

Rights Action  
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**STRUGGLE IN RIO BLANCO, HONDURAS: 142 DAYS AND COUNTING ...  
Criminalization continues against leaders of COPINH and Lenca indigenous  
communities as they defend their natural resources and way of life**

By: Karen Spring ([spring.kj@gmail.com](mailto:spring.kj@gmail.com)), August 22, 2013

The community of Rio Blanco and the Council of Indigenous and Popular Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) maintain a 142-day road blockade preventing the construction of an internationally financed, hydroelectric dam project.



The Gualcarque river, August 13, 2013, at the location of the proposed hydroelectric dam. (All photos @ Karen Spring)



The Rio Blanco community at the road blockade. Sign reads “Yes to life, no to mining”. (August 3, 2013)

In defense of Lenca indigenous territory and the Gualcarque river, the Rio Blanco community, supported by COPINH, is blocking the entrance of machinery owned by DESA, the concession holder and SINOHYDRO, the Chinese company building the dam.



Next to the access road to the Gualcarque river, the families of Rio Blanco work in shifts to maintain a 24-hour blockade. (August 3, 2013)

### **The Killing Of Tomas Garcia**

In an escalation of violence and militarization in the region, the Honduran military opened fire on community protesters on July 17th, killing Tomas Garcia and injuring his son, Alan Garcia. The region



remains heavily militarized and the prosecution and criminalization of COPINH and community of Rio Blanco continues.

### Trumped Charges Against Leaders

On August 14th, three COPINH leaders, Berta Caceres, Aureliano Molina and Tomas Gomez gave their testimonies before a judge in La Esperanza, Intibuca. All three leaders are being charged with land usurpation, damages to private property and coercion. The court decided on August 14th that the three leaders must present themselves and sign before a judge every 15 days. Caceres, Molina and Gomez are scheduled for a follow-up hearing in Intibuca on September 12 and 13th.



Berta Caceres, Coordinator of COPINH with ex-President Manuel Zelaya. (June 28, 2013)



In front of the courthouse in Intibuca, a Rights Action international delegation accompanied COPINH, the Rio Blanco community, and national and international solidarity delegations. Signs read: “No to concessions in Honduras” and “Tomas Garcia lives and the struggle continues ... COPINH”; and “Go to hell DESA and SINOHYDRO, COPINH”. (August 14, 2013)

Despite facing charges in the department of Intibuca, COPINH Coordinator, Berta Caceres still faces trumped up charges in the department of Santa Barbara, as well. Caceres is being charged with possession of an unregistered firearm and damages to private property. All trumped up charges against COPINH leaders are directly related to the criminalization and intimidation of those that reject the construction of the Agua Zarca dam.

The campaigns of terror, criminalization and prosecution are being conducted under the assumption that DESA holds title to the land where their administrative buildings have been constructed in proximity to the Gualcarque river; where access roads to the river have been built; and the banks of the river.



The administrative offices of DESA and SINOHYDRO heavily guarded by Honduran military and private security guards.

Community members resisting the Agua Zarca dam are unable to access the river without harassment from DESA’s private security guards. The Lenca community of Rio Blanco was not consulted prior to the approval and construction of the Agua Zarca dam in violation of the International Labour Organization, Convention No. 169 requiring “prior, free and informed” consent.

Accompaniment, follow-up and international outcry regarding the intimidation and criminalization of the Rio Blanco struggle is extremely important. The construction of the dam in Lenca territory is directly related to a series of laws managing the exploration and exploitation of Honduras’s natural resources, promoted and financed by the Government of Canada, the Government of the United States, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

**More Information:**

- Annie Bird “A Priest and 22 members of the National Resistance Front arrested in Campas, Lempira, followed by illegal eviction of Lenca communities blocking illegal construction of Agua Zarca dam” -

<http://rightsaction.org/action-content/illegal-arrest-priest-and-22-members-honduran-national-resistance-front>

- SOA Watch, "SOA Graduate involved in criminalization of Indigenous leader, Berta Caceres" - <http://www.soaw.org/about-us/equipo-sur/263-stories-from-honduras/4121-bertha>
- SOA Watch, "The Murder of Tomas Garcia by the Honduran military" - <http://www.soaw.org/about-us/equipo-sur/263-stories-from-honduras/4129-tomasgarcia>

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## WHAT TO DO?

### Repression And Violence In Honduras Do Not Just Happen – They Are Policy

The situation of repression and impunity continue unabated in Honduras. Please send copies of this information, and your own letters, to your Canadian and American politicians (MPs, Congress members and Senators) and to your own media.

Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the democratically elected government, Honduras has become the 'Murder Capital of the world'. State repression has reached the levels of 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 mining, sweatshops, tourism, etc, in Honduras since the coup. In no small part, this repressive regime remains in power due to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada.

There are no signs that this repression, violence, corruption and impunity will decrease, even as a majority of Hondurans courageously support the LIBRE political party that will participate in the November 2013 presidential elections ... in a hope of putting an end to their nightmare.

Across Honduras, community based organizations in the pro-democracy movement need considerably more human rights accompaniment, media attention on the harms and violations, education and activism in Canada and the U.S., and funding.

### Contact:

- Member Of Parliament: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>
- Congress: <http://www.house.gov/> to get info for your member of Congress, and call: 202-224-3121
- Senate: <http://www.senate.gov/> to get contact for your Senator, and call: 202-224-3121

**To Make Tax-Deductible Donations (In Canada And The U.S.)** to support grassroots organizations and their community- and environmental and human rights defense struggles in Guatemala and Honduras, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

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

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