

Berta Cáceres commemorative bench & apple trees, Fredricton, Canada

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/bertha-caceres-commemorative-bench>



Photo: Maria Jose Burgos, CBC

"These are centuries-old ills, a product of domination. There is a racist system in place that sustains and reproduces itself.... The political, economic and social situation in Honduras is getting worse and there is an imposition of a project of domination, of violent oppression, of militarisation, of violation of human rights,... of the turning over of the riches and sovereignty of the land to corporate capital, for it to privatise energy, the rivers, the land; for mining exploitation."

(Berta Cáceres)

"Berta reminded the world that the hurt that pours out in Honduras today is a result of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism and it has everything to do with not just the US but also Canada. ... It is unacceptable that Canadians know so little about how our foreign policy is hurting people around the world."

(Tracy Glynn)

Rights Action is pleased to have helped fund this historic memory project, as we continue to support the security and justice struggles of members of her family in Honduras.

Who was Berta Cáceres and why we honour her in Fredericton? Berta Cáceres honoured with memorial at Hayes Farm, Fredricton, Canada

by Tracy Glynn, August 26, 2021

<https://nbmediacoop.org/2021/08/26/bertha-caceres-honoured-with-memorial-at-frederictons-hayes-farm/>



Mark Trealot, Hayes Farm manager; bench artist Bruce Gray; Tracy Glynn;
Wolastoq Grand Council Chief Ron Tremblay.

Photos: Maria Jose Burgos (CBC) & Matthew Hayes

On August 25 under the hot noon sun, a crowd gathered at Hayes Farm in Fredericton's Devon neighbourhood for the unveiling of a memorial to Berta Cáceres. The memorial, two apple trees and a bench crafted by local artist Bruce Gray, is located at the front entrance of the urban teaching farm.

Josephine Savarese was one of many from the Fredericton chapter of the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network present at the gathering. She asked if it was appropriate to sit on the bench. Wolastoqewi Kci-Sakom spasaqsit possesom (also known as Wolastoq Grand Council Chief Ron Tremblay) replied: "It is a place to sit and reflect on the richness of food and medicine that grows to feed and cure local people. It's small local farms that will help regenerate the local economy and unify people. Berta's spiritual presence will be felt at Hayes Farm as workers and visitors alike can sit and gaze over the land where sweat, love and hardwork was put into every seed, tree and plant."

The Grand Chief opened the event by smudging the bench and offering heartfelt words of solidarity with Indigenous land defenders everywhere who are losing and risking their lives for their resistance to resource extraction.

Bruce Gray spoke about his vision for the bench, where the wood came from (Government House, a sacred site for the Wolastoqey people) and the process of creating it. Hayes Farm

manager Mark Trealot, taking a break from harvesting berries and fruits, spoke about the farm that is home to the memorial.

The event was covered by CBC's Maria José Burgos. **“Slain Honduran Indigenous activist inspires Indigenous people and other environmentalists in New Brunswick”**

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/berta-caceres-memorial-fredericton-bench-1.6153288>

Who was Berta Cáceres and why are we honouring her here in Fredericton?

I delivered this speech:

Berta Cáceres, a high profile Indigenous Lenca land defender in Honduras, was murdered because of her activism in her home on March 2, 2016. She was 44 years old.

When I read that Berta had been murdered, I, like many people across the world, was devastated and felt compelled to share what she was telling us, what she gave her life telling us, in her many appeals to the world for solidarity.

Berta was well known in my activist circles around the world. In 2001, Berta marched on the streets of Quebec City against the Free Trade Area of the Americas — with some of us here today. Let's be clear that free trade agreements are foreign investor protection agreements. Berta fought against these kinds of agreements most of her life.

Berta was inspired by her mother who housed refugees from El Salvador. Berta's mother instilled a lifelong commitment in her children to stand up for the oppressed. Berta was a teacher and mother of four children. She fought illegal logging, plantations, hydroelectric dams and mines. She was a student activist and in 1993, she co-founded COPINH to defend the Lenca people and lands.

In 2015, she was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize — kind of like a Nobel Peace Prize but for environmental activists who risk their lives. Berta told the audience at the prize ceremony at the San Francisco Opera House:

“These are centuries-old ills, a product of domination. There is a racist system in place that sustains and reproduces itself.... The political, economic and social situation in Honduras is getting worse and there is an imposition of a project of domination, of violent oppression, of militarisation, of violation of human rights,.... of the turning over of the riches and sovereignty of the land to corporate capital, for it to privatise energy, the rivers, the land; for mining exploitation.”

Almost a year later, on March 3, 2016, we woke up to the emails that contained the subject line: Assassination of Berta Cáceres.

The emails said that just before midnight on March 2, a death squad shot and killed Berta while she slept in her home. She died in the arms of Mexican activist Gustavo Castro Soto, who was shot twice in the attack and survived.

Tens of thousands of people attended Berta's funeral. Tributes to Berta poured in from organizations across the world. Solidarity actions at Honduran embassies were held with banners unfurled that said, "Berta Cáceres Did Not Die, She Multiplied!" — a slogan that now appears permanently on this beautiful bench at Hayes Farm. Most of the people participating in these actions, including this one today, never met Berta but they are inspired by her activism and outraged by her murder.

Berta reminded the world that the hurt that pours out in Honduras today is a result of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism and it has everything to do with not just the US but also Canada.

Honduras is one of the original banana republics, long subjected to plunder for the profit of multinational corporations and the domestic elite.

A 2009 military coup in Honduras ousted President Manuel Zelaya. This coup was supported by Canada and the U.S. Since the coup, the country has become a murder capital of the world and we see thousands of migrants fleeing the country — so when US Vice President Kamala Harris says the US is going to get to root causes of the migrant crisis, she needs to listen to Berta, and not to American investors getting rich in Honduras as they displace people from their homes.

Trudeau and Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau also need to listen to Berta.

While President, Zelaya proposed to raise the minimum wage by 60 %, ban open pit mines and cyanide use in mines, and provide free education for all children. Foreign capital did not like these plans and dutiful governments like Canada have done what they could to support foreign investments including legitimizing the post-coup regime, a regime that is friendly to Canadian and American investments in the country and deadly for environmental and human rights activists.

After the U.S., Canada is the largest foreign investor in Honduras. Canadian investments in Honduras are concentrated in mining, sweatshops and tourism. Meanwhile, hundreds of environmental activists, journalists, lawyers, peasants and LGBTQIA2S+ activists have been killed by Honduran authorities since the coup.

When Berta was murdered, a loud message to activists was sent: no activist was safe in Honduras.

[Before she was killed, Berta was organizing Lenca opposition to dams](#) being built by Desa and Hydrosys, a Canadian company, and she said she had received death threats from Blue Energy, another Canadian hydro developer at another site near her home.

These companies benefit from the foreign investor protection agreement that Canada and Honduras signed in 2011. Canada also provided technical assistance to Honduras' new mining law that passed in 2013. The new law is beneficial for Canadian investors but provides little protections for people and the environment.

Canada is the biggest mining investor in Honduras. The Goldcorp San Martin mine, now closed, is blamed for severe health impacts. Aura Minerals, a US company listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, recently blew up a mountain in western Honduras, on top of which is the 200 year old Azacualpa Cemetery.

I could go on about Canadian misadventures in Honduras like how the [Garifuna activists are being criminalized and murdered for their opposition to Canadian-owned tourism projects](#), but I have other things to say and other people need to speak.

Earlier this year, a court unanimously found Roberto David Castillo Mejía guilty of participating in the killing of Berta. Castillo is considered to have masterminded the killing. In December 2019, seven men were sentenced to prison for Berta's murder. At the time, prosecutors said the killers acted on behalf of the hydro-dam company, Desa. A former soldier told [The Guardian](#) shortly after Berta's murder that her name was on a Honduran army list of activists to eliminate.

Besides calling for justice for their mothers' murder, Berta's daughters – Olivia, Laura and Berta – are following in their mother's activist footsteps and denouncing imperialist misadventures in their country. They are part of a global movement that is drawing attention to the record number of land defenders being murdered each year. In 2020 alone, at least 331 land defenders, many of them Indigenous, were killed, according to [Global Witness](#).

Berta's activism was centered on opposing not only dams and mines but also the oppressive structures that serve to justify destruction of the lands and waters and displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. A year before she was murdered, Berta urged humankind to wake up. She declared: "Let us wake up! Wake up humankind! We're out of time. We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only assure our own self-destruction."

To mark the fifth anniversary of her murder and what would have been her 50th year of life, Berta's family has called for people to plant trees in her memory and the wonderful people of Fredericton, of Wolastoqiyik territory, and beyond have come together to make that wish happen.

This beautiful memorial to Berta, two apple trees and a bench, was made possible with donations from:

- [Rights Action](#), an organization that has been doing solidarity work in Honduras and Guatemala for years;

- [MiningWatch Canada](#), an organization that supports communities affected by mining in Canada and communities abroad affected by Canadian mining companies;
- [CUPE NB](#) and the CUPE Maritimes Solidarity Fund. CUPE is New Brunswick's largest union. The union is currently in negotiations for fair wages and better working conditions. Support CUPE. Berta would want you to. She was also a labour activist. You can thank our CUPE frontline workers this Saturday at 10am at a province-wide march. In Fredericton, this walk will start at the Social Development office at 551 King Street.

I need to thank many of you here today who gave individual donations to cover the costs of the apple trees and the bench. Thanks to all the lovely people at Hayes Farm, especially Mark Trealot who jumped at the chance to give a memorial to Berta a good home, a place where I imagine Berta's daughters and colleagues one day visiting. Berta would have loved this place.

Thank you to Martin Aitken and Aitkens Pewter for designing the plaque that contains a strong message of truth that people here need to know. It is unacceptable that Canadians know so little about how our foreign policy is hurting people around the world.

Much gratitude to Bruce Gray, the artist who made this beautiful bench, inspired by Berta's life. Finally, thank you to Aditya Rao, Susan O'Donnell and Marilyn Merritt-Gray who can always be counted on to do important behind-the-scenes work on the things that matter.

(Tracy Glynn, tracy.a.glynn@gmail.com, has worked with communities affected by resource extraction in different parts of the world including on Wolastoqiyik territory.)

Archives – COPINH & Berta Cáceres

Over 20 years of Rights Action archives related to work in support of COPINH:

<https://rightsaction.org/archcopin>

- **A Rot in Honduras That Goes All the Way to the Top**, By Hilary Goodfriend, May 27, 2020, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/05/berta-caceres-murder-honduras-nina-lakhani>
- **BOOK: Who killed Berta Cáceres? Behind the brutal murder of an environment crusader**, By [Nina Lakhani](#), 2 June, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/02/who-killed-berta-caceres-behind-the-brutal-of-an-environment-crusader>
- **Inside The Plot To Murder Honduran Activist Berta Cáceres**, By Danielle Mackey, Chiara Eisner, December 21, 2019, The Intercept, <https://theintercept.com/2019/12/21/berta-caceres-murder-plot-honduras/>

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