

URGENT ACTION

AFRO-DESCENDANT COMMUNITY AT RISK IN HONDURAS

Members of an Afro-descendant Garífuna community in north-eastern Honduras, including human rights defender Miriam Miranda, were temporarily abducted by armed men after discovering an illegal runway used by drug traffickers on the Garífuna community's territory. The safety of Miriam and the Garífuna community remains at risk.

Early on 17 July several members of an Afro-descendant Garífuna community, including human rights defender Miriam Miranda, were visiting a remote area in the Garífuna territory in Vallecito, Colón Department, when they were captured by four heavily-armed men. During a previous visit to the area, community members discovered that an illegal runway used by drug traffickers that had been destroyed by the army in January 2014 was being rebuilt. Miriam told Amnesty International that the attackers searched them, took away their mobile phones and said that they were going to kill them. When the attackers learned that more members of the Garífuna community were still in the area and could be aware of the abduction and call for help, they phoned their chief. A vehicle with reinforcements arrived and following negotiations, all those who were abducted were freed four hours later.

Miriam Miranda is the general coordinator of the Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH), an organization that works to promote and defend the rights of the Afro-descendant Garífuna community. In 2011 she was granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights because of the threats and harassment she faces due to her human rights work. These measures have not been properly implemented.

In the hours following the abduction, numerous national and international organizations launched calls for action. As a result an army contingent was sent to the area where the incident occurred to ensure the protection of those who were abducted. However, this was a provisional and partial measure that will not ensure the security of Miriam Miranda, other Garífuna members and their families when they return to their homes. Moreover, no measures are in place to secure the Garífuna territories where drug traffickers are reportedly operating, putting the entire community at risk.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to carry out an immediate and independent investigation into the abduction on 17 July, to make the results public and bring those found responsible to justice;
- Urging them to fully implement the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights precautionary measures in favour of Miriam Miranda and to provide effective protection to her, her family and all members of the Garífuna community in accordance with their wishes;
- Reminding them of their duty to guarantee that human rights defenders can carry out their work without fear of violence and threats, as established in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 SEPTEMBER 2014 TO:

Minister of Interior

Sr. Arturo Corrales
Secretaría de Estado en el Despacho de
Í Seguridad
Aldea el Ocotol, Antiguo Local de la
Academia Nacional de Policía ANAPO
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Email:

comunicacionCNDS@gmail.com

Salutation: Dear Minister of Interior /
Señor Ministro del Interior

Attorney General

Sr. Oscar Chinchilla Banegas
Ministerio Público, Lomas del Guijarro
Avenida República Dominicana
Edificio Lomas Plaza II
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Fax: 011 504 2221 5667
Twitter: @MP_Honduras
**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/
Señor Fiscal General**

And copies to:

**Organización Fraternal Negra
Hondureña - OFRANEH**
Apartado Postal 341, La Ceiba, Atlántida
Honduras
**Fax: 011 504 25521513 / 011 504
24490003**
**Email: ofraneh@yahoo.com /
garifuna@ofraneh.org**

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Embassy of Honduras
3007 Tilden St. NW, Washington DC 20006, **Telephone: 202 966 7702**

Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In 1997 the National Agrarian Institute (Instituto Nacional Agrario, INA) granted title deeds on 980 hectares of land in Vallecito, Colón Department, to the Afro-descendant Garífuna community. For years organized crime has been present in the Vallecito territory, where drug traffickers have built an illegal runway that they have been using for their operations. The Garífuna community has been facing harassment, intimidation and threats in their struggle to take possession of their land.

Indigenous peoples and Garífuna communities in Honduras are discriminated against and suffer inequality, for example, in relation to their rights to land, housing, water, health and education. Large scale projects are carried out on their lands without being consulted and without their free, prior and informed consent. Indigenous and Garífuna leaders have faced fabricated criminal charges and have been the target of attacks and intimidation in reprisal for their work in defence of human rights. This is the case of Miriam Miranda, who has been at the forefront of the defence of the human rights of the Garífuna community, in particular in relation to their land, territory or natural resources.

Human rights defenders face high levels of risk in Honduras. According to the National Commissioner for Human Rights, 30 journalists and 70 lawyers have been killed in Honduras since January 2010. Among the dozens of cases of human rights violations and abuses committed against human rights defenders in the last five years, according to the information Amnesty International has received, in only one case were those responsible prosecuted, convicted and sentenced. For more information, see Amnesty International's Open letter to the presidential candidates of the Republic of Honduras (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR37/014/2013/en>).

In June 2014 the Honduran Congress discussed a first draft of a Law to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Defenders and Justice System workers (Ley de Protección para los Defensores de Derechos Humanos, Periodistas, Comunicadores Sociales y Operadores de Justicia). Given the context of violence faced by human rights defenders, journalists and justice system workers, it is absolutely crucial that the law is approved and implemented, and that adequate resources (including financial and human) are devoted to the task of establishing an effective protection mechanism.

Name: Miriam Miranda (f) and members of the Garífuna community

Issues: Human rights defender, Abduction, Fear for safety, Risk of ill-treatment

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