



National Union for Rural Workers - CNTC

REPORT ON THE CRIMINALIZATION OF OUR AFFILIATED PEASANT FAMILIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PANDEMIC

UNITY - LAND - JUSTICE - LIBERTY

**Tegucigalpa, Honduras
October, 2020**

INTRODUCTION

Since its founding in January 1985, the CNTC has worked for access to land and land titles, agricultural and forestry production, training for its members (at the Regional and National level), and including women and youth in the development of all activities. It continues these activities to strengthen organizationally, as a peasant union and as as Productive-Enterprises dedicated to the agricultural productivity and economic development of our affiliated small farmer groups so they can improve their living conditions in rural areas.

However, the fight to achieve these goals has been difficult and complicated; we have even had to risk our lives for this cause as a consequence of the unequal conditions in which we operate and, worse, facing the adversity of a government system that does not have any political will for campesino families to have equal rights and to benefit from projects that could provide them with comprehensive development.

The arrival of the health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has created more unfavorable conditions for our defenders of the land and territory due to the creation of emergency decrees and the increased isolation of our

communities from society. This, combined with police and military control of civic life, has increased the criminalization of the struggle for access to land and it violates the human rights of our campesino brothers and sisters.

What follows is a chronological summary of events that have been occurring in our territories during the health emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. March 24, 2020: Eviction of the Campesino Enterprise Group LEAN in Arizona, Atlántida, during which the police arrived to violently remove the peasant families without any court order, all this at the request of the transnational company, Standard Fruit Company. The rights of 18 families were violated.



2, June 26, 2020: A violent and illegal eviction of the Campesino Enterprise VIDA NUEVA in Choloma, Cortes, at the request of a Real Estate Company (Financiera Lotificadora)*, by personnel from the DPI (Police Investigative Directorate) and the National Police, displaced 39 families who have been living in their homes on the land for over 15 years. This eviction occurred despite the fact that these lands have been declared to be public lands by the National Agrarian Institute INA.

* *translator note: A Financiera Lotificadora is a company that obtains land and breaks it into smaller lots to sell; often associated with urbanization of rural lands.*



3. From July 4 to July 11, 2020: Several events took place in the LA ESPERANZA Campesino Enterprise located in an indigenous community, Santa María, La Paz. Heavily armed civilians arrived at the community with the intention of evicting the group, intimidating them and making death threats. The next day National Police personnel arrived with the same intentions, and they were able to evict our brothers and sisters. Then on July 10, their corn fields were destroyed by armed civilians accompanied by the National Police. This situation led the campesinos to carry out a courageous action, accompanied by the members of the Regional Board of Directors of the CNTC in La Paz, that managed to capture the armed civilians who were in the midst of occupying the land, confiscating their weapons, and immediately turning these individuals over to the National Police along with their weapons. However, the next day they were set free, and the confiscated weapons were returned to them by the Police, endangering our colleagues.

All of the above occurred at the request of Antonio Mazariegos, originally from Tegucigalpa, who claims to own the land but whose relationship with this property is unknown. There is no official land registry for the area that has records of any purchased land and this land is usually classified legally as national and ancestral land, that is, the rights to these lands belong to the natives of those communities. In this case there are 54 peasant families at risk and constantly threatened, but because of all the legal complaints filed by the campesino groups this situation has stopped.



4. July 15, 2020: The peasant group DESARROLLO AGRICOLA in Villanueva, Cortes was the target of a DPI raid without any legal authorization, intimidating our brothers and sisters, and using excessive force that resulted in two members of the group being beaten. In this case the legal classification of the land is still unknown. The pertinent investigation will be made in the future, although it is believed that the land is communal (ejidal). This case involves the economic interests of a Real Estate Company (Financiera Lotificadora) and of the municipal government.



5. July 27, 2020: Our sister MELANI CHAVARRIA, President of the local CNTC Board of Directors for Tutule in the La Paz Region was threatened, along with her family and other members of the Campesino Enterprise NUEVA VISION, by Mr. Alexis Nolasco. Nolasco, originally from Tutule, claims to be the owner of land in the Tutule sector, knowing that claim is false as investigations have shown that these lands are mainly a part of the traditional and communal land system. It should be noted that the brothers and sisters who are members of this campesino organization have been frightened and intimidated by this man who has also made phone calls to them and hired people to monitor their movements. Because of all this we are accompanying this case and we are filing formal legal complaints, without any results so far.

6. August 5, 2020: In Planes de Santa María, La Paz, members of the La Paz CNTC Regional Board of Directors were accompanying a peasant group called TIERRAS RECUPERADAS who are on ancestral and public land when they were threatened and harassed by armed civilians who even chased them and, with machetes in hand, stole the phone of the CNTC Regional Secretary General, Heidi Vasquez. The purpose of taking the phone surely was to get information on the activities of our organization for the benefit of our campesino members. It is important to highlight the fact that these families have lived on these lands for more than 12 years, but a family named Argueta from the town of

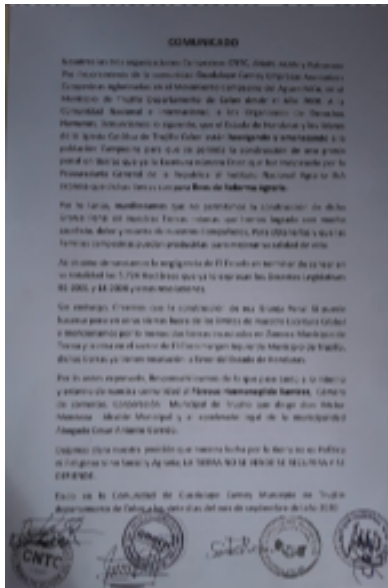
Marcala is doing everything possible to take this land, no matter how many violations they commit. There are 40 campesino families in this struggle, they are disbanded for the moment because of the fear caused by the events described above.

7. August 27, 2020: Antonio Martínez, a member of the Campesino Enterprise BENDECION DE DIOS and a leader of the Transformation and Service Enterprise for the CNTC La Paz region was the victim of an attempt on his life. The attack happened in an isolated area where two men were lying in wait to kill him. Because of his instinct for survival and cleverness, Antonio managed to escape although he suffered a beating and serious injuries. A complaint was filed with the Public Prosecutor and the Police for the Municipality of La Paz who did not give it the necessary importance, only saying that they would follow-up and watch the situation. To date we have not heard anything; for them, these crimes are considered unimportant.



8. August 30, 2020: The Mayor of Trujillo, Colon came to land that is occupied by members of the Campesino Movement of the Aguan (MCA) affiliated to the CNTC, his plan is to take their land to use for the construction of a new prison for that region.

More than 100 families have been the object of all kinds of threats and harassment by the civil authorities in the area, what the authorities are trying to do is leave the campesino families without land to cultivate. The families have



been on the land since 1990; it was turned over to them by the National Agrarian Institute (INA) and they have been fighting to be granted definitive ownership but the Governor strongly opposes that. His goal clearly is to take the land and build the Prison.

We have filed formal complaints about this case with various Human Rights entities and we have published communiques about it, but up to the present, we have not had the hoped for results because economic interests of the involved private company and the government are at work.

9. September 30 to October 1, 2020: Our colleague Sebastián Reyes, General Secretary of the La Paz region and head of the CNTC Institutional Development in the region was followed by an unknown vehicle as he carried out the work required by his position. Immediately we issued an alert and we were able to discover that the car had Guatemalan license plates. That fact leads us to the conclusion that the owners of the transnationals and hydroelectric companies hired people from outside the country to terrorize and intimidate, and perhaps to commit crimes including possibly causing the deaths of our defenders of the land and territories.



10. September 8, 2020: There was an attempt to evict the campesino group JARDINES DEL VALLE in Ceguaca, Santa Bárbara, 20 families with more than 30 years living on their lands, even though they have a resolution from the National Agrarian Institute that recognizes them as the owners. The attempt was by a landowner named Terencio Pineda with an individual named Salvador Paredes who accompanies Pineda in all actions against the campesino group because he also has economic interest in the land. In this action they moved livestock into the fields, they only partially destroyed the crops of our brothers and sisters who had been ready to counter the attack. After that a complaint was made to the National Police who arrived at the scene and detained those responsible for the crime, but, later in the afternoon they were released due to the collusion between the police and economic and political powers in the country.



11. September 20, 2020: There were threats to take the land away from two INDIGENOUS LENCA COUNCILS, CILCOSE and FAMILIAS UNIDAS in the CNTC La Paz Region in the town of San Jose. Heavily armed, hooded civilians arrived at the communities announcing that the land belonged to them and that the members of the Indigenous Councils had one day to leave. We still don't know under whose orders this armed group is acting. During this incident Susan Vásquez, leader of the group CILCOSE and the coordinator of the CNTC



regional community radio, Radio Suyugware, and her family were personally threatened. We think that another indigenous organization called NUEVA PALESTINA is involved, but the reality is that there are armed shock groups trying to weaken our campesino groups so that they will lose their land and the hydroelectric dams can then be built. We have filed complaints about this case, like all the others, with the government Human Rights authorities, and even with the Prosecutor for the Rights of Ethnic Groups; we continue to do follow-up on the complaints.

12. At the beginning of October 2020 there has been an attempt to evict two campesino groups CAMPO and HOMBRES Y MUJERES DE FE, in the community of Cañada de Flores in Guaimaca, Francisco Morazán by a man named Maximino Rivera Elvir. The groups have been on the land for more than 10 years and have proven that the lands are communal (ejidal) lands which means that they belong to the natives of Guaimaca. For the moment the eviction has been stopped, but we are alert to what could occur regarding an eviction, and even though the eviction has stopped, harassment by the National Police, Military and armed civilians in the service of this big landowner continues. It is relevant to mention that there are around 40 families involved in this struggle, at risk of losing their land. During this struggle they have had various losses: homes, crops, domestic animals and what is worse is the psychological damage that they have had to endure during this time.

- The cases that we have described have been verified as true. We have had to understand that one of the most common strategies being used to wear down our brothers and sisters who struggle for a little piece of land is the creation of shock groups by the big landowners and transnational companies in order to take the campesino land for themselves at any cost.
- Furthermore, the decrees being created and approved by the government of the republic are extremely harmful because they only increase criminalization and the rural land problem, for instance, Decree 030-2020, 041-2020, is a key example of the decrees that will complicate the defense of land, territories and communal resources, which is one of the most important tasks of our organization. There is also the example of the congressional approval of the new penal code

which is an instrument for criminalization of the struggle for access to land.

- In the face of everything reported here, we call on human rights organizations, both national and international, and on our fraternal organizations to help us to share the information about our agrarian challenges and at the same time to accompany us so that we can defend and accompany our CNTC members.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

- During the pandemic or state of emergency, in which the government ordered a general confinement and therefore the temporary closure of all the judicial and agrarian government entities: in this case the Supreme Court of Justice, and all the lower courts and sentencing courts. This hasn't stopped the persecution and illegal actions, including those of the police forces and military who are following orders from the politicians, big landowners and businessmen, etc. who represent political and economic power in the country.
- Also, despite the fact that these institutions were closed, orders for our campesino brothers and sisters with charges in place to appear in virtual hearings did not stop, even though it is known that they don't have the equipment, tools, or internet signal to participate in these hearings. This has made things more difficult, since our brothers and sisters cannot appear in virtual court it is taken as contempt of court; the situation becomes a violation of the true right to a defense and to legal representation by a lawyer.
- In summary, the actions that we have taken as a consequence of the events that we have reported here include that we have provided accompaniment and attention to approximately 341 campesino families who are at risk and at a high degree of vulnerability in the face of the attacks by the big landowners, politicians and transnationals in collusion with the State apparatus, national police and military police.