

Activists Demand Justice Following Assassination of Berta Cáceres

'It is very easy to pay people to commit murder': After the prominent Honduran Indigenous rights activist is killed, supporters seek justice



Supporters in Tegucigalpa protested Cáceres' murder on Thursday. (Orlando Sierra/AFP/Getty Images)

More than 50 humanitarian and environmental groups from around the world [called](#) on Friday for an independent international investigation into the assassination of Honduran Indigenous rights activist Berta Cáceres, who was murdered in her sleep at 1am on Thursday by two unknown assailants.

"Mrs. Cáceres' case is the most high-profile killing within a growing trend in the murder, violence, and intimidation of people defending their indigenous land rights in Honduras," wrote the groups in their letter to the Honduran president.

"We know that in Honduras it is very easy to pay people to commit murders," Zuñiga Cáceres [said](#) of her mother's death to *teleSUR*. "But we know that those behind this are other powerful people with money and a whole apparatus that allows them to commit these crimes."

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Cáceres was a prominent leader in the Indigenous movement in Honduras against one of Central America's largest hydropower projects, four enormous dams known as "Agua Zarca" in the Gualcarque river basin, the *Guardian* reported. The Indigenous group Cáceres founded, Civil Council for Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), has so far been successful in preventing the project from moving forward.

Cáceres was [awarded](#) the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her activism just last year.

"Berta Cáceres devoted her life to protecting natural resources, public spaces, land rights, rivers from the privatization process that's underway and that gained speed after the 2009 military coup," [said](#) Karen Spring, the Honduras-based coordinator of the social justice network Honduras Solidarity Group, in an interview with *Free Speech Radio News* on Thursday. "She spent her life defending land and and basically supporting communities, mostly indigenous communities all over the country."

As a result of her activism, Cáceres had received death threats and feared for her life, the *Los Angeles Times* [reported](#), and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), a prominent human rights organization, had last year formally called on the Honduran government to put protections in place for Cáceres, [according](#) to the *Guardian*. The UN has condemned the Honduras government for failing to protect her, and activists have accused the government of having a hand in her death.



"Most murders go unpunished [in Honduras]," observed School of the Americas Watch. (Orlando Sierra/AFP/Getty Images)

In its most recent [report](#) (pdf) released in December, IACHR warned of the violence and threats to their lives that activists such as Cáceres suffer under in Honduras. The group blamed "the increased presence of organized crime and drug traffickers, the recruitment of children and adolescents, and an inadequate judicial response that fuels impunity, corruption, and high levels of poverty and inequality. In addition, according to the information received, part of that insecurity comes from the National Police, the Military Police, and the Army, through their illegitimate use of force, in some cases in complicity with organized crime."

Student protesters took to the streets in Tegucigalpa on Thursday to mourn the widely beloved environmentalist's death, the *Guardian* [reported](#), and the Honduran government, in power since [a U.S.-backed coup](#) in 2009, responded with riot police.

One suspect has been arrested, the Honduras government confirmed in a statement to *teleSUR* on Friday. There were reportedly two assassins involved in Cáceres' death. But the Cáceres family is demanding "an independent, international investigation [into her death] not led by the Honduran government," *teleSUR* reported.

"Honduras has the world's highest murder rate," [noted](#) School of the Americas Watch, a group that seeks to close the infamous U.S. Army School of the Americas, in a statement on Thursday. "Honduran human rights organizations report there have been over 10,000 human rights violations by state security forces and impunity is the norm—most murders go unpunished. The Associated Press has repeatedly exposed ties between the Honduran police and death squads, while U.S. military training

and aid for the Honduran security forces continues."

The environmental group International Rivers [demanded](#) Thursday that "the U.S, government, in particular, [end](#) its support for the Honduran military through loans and through training at the School of the Americas," drawing attention to the United States' significant responsibility for the oppressive regime in Honduras today, in order "to honor Berta Cáceres' lifelong struggle and her ultimate sacrifice for rivers and rights."

Democracy Now! remembered Cáceres in the following [segment](#) on Thursday:

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