

16 April 2018

Honduras: Killing of Human Rights Defender Carlos Hernández

On 10 April 2018, human rights lawyer **Carlos Hernández** was killed by unidentified assailants at his office in Tela municipality, Atlántida, Honduras. [Carlos Hernández](#) had been legally defending the Mayor of Arizona, who is charged with unlawfully occupying property belonging to the government and to the *Generación Eléctrica* (INGELSA), which is responsible for the construction of the Río Jimalito hydroelectric project. Because of the damaging impact on the socio-economic rights of communities living in the surrounding environment and the lack of previous, free and informed consent from the communities, Mayor Arnoldo Chacón is opposing the project alongside the communities of Tela municipality.

A case was filed against Mayor Arnoldo Chacón on 12 March 2018 for his involvement in, and support of, an encampment known as *Campamento Digno en Defensa del Río Jilamito* (Honorable Encampment in Defense of Río Jilamito) that was set up to protest the hydroelectric project. The encampment, which was set up in May 2017 to oppose INGELSA's activities, was organised by *Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y Justicia* (Wide Movement for Dignity and Justice – MADJ). The case that was filed against Mayor Arnoldo Chacón on 12 March 2018 was also filed against four of MADJ's members.

Although neither Carlos Hernández nor his client, Mayor Arnoldo Chacón, were members of MADJ, both were involved in the organisation's activities and working alongside its members. Carlos Hernández's murder is indicative of the context of increasing threats and violence against MADJ and the communities involved with MADJ's cause.

Since the elections in November 2017, there has been a military and police raid on MADJ's headquarters, assaults on and surveillance of their members, and threats against [Martín Fernández Guzmán](#), MADJ's General Coordinator. Four members of MADJ have been murdered by state security forces and paramilitaries during the ongoing post-electoral crisis in Honduras.

Honduras is considered one of the world's most dangerous countries for human rights defenders. A [press release](#) issued by UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, and the Inter-American Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, said that the Government of Honduras "must immediately adopt and apply effective measures to protect human rights defenders, so they can carry out their human rights work, without fear or threat of violence or murder." In a official visit to the country on 28 July 2017, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, emphasized "the paramount need to increase protection for human rights defenders in Honduras".

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the murder of Carlos Hernández and the escalating violence against those environmental rights defenders, who are either MADJ members or who are working in support of MADJ's activities. Front Line Defenders condemns the violence, criminalisation and police harassment against these defenders

and all attempts to prevent environmental rights defenders carrying out their legitimate work in Honduras.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Honduras to:

1. Strongly condemn the killing of human rights defender Carlos Hernández;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the members of MADJ, in consultation with the beneficiaries;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assassination of Carlos Hernández, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. 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.