

Miriam Miranda, OFRANEH leader, and 3 Garifuna men, detained and threatened by Honduran police

(<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=6d6627ffdb>)

On January 11, 2017, Miriam Miranda and three other members of OFRANEH (Fraternal Organization of Black and Garifuna Peoples) - Luís Gutiérrez, Oscar Gaboa, Luís Miranda - were illegally detained and threatened by police at a roadside stop in La Ceiba, along Honduras' north coast.



The police acted aggressively towards Miriam, an internationally known land, Indigenous rights and environmental defender, and her colleagues, demanding that they produce identification and asking where they were coming from, where they were going.

[Policías Retuvieron y Amenazaron a Coordinadora de OFRANEH y Tres Compañeros Garifunas, 11 January 2017, <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/1592-policias-retuvieron-y-amenazaron-a-coordinadora-de-ofraneh-junto-a-tres-de-sus-companeros-garifunas>]

When they refused to answer the illegal questions, they were ordered out of their car. The police threatened to beat and jail them for “disrespecting the authorities”. By this time, Miriam had alerted Honduran human rights defenders and calls were being made to the highest levels of police authorities, holding them responsible for any more repression Miriam and the three men might suffer.

After some 30 minutes, they were released.

This seemingly small incident is very worrying because of the nature of systemic repression and violence, corruption and impunity in Honduras, and because of who Miriam is.

Along with Berta Caceres (assassinated March 3, 2016), Miriam is the most respected land, human rights and environmental defender in Honduras, particularly since the 2009 military coup that was backed and legitimized by the governments of the U.S. and Canada. In 2015, Miriam and Berta were co-recipients of the Óscar Romero human rights award (<http://www.oscarromeroaward.org/home/>).

For many years, Miriam – like Berta before her – has been the recipient of so-called protective measures from the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. Like Berta, Miriam (let alone other members of OFRANEH) has suffered previous attacks and acts of repression.

On March 29, 2011, Miriam was shot with a tear-gas canister while participating in a peaceful protest in Triunfo de la Cruz. Not only was she illegally shot and detained by police that day, and charged with sedition, she ended up hospitalized due to the injuries sustained.



On July 17, 2014, Miriam and 5 other Garifuna community defenders were kidnapped by heavily armed men, because Miriam and the OFRANEH members were peacefully protesting the operation of an illegal landing strip on Garifuna territories used by organized crime drug traffickers.

Resisting ethnocide by global tourism operators, including Canadian “porn king”

Before the 2009 military coup, and particularly since, Miriam has been at the forefront of community struggles to resist illegal and violent evictions of Garifuna people from their historic lands by Honduran and international tourism investors and businesses, always backed by police, army and privately hired thugs and hitmen.

“Lands To Die For: The Garifuna Struggle In Honduras” is a sobering portrayal of some of the violence and corruption facing the Garifuna people in the context of the systemic violence and repression, impunity and corruption that characterize the Honduran military, economic and political elites and their international partners. (To view: <http://www.cctv-america.com/2016/12/20/lands-to-die-for-the-garifuna-struggle-in-honduras>)

In November 2016, the Toronto Star published an article (“Canadian porn king and Caribbean paradise”, <http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=0731d13449>) about Randy Jorgensen, labeled the “porn king” by Maclean’s magazine in 1993, who is a major tourism operator along the Garifuna coast and who is involved in various open struggles with Garifuna communities in the Trujillo area.

Since 1998, Rights Action has worked with and supported Miriam and OFRANEH, the leading Indigenous-Garifuna rights organization in Honduras. Over the years, many members of OFRANEH have been killed and attacked by police, soldiers and private sector thugs working on behalf of the global tourism industry, the global African palm industry and narco-traffickers.

The U.S. and Canadian-backed military coup on June 28, 2009 marked a serious and qualitative turn for the worse in Honduras’ situation of inequality and racism, repression and violence, corruption and impunity. And, since then, the U.S. and Canadian governments, the U.S. military, and a host of North American companies have maintained or increased economic investments with and military support for the repressive, corrupt regimes in power.

More information

- OFRANEH (Organizacion Fraternal Negra Hondureña), garifuna@ofraneh.org, www.ofraneh.org, <http://www.ofraneh.wordpress.com>
- Grahame Russell, Rights Action, grahame@rightsaction.org
- Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, Spring.kj@gmail.com

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