

Vicious attack against Olivia Marcela Zúniga Cáceres, LIBRE party candidate & daughter of assassinated human rights defender Berta Cáceres Assassination of LIBRE candidate Nery Fernando Reyes

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/vicious-attack-against-olivia>



“Drug traffickers should be in jail, not in the Presidential Palace”

Life as normal in Honduras, an exploited country ruled by the military-backed, drug-trafficking regime of President Juan Orlando Hernandez, a “democratic allie” government with full political, military and economic relations with the U.S. and Canada since the 2009 military coup ousted Honduras’ last democratically elected government.

Assassination of LIBRE mayoral candidate in Yusguare; Attack against LIBRE congresswoman Olivia Zúniga Cáceres

Oct. 9, 2021, ContraCorriente, Text: Leonardo Aguilar, Photographs: Martín Cáliz

<https://contracorriente.red/2021/10/09/asesinato-de-candidato-a-alcalde-en-yusguare-y-atentado-contradiputada-olivia-zuniga-caceres-crispan-ambiente-electoral-en-honduras/>

Early this morning, LIBRE Party deputy Olivia Zúniga, daughter of Berta Cáceres (assassinated in March 2016), denounced an attempt on her life. Her husband was arrested for the event that occurred despite the fact that Zúniga Cáceres has protective measures and was to be guarded by the National Police.

Only a few hours had passed since the mayoral candidate of Yusguare for the same LIBRE party, Nery Reyes, was assassinated in Choluteca.

The atmosphere of political violence is exacerbated close to the elections with 15 candidates for popular election assassinated between December 2020 and September 2021, while the traditional media coverage resorts to smear practices.

In the early hours of this Saturday morning (October 9), and in the middle of a national holiday, Olivia Marcela Zúniga Cáceres denounced an attack on her home in Planes de Santa Catalina, in the city of La Esperanza, Intibucá, according to a press release from the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH).

Olivia Zúniga is a congresswoman for the Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE) party and is the daughter of environmentalist Berta Cáceres, who was murdered in March 2016 in her home located in La Esperanza, by hitmen hired by people linked to the company Desarrollos Energéticos S. A. (DESA), several of whom are in prison.

According to the COFADEH communiqué, the congresswoman's father, Salvador Zúniga, indicated that his daughter "is badly beaten" and that "they tried to suffocate her and stole a white pick-up truck that she had in her house".

ContraCorriente contacted the International Secretary of the LIBRE party, Gerardo Torres, who stated that Olivia Zúniga has precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and that the congresswoman, in order to comply with the formalities, denounced these aggressions before the Police Directorate of Investigations (DPI) of La Esperanza.

"In the case of Olivia Marcela, she did file a formal complaint. Let us remember that she has precautionary measures and that is why she is always accompanied by a police patrol. Olivia denounced that four men entered her house, beat her, intimidated her, tried to suffocate her and took her car. This is a formal complaint," said Gerardo Torres.

Torres added that there is concern in the LIBRE party because they are trying to present the aggression against Olivia Zúniga as a family problem and that they are concerned about what might happen to her health and protection.

We have seen that they are trying to present it as a problem with her partner or her ex-partner, however, these were strategies that they used to distort the murder of Berta Cáceres in the first place. They said that Berta Cáceres had been murdered because of a problem with her partner: Gerardo Torres.

On the day of Berta Cáceres' murder, one of the members of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) - the organization that Berta Cáceres led - was detained for 48 hours by the National Police. Both the armed forces and the traditional press claimed that the motive for the assassination was a matter of passion.

However, five years later, on the morning of July 5 of this year, a court ruled against David Castillo Mejía, ex-military and former president of DESA, for his proven co-perpetration in the murder of Berta Cáceres. The Court concluded that Berta's murder was the closure of a planning that began in 2015 with communications between Douglas Bustillo, former head of security of the DESA company, who was convicted in December 2019, as material co-perpetrator of the crime, coordinator of the assassination group and main link with the DESA company.

This October 9, the National Police proceeded to capture Luis Fernando Romero Argueta, 30 years old, arrested in western Honduras, suspected of "crime of injury and robbery with violence". Some media have stated that what happened to Olivia Zúniga was a matter of "passion" after Romero Argueta was sentimentally linked to the congresswoman.

It is important to point out that Olivia Zúniga denounced and led a day of protests to open an investigation against several police officers on February 7 in La Esperanza. Olivia demanded that the perpetrators of the crime of nursing student Keyla Patricia Martínez Rodríguez, who was found dead in a police cell in La Esperanza, Intibucá, be punished.

For her part, Berta Zúniga, another of Berta Cáceres' daughters and leader of COPINH, expressed herself on Twitter and condemned how the media has handled the matter of her sister. "With respect to what happened to my sister Olivia I want to say that it is terrible that in the face of crimes of violence that endanger the lives of women, the victims continue to be judged."

Gerardo Torres, for his part, questioned: "How is it possible that someone who is under the protection of the State of Honduras suffers this type of attack? It serves as an alert for the international community to see that the precautionary measures more than something real seem like a show by the State of Honduras because it does not investigate, does not protect and does not guarantee the safety, protection and life of social activists".

Berta Oliva, founder of COFADEH, told Contracorriente that, although some are trying to justify this aggression, this is an attack against a human rights defender, deputy to the National Congress, indigenous woman and a leader. "It is nothing more than a condemnable act and a terrorist act, beyond what the investigations may say in the current political moment and current situation. We cannot think differently. I know that there are already dissident voices that are directing the act to make us think falsehoods."

"In the conditions in which Olivia was left, we condemn and denounce them. We must investigate at the institutional level but it is also worthwhile at the collective level, we cannot allow indifference to be installed as a meaning of oblivion": Berta Oliva.

Berta Oliva added that it is not surprising that from the State they can make any kind of strategy to attack her. "We have already seen how there are people who are handling it. There are other people who are handling another discourse and that is not what one has been told, at least first hand."

Assassination of Nery Fernando Reyes, LIBRE candidate

But the alerts regarding assassinations of political aspirants in Honduras are activated. Last Friday night, October 8, LIBRE leader Nery Fernando Reyes, candidate for mayor in the municipality of Santa Ana de Yusguare, department of Choluteca, in southern Honduras, was shot and killed.

According to COFADEH data, a score of Honduran citizens, candidates for elected office, have been murdered in recent months in Honduras in a context of political violence.

"In the last few months as these elections approach, more than 21 leaders with political aspirations have already been murdered, which indicates the level of action that will be taken each time the days for the general elections approach and shorten," Berta Oliva told Contracorriente.

At the end of last July, in a previous note on the murder of Carolina Echeverria - a candidate close to the Rosenthal family - we indicated that between December 2020 and September 2021 a total of 15 people linked to politics, among them 12 candidates for popular election, were victims of political violence in Honduras, and 12 of those cases resulted in homicides, according to information provided by the National Violence Observatory of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (ONV-UNAH).

However, a more recent ONV-UNAH report indicated that 15 people linked to politics had been killed from December 2020 through September 15, 2021.

Gerardo Torres said that the Choluteca coordination has informed them that they are on alert because there are other LIBRE candidates who have received death threats and that these come "from members of the National Party or members of organized crime." He added that, in other areas of the country, there are also LIBRE militants reporting "threats so that they do not have a presence in the polling stations or so that they do not campaign in certain places".

Apparently he (Nery Fernando Reyes) in recent days had received threats, warning him not to approach a certain sector there in Yusguare, and well, he had informed the political coordination of the department. That was reported to us yesterday. And that he is not the only one who has received some threats",

indicated Gerardo Torres, who lamented the lack of action of the justice apparatus in the country of which he said "they only activate when they have to persecute and repress people who are defending their rights or natural resources".

Gerardo Torres states that in the political campaign of 2013 and 2017, they had several aspirants and candidates murdered or threatened, but that "in those cases no investigation was ever done".

Torres explains that the situation in Choluteca is particular, since this place was known during the 2017 electoral fraud protests as "the bastion of the south" and that this movement generated a "social growth that today is translating into electoral growth for LIBRE. That is what is generating an atmosphere of tension in the department of Choluteca, that social and political movement threatens the power structures that have historically existed in the department."

"We do not have an exact number but we have already had several weeks receiving notifications from candidates and social leaders who have received different threats to try to intimidate them and reduce their political participation", assures Torres.

For Berta Oliva, what Nery's murder tells us, is the continuity of many more that may come if we do not seriously denounce and condemn in the streets so that the masses make known what is really happening.

Oliva assures that it is clear that these attacks and assassinations seek to produce fear, because they are made in the public light looking for strong effects for the non-participation of the people and to produce a social decomposition.

More info

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- Karen Spring, Honduras Now, karen@hondurasnow.org

Archives – COPINH & Berta Caceres

Over 20 years of Rights Action archives related to work in support of COPINH:
<https://rightsaction.org/archcopinh>

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>

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