

October 12, 2019, international Indigenous rights day: María Digna Montero, a Garifuna teacher and land defender in Honduras, was shot dead in her home by assassins

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María Digna Montero

Assassinations of indigenous Garifuna women continue with impunity in Honduras, as the corrupt, repressive (U.S. and Canadian-backed) regime of 'narco-President' Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) and his brother, former congressman Tony Hernandez, face Honduran State-sponsored drug trafficking charges in New York City.

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María Digna Montero, teacher and land defender, shot dead in her home

OFRANEH communique, October 12, 2019

So far in the months of September and October, six (6) Garifuna women have been violently murdered in the communities by outsiders (ladinos/mestizos/whites). We, the Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH), express our deep concern about the escalation of violent deaths and the extermination of the people of the Garifuna communities, mainly women, without any investigations by the authorities into these murders.

The heightened tension and growing risks to the security and human rights of the leaders in the communities and ancestral territories is a product of the dispossession, displacement and criminalization of the communities and of the extractive mega projects promoted by the State together with the national and international corporations.

Midday, October 12, 2019, two armed ladinos arrived at the home of teacher María Digna Montero, in the community of Cusuna, municipality of Iriona, Department of Colón, and shot her dead. The assassins fled on a motorcycle and it was reported that the teacher's body was left until 5:00pm waiting for the authorities to perform the proper removal.

In this context of systematic violence and death, and the complicity of the State with its ineffectiveness and inability to offer security to our communities, vulnerability and dangers are exacerbated. The State of Honduras refuses to recognize our ancestral rights to our lands and to comply with the condemning sentences issued in 2015 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the repeated violation of the human rights of the Garífuna communities of Punta Piedra and Triunfo de la Cruz.

Faced with this grave situation of extermination and the serious threats to the human rights and security of members of the Garífuna communities in Honduras, we declare:

- We condemn the cowardly murder of Garífuna teacher María Digna Montero and demand that this crime be clarified and that both material and intellectual killers be put behind bars.
- We alert the national and international community to the situation of defenselessness in which the Garífuna communities find themselves, and condemn what has become a threat of extermination and expulsion of the Garífuna people from their communities, consequences of these murders and the constant intimidation and threats the community leaders are subjected to by people outside the community.
- We demand the demilitarization of the region and the Garífuna communities because their presence does not represent any guarantee of security for the communities. On the contrary, the more military personnel in the communities, the more murders have been reported from the members of the communities.
- We alert all Garífuna communities in Honduras to remain vigilant of their communities and that, making use of the principles of Territorial Autonomy and Self-Determination, they can mobilise the mechanisms of security and ancestral self-protection in the face of total abandonment and unprotection of the communities by the state.
- We reiterate our commitment to non-violent struggle and demand the exercise of the rule of law in the country, as well as an end to the crimes targeting the Garífuna communities as part of a strategy of intimidation and systematic expulsion by the State of Honduras.

Today, October 12, 2019, history is once again marked by the systematic repression exercised by state governments against the indigenous peoples of the world, especially at this moment in Ecuador and the assassination of our Garífuna leaders in Honduras.

WE REAFFIRM that we will continue to defend and fight for our ancestral rights, territorial and cultural autonomy. We demand justice for our murdered Garífuna comrades!

La Ceiba October 12, 2019

Honduran Black Fraternal Organization, OFRANEH

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Since the 1970s, OFRANEH (the Fraternal Organization of Black and Garifuna People of Honduras) has led the territorial, human rights and environmental defense struggles of the Garifuna people along Honduras' north coast. For decades, they have face repression and illegal evictions at the hands of corrupted authorities and international investor interests in tourism, African plan production and drug trafficking. Rights Action supports OFRANEH since 1998.

Lands To Die For: The Garifuna Struggle In Honduras

December 20, 2016, CCTV Americas. 35 minute film about violent and corrupt challenges facing the Garifuna people, lead by the OFRANEH organization, in the context of the violence and repression, impunity and corruption that characterize the Honduran military, economic and political elites and their international partners. <http://www.cctv-america.com/2016/12/20/lands-to-die-for-the-garifuna-struggle-in-honduras>

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