

14 July 2016

## **Honduras - Break-In and theft of key evidence at the office of the Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ)**

In the early hours of 13 July 2016, an unknown individual was filmed on surveillance cameras breaking into the offices of the **Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia (Movement for Dignity and Justice, MADJ)** in San Pedro Sula. hard-drives, computers and cameras containing key evidence in cases of corruption and human rights violations taken up by the organisation were stolen.

MADJ is an organisation dedicated to combating corruption and upholding human rights in Honduras. In particular, MADJ has consistently advocated for environmental and land rights of indigenous communities in the context of mega-projects and industrial mining. Víctor Fernández is the director of MADJ's Human Rights Department, a lawyer with the Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Indígenas Populares – COPINH (Civic Council of Popular Indigenous Organisations) and is part of a team of lawyers representing the family of murdered indigenous leader Berta Cáceres. Previously, Víctor Fernández actively advocated for the land and environmental rights of the Toluma people in Locomapa, Yoro. In October 2015, MADJ along with 4 other organisations brought a case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, denouncing misappropriation of public funds by public officials working at the Honduras Institute for Social Security (IHSS), which allegedly caused a significant decrease in the institution's capacity to provide public healthcare to countless citizens. As a result of previous attacks, threats and harassment against MADJ, its 18 members and their families are beneficiaries of precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on 19 December 2013.

In the early hours of 13 July 2016, an unknown male individual broke into the offices of MADJ located in the neighbourhood of Barandillas, San Pedro Sula. The break-in was filmed on surveillance cameras located at the entrance to the building. The unknown individual raided archives, shelves and desks and took hard-drives, computers and cameras containing crucial information gathered by MADJ to pursue high profile cases on corruption and human rights violations. Despite the presence of costly equipment and cash in the office, none of these valuables were taken. Upon arriving to their office early in the morning, members of MADJ immediately contacted the police to report the incident. However, the police arrived at 2pm and brought none of the necessary equipment to document the scene; neither fingerprints nor footprints were lifted.

As a result of their human rights work and activism against corruption, members of MADJ have been subjected to constant threats and harassment. Earlier this year, the organisation denounced the presence and harassment by the military at the farm of MADJ General Coordinator, Martín Fernández. The human rights defender's farm is located in Atlántida, where MADJ has led a constant struggle against corruption and in defence of the environment. MADJ members have also been the target of harassment and threats as a result of their active participation in bringing to justice the killers of COPINH leader Berta Cáceres, denouncing human rights violations committed in the context of hydroelectric and mining projects in the North-West of the country and combating corruption of high profile public officials in the IHSS.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Honduras to:**

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the break-in and robbery of the MADJ offices, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of all MADJ members as well as their relatives, in accordance with Precautionary Measures No. 416-13 issued on their behalf by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights;
3. 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 undue restrictions.