Cano U.S. airbase near Tegucigalpa was given a \$25 million facelift and two Atlantic naval bases were expanded.

In 2011 the Pentagon increased its contract spending in Honduras by 71% to \$55 million dollars. Five more military bases have since been upgraded -- spreading the U.S. military presence to the entire country (General John F. Kelly, head U.S. Southern Command just paid a visit to Honduras in January).

The remilitarization of Honduras has ushered in a thriving cottage industry of paramilitary units available to the highest bidder. Just imagine who has the inkling -- and the money, to buy them.

The result has been called "The War on Peasants". (See: <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/Grabbing+Power>) Land that was distributed to peasants in the 60s and 70s is now violently up for grabs. Often organized in cooperatives, peasant farmers are desperately trying to fend off the grabbers. They have formed intra-regional federations and "observatories" in an attempt to protect themselves legally and politically from dispossession. The leaders of these peasant organizations are targeted by paramilitary groups and mercenaries hired by large oil palm growers.

The silence on the part of the Obama administration is possible, in part because Honduras is the "unknown country" off the radar for most North Americans. Sanitizing the violence of land grabs with terms like "large scale land acquisitions" and suggesting that they are "forms of investment" in agriculture only serves to distort the issue. The drumbeat of the War on Drugs further drowns out the reality of human rights abuses on the ground. Even the media's exclusive attention to the War on Terrorism diverts our attention from the terror being visited upon Honduran peasants.

With all the high talk these days of saving the world from hunger, how is it no one steps forward to protect farmers when they are gunned off their land?

BACKGROUND

Honduras As The Murder Capital Of The World:

- McClatchy Newspapers, January 20, 2012: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/01/20/136474/crime-booms-as-central-americans.html>
- NACLA, January 21, 2012: <http://nacla.org/news/graft-greed-mayhem-turn-honduras-murder-capital-world>
- New York Times, January 27, 2012: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/27/opinion/in-honduras-a-mess-helped-by-the-us.html?_r=2
- NPR Radio, February 11, 2012: <http://www.npr.org/2012/02/11/146668852/in-honduras-police-accused-of-corruption-killings>

Journalist Killing Capital:

- Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, U.S. Congress, Testimony of Rev. Ismael Moreno Coto, July 26, 2012: <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2012/moreno260712.html>

LGBT Killing Capital:

- Miami Herald, January 17, 2012: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/01/17/2593984/honduras-is-test-of-new-us-policy.html>

Inmate Killing Capital:

- BBC World News, February 15, 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-17038259?print=true>
- The Real News, February 24, 2012: http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=7979

Lawyer Killing Capital:

- United Nations, April 11, 2012:
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41745&Cr=latin+america&Cr1>

HONDURAN PEOPLE UNDER A PERMANENT COUP D'ETAT

- The Nation, October 12, 2012, “How Low Can Honduras Go?”:
<http://www.thenation.com/article/170543/how-low-can-honduras-go>
- OFRANEH (Garifuna People’s Organization), December 13, 2012, “Honduran People Under A Permanent Coup D'etat”:
<http://rightsaction.org/action-content/honduran-people-under-permanent-coup-detat>
- CBS News, December 31, 2012, “Inside The World's Deadliest Country: Honduras”:
http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-202_162-57561301/inside-the-worlds-deadliest-country-honduras/

WHAT TO DO?

Please send – and keep on sending - copies of this information, and your own letters, to your own elected politicians (MPs, Congress members and Senators) and to your own media.

Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the democratically elected government of President Zelaya, Honduras has become the ‘Murder Capital of the world’. State repression has again reached levels similar to the worst years of the 1980s.

Since the coup, the U.S. and Canadian governments have ‘legitimized the illegitimate’ post-coup regime. North American companies and investors have increased their business activities in Honduras since the coup. In no small part, this regime remains in power due to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada.

GET INFORMED / GET INVOLVED

- **SPEAKERS:** Contact us to plan educational presentations in your community
- **JOIN A DELEGATION:** Form your own group or join one of our delegation seminars to Guatemala and Honduras to learn first hand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles
- **BALANCED DAILY NEWS SOURCES:** www.democracynow.org / www.therealnews.com / www.upsidedownworld.org / www.dominionpaper.ca / www.rabble.ca / www.fsrn.org /
- **GOOD READING:** Eduardo Galeano "Open Veins of Latin America" / Howard Zinn "A People's History of the United States" / James Loewen "Lies My Teacher Told Me" / Ronald Wright "Stolen Continents" / Naomi Klein "The Shock Doctrine" / Dr Seuss's "Horton Hears A Who" /

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS (in Canada and the U.S.)

In support of pro-democracy, community based organizations in Honduras, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

CANADA: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS can be made (in Canada and U.S.):

<http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

- be a monthly credit card donor (Canada and U.S.)
- to donate stock, contact: info@rightsaction.org

MORE INFO: info@rightsaction.org

- Get on/off Rights Action's listserv: www.rightsaction.org
- Follow Rights Action on facebook: www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org

Please re-post and re-publish this information