

# *Honduran Government Involved in Murder of Environmentalist*

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A group of independent jurists has declared that members of the Honduran Government, along with a mob paid by a local company, are responsible for the murder of environmentalist Berta Caceres, a noted Honduran indigenous leader, who led a movement opposed to the construction of a dam that would flood extensive lands used by the Lenca tribe to produce foodstuffs for its members.

Caceres, a well know, respected leader of that tribe, was executed by gunmen, a group that invaded her home in the small village of La Esperanza, in Western Honduras.

Her murder sparked immediate national and international reaction since Berta Caceres was one of the main spokeswomen for Indian tribes deprived of their lands and their livelihood by local landowners who have death squads in their employ.

One year before her murder, Berta Caceres had received the Goldman Environmental Prize, awarded to outstanding community leaders. As a victim of frequent death threats, she was covered by a judicial decision calling for her protection from death squads.

An investigation that followed her murder revealed that the death attempt was planned for months by a private Hondurean companycompany involved in the energy businesss, Energy Development, with support from the top Honduran Executive Office.

Energy Development had been awarded a contract to build a hydroelectric power station on the Agua Zarca area, and the project went on without taking into account the necessary discussion, monetary compensation and redeployment of the thousands of families that would be affected by the dam, with the flooding of their plots, homes and cultivated fields.

At least four indigenous leaders were shot to death by squads of gunmen that roamed the valley imposing a climate of terror and repression, as they forcibly backed the expulsion of peasant families. Hundreds of peasants were killed.

In March, two thousand and sixteen, when Bertha Caceres was gunned down, two members of the squad were captured, but none of the planners are behind bars.

The family of Berta Caceres claims that the impunity surrounding the murder would be impossible without the evident support from the highest levels of power in Honduras, a country where money is able to cover up the most heinous of crimes.

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