

Rights Action
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New Report:

“The Agua Zarca Dam and Lenca Communities in Honduras: Transnational Investment Leads to Violence against and Criminalization of Indigenous Communities”

- Full Report English:
http://rightsaction.org/sites/default/files//Rpt_131001_RioBlanco_Final.pdf
- Full Report Español:
http://rightsaction.org/sites/default/files//Rpt_131001_RioBlanco_Span.pdf

“The Agua Zarca Dam and Lenca Communities in Honduras: Transnational Investment Leads to Violence against and Criminalization of Indigenous Communities”

by Annie Bird, Rights Action co-director (annie@rightsaction.org)

The “Agua Zarca Dam” report provides a detailed description of the conflict over the Agua Zarca dam in the indigenous region of Rio Blanco, Intibuca, Honduras. This dam project is facilitated not only by funding from multilateral development banks (MDBs) but also by the new Regional Energy Market (MER) promoted by the MDBs, like the World Bank and the IDB.

The MDBs promoted the MER, related to the giant new regional energy transmission line SIEPAC, with the stated intent to provide big new investment opportunities for private investors interested in building new energy generation plants. Hydroelectric dams have been the focus of interest in river rich nations like Honduras and Guatemala, even as these river valleys are the millennial homelands to indigenous peoples. As the IDB stated “Forecasts indicate that Central America should double its installed electricity generation capacity over the next 15 years...this is an historic moment for investment, principally for the private sector in energy projects.”^[1]

In promoting SIEPAC and MER, the MDBs - controlled by the wealthy nations of the global north, with high levels of interest in investment opportunities – ignore the fact that the justice systems in Central America are still decimated by the legacy of the military regimes of the 1980s. Corrupt and abusive systems of political control over justice administration installed then are still strong today. This leaves indigenous communities vulnerable to extreme human rights abuses from corporations and investors interested in building dams.

In fact, the MDBs, taking the lead from the US Treasury Department, are not only ignoring but even specifically adopting policies that contradict international law related to indigenous rights. These laws, if enforced, could protect the rights of project affected peoples. While billions of dollars are invested every year by the MDBs in projects that can and do result in human rights abuses, the human rights and legal bodies that can identify and condemn human rights abuses are left without budgets, with huge backlogs, and no enforcement mechanisms.

Lenca communities in the Rio Blanco region of Intibuca, organized in COPINH, the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, have submitted five formal complaints to the Public Prosecutors office since 2010 for acts of abuse of authority and the stealing of land by

Honduran government officials and the dam builders, the DESA and SINOHYDRO corporations. While no investigations have advanced, communities opposing the dam have come under increasing violence, including a murder on June 15 by the military.

Most recently, internationally recognized COPINH leaders defending the communities land rights have been charged with "inciting" a road block by communities. While the only evidence presented simply showed that the human rights defenders believed the communities had more valid land rights than the company, the charges were quickly prosecuted and Berta Caceres has been ordered to await trial in jail. It is suspected that Aureliano Molina will receive a similar order on Monday, October 7.

These trumped up charges were initiated within days of newspaper reports that US Ambassador to Honduras, Lisa Kubiske, urged Honduran authorities to prosecute those who promote land "invasions." Evidence shows that if Honduran law and ratified international conventions were enforced, the dam builders would be the ones prosecuted.

MDB projects should be bound to findings of existing international bodies charged with overseeing implementation of the conventions that nations are bound to accept as law. Instead, MDBs hold themselves above the laws. The World Bank, chartered as an agency of the United Nations is bound by its charter to seek to advance and not undermine the directives of the conventions of the United Nations. Yet the World Bank does not even bother to attend the hearings of the UN Commission on Human Rights, where it holds an empty seat.

[1] <http://www.iadb.org/en/news/webstories/2013-06-25/energy-integration-in-central-america,10494.html#.Uk7pMxBJZGo>

What To Do:

1. Action Page: <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/demand-justice-aureliano-molina-bertha-caceres-and-lenca-communities-rio-blanco>
2. [Write a Personal Letter to and call Congress or Parliament \(http://rightsaction.org/action-content/annie-bird-another-copinh-indigenous-rights-defender-may-be-sent-jail-honduras#Congress\)](http://rightsaction.org/action-content/annie-bird-another-copinh-indigenous-rights-defender-may-be-sent-jail-honduras#Congress): Ask your congressperson to demand that the US Ambassador rectify her comments that could be understood as a call for prosecution of land right defenders, and ask the Honduran Attorney General to provide information on the advances of investigations into the charges by Lenca communities against government officials and the dam developers for stealing land and abuse of authority.
3. [Write to the Treasury Department or Finance Ministry](http://rightsaction.org/action-content/annie-bird-another-copinh-indigenous-rights-defender-may-be-sent-jail-honduras#treasury) in Canada (<http://rightsaction.org/action-content/annie-bird-another-copinh-indigenous-rights-defender-may-be-sent-jail-honduras#treasury>): Demand the Treasury review all multilateral development bank funded projects in Honduras and particularly to DESA as for human rights violations and demand Treasury respect international law in their positions regarding MDB loans.
4. [EmailCongress \(http://org.salsalabs.com/o/727/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=14330\)](http://org.salsalabs.com/o/727/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=14330) with SOA Watch: to demand charges are dropped against Berta Caceres.

5. Sign a [Move On Petition](http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/drop-bogus-charges-on) (<http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/drop-bogus-charges-on>) with Just Foreign Policy, to have charges against Berta Caceres dropped.
6. Protest on the [October 10 Day of Action](http://otherworldsarepossible.org/international-day-action-sept-10-pressure-honduran-government-cease-violence-against-indigenous) (<http://otherworldsarepossible.org/international-day-action-sept-10-pressure-honduran-government-cease-violence-against-indigenous>) in coordination with Other Worlds.

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To support grassroots organizations and their community- and environmental and human rights defense struggles in Honduras (like COPINH, that Rights Action has supported since 1998), 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

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