

# Berta Cáceres: 'We are being targeted'

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"We are being targeted for contract killing ordered by the judiciary and the armed forces. Our lives are hanging by a thread."

These dramatic premonitory words were part of the last interview Berta Cáceres granted by to *Il Manifesto*. Cáceres, the feminist and coordinator of the Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH), which she helped create in 1993, was killed around 1:00 a.m. on Thursday, March 3 by at least two gunmen. In her conversation with us, which has not been published until now, warnings of a state murder were already there.

## **What is the activity of COPINH?**

Ours is an indigenous organization for territorial struggle that seeks to build an emancipation process to demolish the multiple forms of domination: capitalism, patriarchy, racism. After the coup against [President Manuel] Zelaya [in 2009], we had to face great risks and difficulties. We have lost many lives. But from all the misfortunes that have affected and continue to affect the Honduran people, we have drawn different lessons and tried to derive strength from them.

Today we feel we are different, more united and organized, capable of greater articulation. We have capitalized on the work of more than 21 years. Today, COPINH groups 200 Lenca communities, native people who are organizing the resistance in defense of their ancestral territories.

## **What is the situation now?**

We have been an enclave of colonialism for 500 years, and the situation is getting worse and worse. We are victims of a totally predatory energy model, which tramples on collective rights and violates human rights constantly. Thirty percent of Honduran territory was handed over to mining and hydroelectric multinationals. There are over 300 illegal businesses that thrive in the prevailing corruption and without the consent of the people.

There is a lot of conflict. In Honduras, there is the largest U.S. military base in the region, and militarization has increased again after the coup of 2009 — especially in La Mosquitia region, an immensely rich region of Honduras, a territory that includes four original peoples. A place that holds a lot of hydro resources, oil and biodiversity. We were told that there is no oil in Honduras, but there is. This is why the transnational British Gas Group was given by concession much of La Mosquitia maritime and territorial platform. Fishing and aquaculture law allows even the granting of the sea to large companies.

Honduras is a case study in the concession of sovereignty to multinational corporations and U.S.

military bases. The country was given away in a new and little known phenomenon: the Special Economic Development Zones. Free zones, sort of capitalist model cities. A megaproject decided by legislative and executive decree despite the strong opposition in the territory and in the courts. But the judiciary power also gave up, creating a unique trans-nationalization process, which implies the autonomous government and without control of these areas, which are located well within the country. Capitalism has the nerve to call it "autonomy of the libertarian city." in truth, it's a state within a state with the outsourcing of justice, an almost private army, its own laws to crack down on immigration, high exploitation of labor without rights. Territories are been stolen for this. There are 12 "model cities" in mining and energy. A large financial investment and a tax haven to wash the dirty money of drug trafficking.

In recent times, we have witnessed an unprecedented wave of violence: structural violence, planned to sow terror and militarize society. Honduras has the highest murder rate in the world: 89 per 100,000 inhabitants, higher than some of the countries where there are armed conflicts. A human carnage, mostly of young people. Because of hunger and misery, about 60,000 people a year flee the country. These migration policies are inhumane, particularly for women who undertake trips of death, toward a destination of discrimination and violence.

The social and indigenous movements have organized themselves as the Liberty and Refoundation Party (LIBRE). What has changed since the last elections?

The creation of a leftist party is an achievement. LIBRE brought to Congress about 30 deputies, in spite of fraud and the violence that we suffered. However, this has also de-energized the resistance movements in the territories. And anyway, the oligarchy, the real power in Honduras and the wires that control it from outside, is so aggressive that it does not tolerate any sign of real change. The electoral machine is completely under its control.

In this landscape, we continue our efforts on territorial, cultural and autonomous resistance, starting from the vision of indigenous peoples. We bring forward refounding proposals, not by decree but by carrying out the daily challenge to humanize Honduran society, to organize the revolt, to defend our libertarian identity. It's a difficult challenge. There is a lot of resistance but also a generally bleak landscape that leaves no glimpse of a short-term change.

We combine our struggle with those of other peoples of Latin America, within ALBA, the alliance of peoples of our America that has generated a new supportive force, which has fueled the international reflection of movements. The prospect of COPINH is not only national, but global and it is feeding on the solidarity and struggle of the other peoples of our America: Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua. We feel them close and that gives us a lot of strength to resist the criminalization and brutality we face.

We are under attack by the judiciary, that pursue us with unfair trials, and the contract killers of the oligarchy and the multinationals. There are many political prisoners and many more under investigation. But ending up in prison is the least that can happen. Recently, the car we were traveling in was sabotaged. They threatened my family. In Honduras there is no rule of law. Every day is a gamble.

### **COPINH participated in meetings organized by Pope Francis. What were the expectations?**

The invitation by Pope Francis was a historical event, a significant opening gesture that has also irked the high ecclesiastical hierarchies. The movements have given support to the most advanced leaders of the church and Pope Francis has helped us to go further. However, one should not forget the nefarious role the Church had during colonial oppression. In Honduras, we do not forget the

cardinal who supported the coup, those who supported the dictatorship. If the church takes a commitment, it needs to be consistent: Truly support the social struggles and those for justice, the rights of women against patriarchy and fundamentalism and for the defense of diversity. We do not want to tag after the church.

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