

# Deafening Silence & Complicity in Washington & Ottawa With Repression & Impunity In Honduras

<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=b483065b61>

*"We are profoundly saddened and angered by the brutal assassination of Berta Caceres and appalled by [the U.S.] government's continuous assistance to Honduran security forces, so widely documented to be corrupt and dangerous."*

(60 Members of Congress)



- **What to do / Get involved:** See below

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## Murder Of Acclaimed Activist Has U.S. Questioning Massive Central American Aid Package

By Tracy Wilkinson, April 25, 2016

<http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-bungled-murder-honduras-20160425-story.html>

Feisty and stubborn, Bertha Caceres rallied her neighbors against large hydroelectric dam projects that hurt the land in her native Honduras. She routinely clashed with local authorities and delivered firebrand speeches. She also won international acclaim as a determined indigenous activist in a country where that profession alone could be a death sentence.

Early on March 3, it was. Caceres was at home in the town of La Esperanza ("Hope") when masked men broke in and shot her to death. They also shot her colleague Gustavo Castro and left him for dead.

They were not the first, nor the last, such targets. Two weeks later, an associate of Caceres, Nelson Garcia, was killed. As many as 100 indigenous activists have been slain in recent years in Honduras.

The killing of Caceres and allegations that Honduran authorities have bungled the investigation have created a dilemma for the Obama administration. The White House supports Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez — even as some U.S. officials suspect state or state-supported assassins killed the activist.

"All of us in this work, who are voices for justice, are in danger," Bertha Zuniga Caceres, 25, said in an interview during a recent trip to Washington, where she lobbied for help in the investigation into her mother's death. "We have no faith in the police, in the military, in any Honduran institution."

The administration has sent a retired detective and a [Justice Department](#) prosecutor to assist Honduran authorities. But numerous irregularities in the collection of evidence, preservation of the crime scene, autopsy and other procedures have been reported.

As part of the political fallout, a \$750-million package of U.S. aid designated for northern Central America — the largest such aid plan for the region in more than a decade — may also be in jeopardy.

Numerous members of Congress have signed letters to Secretary of State John F. Kerry to protest the Caceres killing and to demand an independent investigation. The strongest letter, signed by nearly 60 lawmakers, demanded some aid be suspended pending a review of the case.

"We are profoundly saddened and angered by the brutal assassination of ... Caceres, and appalled by our government's continuous assistance to Honduran security forces, so widely documented to be corrupt and dangerous," they wrote.

"We strongly believe that the U.S. government should immediately stop all assistance to Honduran security forces, including training and equipment, given the implication of the Honduran military and police in extrajudicial killings, illegal detentions, torture and other violations of human rights."

Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala must meet conditions on human rights, migration and other governance issues before the U.S. aid money is released, and were on track before Caceres was killed, according to State Department officials. Some of the money goes to training police forces.

A senior administration official who works on Central American issues said a single case, such as Caceres', would not determine a shift in U.S. policy because the White House was concentrating on a broader approach to the region.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in discussing internal deliberations, said U.S. dealings with Hernandez had overall been positive although Honduras remains problematic. Days before the killing, Hernandez was feted in Washington as he claimed success in reducing violence in his country.

The administration has portrayed Hernandez as a credible partner in tackling the region's myriad troubles, including the flood of undocumented families to the U.S. border, rampant violence and drug-trafficking.

That kind of assessment infuriates many in Congress and in the activist community. They are skeptical Hernandez will allow a credible investigation into the Caceres slaying or ease the government's repression of people it doesn't like. The U.S. approach is overlooking egregious abuses, they argue.

Hernandez won praise from the State Department when he asked the United Nations to assist in the investigation. Critics, including the Caceres family, want the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to intervene because it has more experience in slaying cases.

Commission members held heated closed-door discussions with Honduran officials in recent days, a participant told The Times. On Friday, the commission announced it had asked Honduras to give a special group of experts access to the case in the country.

"We expressed our profound indignation and consternation" to the Hondurans, said the commission's liaison for Honduras, Francisco Eguiguren.

The commission had repeatedly demanded protection for Caceres in the months before she was killed, saying she was in grave danger. She had often predicted — more than 30 times by one count — that she would fall victim to the conflicts that engulfed her and her Lenca people.

Her most recent cause was a major dam project, sponsored by the Honduran government with Chinese financing, that the Lencas said would ruin their ancestral waterways.

Many in Washington see the Caceres case as a potential watershed for how Washington deals with Honduras going forward.

Honduras would not let Caceres' colleague Castro, who survived the attack, leave the country for a month after the shooting. A Mexican national, he took refuge in the Mexican Embassy in Tegucigalpa, the capital, until he could go home. Castro told reporters in Mexico City that Honduran security forces had tampered with the crime scene.

Under Honduran law, families of homicide victims may have a consultant attend autopsies and are to be kept apprised of the investigation. Zuniga, Caceres' daughter, said that didn't happen in her mother's case.

Sen. [Patrick J. Leahy](#) (D-Vt.), influential in matters involving Latin America, has followed the case closely. A 20-year-old law named for him would revoke U.S. aid to security forces implicated in human rights abuses.

During his third speech on Caceres in just two weeks, Leahy propped a jumbo photograph of her on an easel beside him on the Senate floor. "Why are the world's most vulnerable people ... so often the victims of such abuse and violence?" Leahy asked. "I put greed at the top of the list."

The government of Honduras and the company building the dam "were complicit in condoning and encouraging the lawlessness that Ms. Caceres and her community faced every day," he said.

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### **Enormous Silence & Complicity in Washington & Ottawa: Pressure Needed in U.S. and Canada**

Please re-send the statement above to your elected politicians, pressuring them to publicly support the key demands:

- The establishment of the independent international judicial commission to directly join the criminal investigation into the assassination of Berta Caceres and attempted assassination of Gustavo Castro;
- The establishment of Congressional, Senate and Parliamentary inquiries into the role that the U.S. and Canada played in supporting the 2009 military coup and legitimizing and doing business with the post-coup regimes since then.

### **Funds Needed for Family of Berta Caceres and COPINH**

Since the assassination of Berta Caceres on March 3, 2016, Rights Action has channeled over \$25,000 to her family and to COPINH, that are at the forefront of efforts to ensure that justice is done, even as family and COPINH members are receiving threats, even as the corrupted regime is trying to 'criminalize' members of COPINH for the killing of Berta.

Tax Deductible Donations in the U.S. or Canada: Make checks to "Rights Action" (write Berta/COPINH on memo line) and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations:

- Canada: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/rights-action/>
- U.S.: <http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations> (click on NetworkForGood)

### **More Information / Get Involved**

- Grahame Russell, Rights Action, [grahame@rightsaction.org](mailto:grahame@rightsaction.org)
- Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, [spring.kj@gmail.com](mailto:spring.kj@gmail.com) (in Honduras)

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