

Green Alliance for Gender Action (GAGA)



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Friday, 4th of March, 2016

Mrs. Lilianne Ploumen
Netherlands Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
P.O. Box 20061
2500 EB The Hague
The Netherlands

Dear Minister Ploumen,

RE: Green Alliance for Gender Action (GAGA) condemnation of the murder of environment and human rights activist, Berta Cáceres.

CC: Mr. A.G. Bert Koenders, Netherlands Minister of Foreign Affairs; Mrs. M.A. Mette Gonggrijp, Ambassador at The Royal Netherlands, Embassy in San Jose, Costa Rica.

On behalf of the Green Alliance for Gender Action (GAGA), one of the strategic partnerships under the Dialogue and Dissent Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, we would like to bring to your attention the devastating news of the murder of Ms. Berta Cáceres. Ms. Cáceres was a prominent Lenca indigenous woman and a strong activist for the environmental, land and human rights of indigenous peoples in Honduras and the Central American region. She co-founded and coordinated the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (COPINH) and was a member of the National Network of Human Rights Defenders of Honduras. In 2015, she was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her work in campaigning for the rights of the Lenca indigenous peoples in relation to the hydroelectric project Agua Zarca, which is being developed by the Honduran company Desarrollos Energéticos S.A. (DESA).

In the early hours of Thursday, 3rd of March, 2016, Berta Cáceres was murdered by two unknown subjects that entered her home, located in La Esperanza, an area in the Intibucá Department of Honduras. Her partner, Aureliano Molina, and colleague Gustavo Castro, a Mexican human rights activist

working for the organisation Otros Mundos, have been detained in custody; however limited information has been provided on their detention. Over the years, Ms. Cáceres and members of the COPINH had continuously been receiving death threats and harassment (in fact, four colleagues of Ms. Cáceres had been murdered recently). In 2009, the Inter American Commission on Human Rights had demanded that precautionary measures be adopted by the Honduran government to guarantee the life and personal integrity of Ms. Cáceres. However, in the last few years, these violent threats have increased in an attempt to weaken the strong resistance of the Lenca indigenous communities in relation to the construction of the Agua Zarca Dam. Ms. Cáceres had been leading the campaign against the construction of this project, which was able to ensure the withdrawal of one of the biggest dam construction companies in the world, Sinohydro, and the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank. It is important to highlight that the Dutch Development Bank, FMO, is currently a co-financier of the project and is providing USD\$15 million for its development (<https://www.fmo.nl/project-details/31639>).

The members of GAGA, Both ENDS, Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (FCAM) and Mama Cash, strongly repudiate and condemn the murder of Berta Cáceres. We have all known Ms. Cáceres and the strong work and campaigning she has done with COPINH. In recent years, Ms. Cáceres and the COPINH had received rapid response funding from Mama Cash and FCAM, to ensure protective measures were in place to address the security threats that they continuously faced. This funding was provided through the Mesoamerican Initiative of Human Rights Defenders and financed by the Dutch Postcode Lottery. Furthermore, the Agua Zarca project is an example of the type of cases Both ENDS has continuously denounced internationally, to highlight and evidence the fraught decision making processes that deny countries, such as Honduras, the political processes and governance needed, effectively excluding local stakeholders. Infrastructure projects, such as Agua Zarca, but also large-scale projects related to the development of, for example palm oil or mining, are driven by foreign investors, regularly having negative, and at times, deadly consequences on local communities.

GAGA members and partners work closely with women activists who are fighting for human rights and environmental justice in their communities. We are aware and understand the dangers that these women face on a daily basis and try to provide as much support as possible so that they can fulfill their role as leading human rights advocates amongst and for their communities. However, the murder of Berta Cáceres highlights the increasing need for stronger pressure from the international community to ensure that national and local governments do not violate the human rights of their citizens. It also requires for a serious revision of the role that Western governments, financial institutions and companies play in the development of large-scale initiatives in countries where the political context does not allow for the inclusion of all stakeholders in key decision making processes.

We ask the Dutch government to respond to this crime accordingly, by showing support to Berta Cáceres' family and community and by requesting that the Honduran government ensures a transparent and just investigation into this crime. We also ask for your support in ensuring that immediate and serious protection measures are in place for those women and men who are advocating for the rights of women, indigenous peoples and for environmental justice in Honduras. In fact, through this strategic

partnership, GAGA is supporting the capacity of grassroots groups around the world to do lobby and advocacy for women's rights and environmental justice; however we must all be aware that these advocates are putting themselves at risk to take up their causes. We therefore see the need to fully understand the environments they are operating in and ensure they can be protected. In this particular case, GAGA is aiming to provide financial support to colleagues of Ms. Cáceres in COPINH as well as our allies in the region who are leading on an international denunciation of this crime, as these activists may now face increasing dangers and threats as they move forward with their actions. Finally, we also ask the Dutch government to reflect on their important role in relation to the financing of infrastructure, mining and agriculture projects, and consider the consequences these projects can have on local communities, in particular those of indigenous peoples.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require further information on the Berta Cáceres case and its development.

Sincerely,



Daniëlle Hirsch
Executive Director
Both ENDS



Carla López
Executive Director
Fondo Centroamericano de
Mujeres



Zohra Moosa
Acting Executive Director
Mama Cash