



RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

PETITION NO.: 421-00779

BY: MS. MAY (SAANICH-GULF ISLANDS)

DATE: OCTOBER 19, 2016

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: SIGNED BY THE HONOURABLE STÉPHANE DION

Response by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

SIGNATURE
Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

SUBJECT

HONDURAS

ORIGINAL TEXT

REPLY

The promotion and protection of human rights is an integral part of Canadian foreign policy and a long-standing priority in our relationship with Honduras. Canada advocates for human rights and takes principled positions on important issues to promote human rights, inclusive and accountable governance and peaceful pluralism, values that define this country around the world.

Canada engages in development and security programming that promotes human rights. Honduras, benefits from the largest bilateral development program in Central America, with approximately \$23 million in annual disbursements, making Canada the third largest bilateral donor in Honduras. Canada's programming focuses on two mutually-reinforcing priorities: (1) governance and human rights, and (2) sustainable economic growth. Canada's latest announcement of a \$5 million contribution to the Organization of American States (OAS) Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) will help strengthen Honduran institutions and contribute to a much stronger justice system.

Following the killing of Berta Cáceres in March 2016, Canada's Ambassador immediately issued statements, including a joint press release with the international community in Honduras, condemning the killings and urging Honduran authorities to investigate, bring the perpetrators to justice and provide protection to human rights defenders.

The agency leading the investigation into the murder of Berta Cáceres, the Technical Agency of Criminal Investigation (ATIC by its Spanish acronym), has benefitted from Canadian assistance through capacity-building led by the Vancouver-based Justice Education Society.

The Government of Canada is taking every appropriate opportunity to raise concerns and advocate for greater respect for human rights in Honduras, in particular regarding the safety of human rights defenders. For instance:

- The Minister of Foreign Affairs raised human rights concerns and the Berta Cáceres investigation with President Juan Orlando Hernández and other government officials, including his counterpart, Minister of Foreign Affairs María Dolores Agüero, during his visit to Honduras (October 13-14, 2016).
- Also while in Honduras, and accompanied by the executive director of Lawyers without Borders Canada, the Minister of Foreign Affairs also met with members of civil society, including human rights defenders, to hear their views and share their concerns about the human rights situation in Honduras.
- Canada's Ambassador to Honduras met with the family of Berta Cáceres and with representatives of her organization, Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH) to hear their concerns and convey Canada's support for the ongoing investigation. The Ambassador had also publicly expressed Canada's concern regarding the theft of Cáceres' original court files and raised it directly with the President of the Supreme Court.
- Canada assumed the presidency of the G16 donor group in July 2016. The G16 provides an important platform to continue raising human rights and security concerns. For example, with Canada as the lead, the G16 has spoken out publicly about the recent murder of land rights activists and in support of measures to strengthen the newly-created National Council for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.
- The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development and la Francophonie visited Honduras in July 2016, and used the opportunity to raise human rights concerns.
- In April 2016, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Americas held bilateral consultations with Honduran officials. Again, the protection of human rights defenders was a key topic of discussion.
- At the Organization of American States, Canada joined other member states in condemning the murder of Berta Cáceres and calling for an investigation into her killing.

- The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) also condemned the killing of Berta Cáceres. She was a beneficiary of IACHR's precautionary measures given the situation of grave risk and ongoing threats she was facing in Honduras.
- Canada supports the central role played by the IACHR in the protection and promotion of human rights and human rights defenders in the hemisphere.

Canada consistently urges Honduran authorities, both publicly and privately, to take action to improve human rights and will support local civil society and address human rights and insecurity through its targeted programming.