

URGENT ACTION

END CRIMINALIZATION OF GARIFUNA LAND DEFENDERS

Five members of Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH) are facing criminal proceedings after being arrested during a police operation in the Garífuna community of San Juan, Tela. They are accused of aggravated usurpation for defending ancestral territory. Their prosecution comes amid racist rhetoric targeting Garífuna communities and Honduras' failure to fully implement four Inter-American Court of Human Rights judgments protecting Garífuna territorial rights. We call on the Public Prosecutor's Office to end the criminalization of these five defenders and ensure that Garífuna people can defend their ancestral territories without fear of harassment.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter to the government official(s) listed. Use the sample letter below as a guide or use your own words.
- [Click here](#) to report your action(s) on **UA 89.26**. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

General Attorney

Pablo Emilio Reyes Theodore

Lomas del Guijarro

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Email: fiscaliageneralhnd@gmail.com

Send a copy of your letter to the address below

CC: Honduran Embassy in the United States

1220 19th St NW #320,

Washington, D.C. 20036

Email: embassy@hondurasemb.org

Dear General Attorney,

I am deeply concerned by the ongoing criminal prosecution of **Deinor Osmany Mejía Arzu, Irbin Rene López Cortes, Carlos Enrique Fernández Guzmán, Onil Rigoberto Hernández Zelaya, and Sara Abigail Acosta**, five members of the Garífuna community of San Juan and the Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH), who were arrested following a police operation in July 2026. More than 200 police officers reportedly arrived in the community to carry out an eviction, during which security forces used tear gas and fired live ammunition, according to testimonies. Although the five defenders were released hours later, they continue to face criminal proceedings for aggravated usurpation for defending their ancestral territory and could face prison sentences. OFRANEH has also reported campaigns of stigmatization and racial discrimination aimed at undermining the legitimacy of its work and its demands to protect Garífuna people's rights.

Their prosecution appears to be part of a broader pattern of criminalization affecting Garífuna communities seeking protection of their collective land rights. This situation is particularly alarming given that Honduras has been repeatedly condemned by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for violations against Garífuna communities, in particular land and economic, social and cultural rights, and remains under an obligation to comply with those judgments.

I urge you to take all necessary measures to end the criminalization of these five defenders and ensure that Garífuna people can freely carry out their legitimate human rights activities without intimidation, discrimination, or judicial harassment.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On July 6, 2026, more than 200 police officers arrived in the Garifuna community of San Juan, in Tela, Atlántida Department, to carry out an eviction. According to testimonies, during the operation, security forces used tear gas and fired live munitions. Authorities also arrested the five human rights defenders, who were released hours later. However, they still face criminal proceedings for aggravated usurpation in their own ancestral territory, which could lead to prison sentences.

OFRANEH has also reported facing campaigns of stigmatization and racial discrimination as a result of its advocacy and demands in this case, aimed at undermining the legitimacy of its work and claims.

This is the second eviction carried out since the entry into force of the new Law for the Strengthening and Protection of the Agro-industrial Sector, Energy Projects, Tourism, Livestock, and Small-Scale Agro-industrial Producers in Honduras, passed by Congress in May 2026. Among others, the law prohibits demonstrations and strikes across a wide range of territories and authorizes evictions without judicial control nor fair trial, thereby jeopardizing the rights to food, housing, peaceful assembly, and freedom of expression. It also aggravates the risk of criminalization of peasants, Indigenous People and Afrodescendants. In September 2026, several UN special procedures and human rights experts have expressed concerns over the law.

Previous to this, Human Rights bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and civil society organizations had already raised concern over the ambiguous definition of the crime of usurpation in the Criminal Code, which may give rise to a discretionary and arbitrary use of this criminal offense that could lead to further criminalization of human rights defenders.

For the Garifuna people, their territory is the foundation of their collective identity, their culture, their spirituality, their ways of life, their food sovereignty, and their very survival as a people.

Between 2015 and 2026, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has issued four judgments against Honduras for violating the rights of four Garifuna communities in northern Honduras regarding their ancestral territory and other rights: the Garifuna Community of Punta Piedra (2015); the Garifuna Community of Triunfo de la Cruz (2015); the Garifuna Community of San Juan (2023); and the Garifuna Community of Cayos Cochinos (2026). Over the last years, OFRANEH has repeatedly denounced that the Honduran government has failed to comply with the measures ordered by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights despite these are binding judgements under international law.

Since August 10, 2026, OFRANEH has maintained a pacific protest camp in front of the Supreme Court of Justice in Tegucigalpa to demand the end of criminalization, compliance with the four judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the cease of the campaigns of stigmatization and racial discrimination against them.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: November 5, 2026

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Garifuna Land Defenders. They/them