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Honduras: Father of human rights defender killed amidst wave of repression against student movement

On 23 June 2017, Roberto Antonio Gómez, father of student and human rights defender **Andy Johan Gómez Jerónimo** was killed while he was travelling to his house in La Esperanza, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Andy Johan Gómez Jerónimo is one of the students who has been charged with trespassing and deprivation of liberty because of his involvement in the Honduran student movement. It is believed that his father's murder is related to the human rights defender's work with the movement.

[Andy Johan Gómez Jerónimo](#) is a human rights defender, a student at *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras* – UNAH (National Autonomous University of Honduras) and a member of **Movimiento Estudiantil Universitario – MEU (University Student Movement)**. The movement struggles for fair and free access to education, as well as for student participation in the management of the University. Since 2014, when UNAH approved several changes in its internal norms resulting in restricted access to the right to education, the student movement has engaged in widespread peaceful protests.

On 23 June 2017, Roberto Antonio Gómez was murdered while travelling to his house in La Esperanza. In the previous four weeks, he had been active in denouncing the state security forces' repression of UNAH students. He was the father of Andy Johan Gómez Jerónimo. Human rights defenders and organizations in Honduras believe that his murder is related to his role in defence of the work of his son and of other defenders in the country.

Andy Johan Gómez Jerónimo and another 19 students and human rights defenders were [detained](#) in May during a protest in which they occupied their University's administration. After the initial hearing, they were released on parole. The students have been charged with trespassing and deprivation of liberty resulting from their peaceful protest in the University building. In their second hearing at the court on 22 June 2017, Roberto Antonio Gómez accompanied his son and protested the University's response to the students and the criminalization of their activities in defence of education rights.

On 20 July 2016, after a wave of protests, criminalization of students and police repression, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) mediated an [agreement](#) between UNAH and MEU, whereby the authorities agreed to end the criminal procedures against the students, recognising them to be a violation of their rights and liberties. After several students had the charges against them dropped, on 7 June 2017 students **Moisés David Cáceres Velásquez**, **Sergio Luís Ulloa Rivera** and **Cesario Alejandro Félix Padilla** were convicted of trespassing, in a clear violation of the upon referenced agreement. The UN Office in Honduras issued an [statement](#) emphasizing *“its serious concern about the conviction issued by the crime of trespassing, considering that on several occasions, the Office has publicly pointed out and in our dialogue with judicial operators that the use of this crime in contexts of criminalization of protest poses serious problems in light of international human rights standards”*.

Honduras is considered to be one of the world's most dangerous countries to defend human rights and is known for failing to protect human rights defenders, as [expressed](#) by the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur for human rights defenders last

year. Front Line Defenders [reported](#) that at least 33 human rights defenders were killed in 2016.

Front Line Defenders condemns the murder of Roberto Antonio Gómez and the attempt to criminalize University students in Honduras, as it believes that the killing of Roberto Antonio Gómez and the judicial harassment carried out against the students are related to their work in promoting human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Honduras to:

1. Publicly and immediately condemn the killing of **Roberto Antonio Gómez**;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of **Roberto Antonio Gómez**, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of **Andy Johan Gómez Jerónimo** as well as of the members of students' organizations;
4. Immediately drop all charges against **Andy Johan Gómez Jerónimo** and all other students participating in protests, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being criminalized solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
5. Immediately quash the sentences against **Moisés David Cáceres Velásquez, Sergio Luís Ulloa Rivera** and **Cesario Alejandro Félix Padilla**, in accordance to the agreement between UNAH and MEU;
6. Refrain from misusing the justice system to intimidate, harass and discredit human rights defenders;
7. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Honduras are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.