

Rights Action  
January 23, 2014

## **British Gas Risks Fueling Dirty War In Killing Fields Of Honduras** By Michael Gillard

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<http://www.spinwatch.org/index.php/issues/climate/item/5598-british-gas-risks-fueling-dirty-war-in-killing-fields-of-honduras>

09 December 2013

Death squads are operating in a coastal area where British Gas has started a multi-million pound offshore oil exploration drive. Michael Gillard reports from the killing fields of Honduras where peasant and community leaders are dying and a British company is at risk of fueling the dirty war.

Josbin Santamaria Caballero has disappeared. Soldiers came looking for him in the early hours of the morning on 30 October. They traveled in patrol boats through this remote but heavily militarized corner of northeast Honduras, where British Gas has just started exploring for oil that could lead to a £50m investment over the next ten years.

When the soldiers arrived, Josbin’s wife, Rosa, was making breakfast for their daughters Keilin, aged six, and two-year-old Nesly. She said the soldiers started beating her husband, a peasant farmer, and accusing him of being a sicario or assassin for local drug lords.

The long-abandoned region of Gracias a Dios has more than potentially large oil and gas fields. It is also a transshipment point for tons of cocaine sent by Colombian and Mexican cartels to the United States. However, there is little to thank God for among the farmers and fisherman living in this war zone.

Last year, a joint US-Honduran drugs operation led to the death of four innocent villagers traveling home by small boat. Two were pregnant, one a teenager and the other a father. Four more were injured in a hail of bullets when the army helicopter gunship opened fire on the boat.

This October, when a helicopter landed at the Caballeros' farm near Bruss Laguna, Rosa recalled in a witness statement how some 40 soldiers spread out to secure the area. "They blindfolded us so we couldn't see the soldiers' faces. I heard one, who appeared to be in charge, say 'kill and burn him', then two shots. When I was able to remove the blindfold I saw soldiers carrying Josbin onto the helicopter. I didn't know if he was alive or dead. When the helicopter left they said to me, 'We'll give you five minutes to get out of here.' I grabbed my two girls and fled to the mountains."

Rosa's statement went to the Human Rights prosecutor. It arrived five days before the presidential elections on 24 November, which saw the return of the right wing National Party on an internal security and foreign investment manifesto.

An investigation is underway. However, there remains almost total impunity for human rights abuses committed by Honduran security forces. The prosecutor's office is under-resourced and itself under threat from sicarios.

The US-trained army deny they were ever at the Caballero farm. The family has formally accused Colonel German Alfaro, commander of the Xatruch Task Force based near the border of Gracias a Dios, of planning Caballero's murder. Days before his disappearance the colonel publicly denounced Caballero as an assassin. Last Wednesday he said: "This individual is a criminal and sicario. In fact, today someone came to my office willing to give evidence in a court that he had seen this man kill a 6-month old baby".

[Rights Action: This is the same Col. Alfaro who made threatening accusations against Annie Bird, of Rights Action, in December. Read Annie's account: <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/bajo-aguan-region-laboratory-new-global-counterinsurgency-and-laboratory>]

Col. Alfaro said Caballero also kills for the United Peasant Movement (MUCA) and fled to Gracias a Dios to escape justice. Digna Santamaria,

Caballero's mother, is a high profile member of MUCA in Tocoa, the town where Col. Alfaro is based. Her two grandchildren are staying with Digna in the peasant settlement of La Confianza. She believes he was 'disappeared' because of her work in defending peasant land rights against landowners in the palm oil industry. Since 2010, 113 peasant leaders have been killed in the region.

[Rights Action: MUCA is one of the main community based groups in northern Honduras that Rights Action has been supporting and working with since 2009.]

Caballero's case has been taken up by the Committee of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared (COFADEH) in Honduras. Bertha Oliva, its director, said the police and military are using the US-led war on drugs in Honduras to eliminate civilian political and community leaders seeking land reform in an area dominated by agribusiness, cocaine kingpins and now oil barons. Oliva has been marked for death many times since the early 1980s when her husband, a resistance fighter, disappeared. "The death squads are here waiting to strike at the people. I am on the list again," she said.

Amnesty International has warned that human rights defenders, indigenous and peasant leaders, justice officials and journalists are subject to phone tapping, surveillance, death threats, kidnapping and murder. The military and private security working for big business are targeting and criminalising peasant communities, it said in a recent letter to presidential candidates.

British Gas is talking to the Honduran army and navy about future security arrangements in the coastal area of La Mosquitia in Gracias a Dios. It is concerned about working in the world's most violent country and the third most corrupt in the Americas.

"We believe that Honduras offers considerable potential of reserves and felt that the offshore region had been largely overlooked by our competitors. We strongly support human rights within our areas of influence and recognise the significant impact that a major oil or gas discovery and development could make to the country," said a spokesman for the company, which split in 1997 from the UK domestic gas supplier of the same name.

British Gas started negotiations with the Honduras government last year. In May it signed a contract securing rights to explore an offshore coastal area of 13,500 square miles. La Mosquitia is home to at least four indigenous peoples. In 1859, Honduras signed a treaty with the departing British Crown agreeing to hand back land titles to the 'Mosquito Indians'.

The Honduran government only fully complied with the treaty this September when British Gas was consulting with Miskitu Asla Takanka, which the company says is "one of the largest groups representing indigenous communities". However, Bertha Caceres, head of the Coordinating Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras, said the land title transfer is a way for the government to divide tribal peoples and buy off those opposed to or demanding greater investment from the oil and gas project. She said British Gas had not consulted her group.

British Gas is waiting for government environmental licences to begin surveys. The company has allocated £300,000 over the next two years for social and environmental investment projects. A spokesman said: "We haven't gone in with our eyes closed. Clearly the security situation and human rights issue is a major area of concern."

Col. Alfaro denied there are any state-sponsored death squads operating in the northeast, except those linked to drug traffickers and the peasant movement. He said he would shortly be releasing recently received video and witness evidence proving that Caballero is alive.

It's day 40 and his body is nowhere to be seen.

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### **Get Informed / Get Involved**

Since 2009, Rights Action has supported and worked with MUCA, a courageous community based organization that needs on-going support if the campesino communities of the northern and north-eastern regions of Honduras are to stop illegal and violent efforts to remove them from their lands.

- Speakers: Contact us to plan educational presentations in your community about these issues

- Join A Delegation: Form your own group or join one of our educational-solidarity delegation seminars to Guatemala and Honduras to learn more about these issues and struggles
- Recommended Daily News: [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org) / [www.therealnews.com](http://www.therealnews.com) / [www.upsidedownworld.org](http://www.upsidedownworld.org) / [www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca) / [www.rabble.ca](http://www.rabble.ca) /

### **Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)**

To support MUCHA's community defense and human rights work, 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 (Canada & U.S.):

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

- Be a monthly donor (Canada & U.S.)
- To donate stock: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

### **In Honduras, Repression, Violence, Impunity And Corruption Are Policy**

Americans / Canadians: Keep on, keep on, keep on ... sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to your politicians (MPs, Congress members and Senators) and your own media. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the 'Murder Capital of the world'. Repression has reached the levels of the worst years of the 1980s.

Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have legitimized a succession of illegitimate and repressive regimes. North American companies and investors, and "development" banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) have increased business activities in African palm production, sweatshops, "model cities", tourism and mining. The Honduran regime remains in power due in large part to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada and the "development" banks. Across Honduras, community based organizations in the pro-democracy movement need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

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

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Comments / Questions, contact Grahame Russell: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)  
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