

# SOLIDARIDAD

 **Witness for Peace**  
Transforming People — Transforming Policy

SPRING 2016

Volume 8 Issue 1

## ¡Berta Vive; La Lucha Sigue! Berta is Alive; The Struggle Thrives!

### The Assassination of Berta Cáceres

In the early hours of March 3, 2016, gunmen entered the home of Berta Cáceres in La Esperanza, Honduras, and assassinated her. Thus the world lost an amazing advocate for social, environmental, and economic justice, and the indigenous and popular movements of Honduras lost one of their best-known figures, marking a new level of terror against social leaders in the country.

In the days, weeks, and months preceding her death, there had been growing fears for her safety. She suffered escalating intimidation and threats, but she chose to carry on. As we mourn her death, Witness for Peace is mobilizing with others to demand justice for her and her cause.

### Background

In the early 1990s, international construction and “development” firms began building a hydroelectric dam at Río Blanco, a territory of the indigenous Lenca people, without consulting them (as is stipulated by Honduran, Inter-American, and international law). The dam, Agua Zarca, is to be constructed on the Gualcarque River, which the Lenca consider sacred. The proposed dam threatens to destroy their community, and cut off food and medical supplies to nearby communities.

Berta Cáceres co-founded the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) in 1993. Through peaceful demonstrations

and road blocks, the group successfully pressured Sinohydro, the world’s largest dam builder, to withdraw from the Agua Zarca project in 2013.

Berta and COPINH’s advocacy did not go unnoticed. Unfortunately, in addition to attracting praise, their activism garnered retaliation. In 2013, the U.S.-funded Honduran army murdered COPINH member Tomás García, as he peacefully protested the dam. The same year, Berta was jailed on falsified charges, but freed following international outcry. Berta later won the prestigious 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize and received international recognition for her work.

### On the Ground in Honduras

After providing support to COPINH and other Honduran partners from our flagship office in Nicaragua for five years, WfP formed a full-time presence in Honduras in January 2016. In the immediate wake of Berta’s assassination, WfP’s Honduras Team traveled directly to accompany COPINH.

Only weeks before her assassination, a 20-person WfP delegation met Berta in Río Blanco. Berta then asked them to meet with her a second time in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa, to speak about the



*WFP staff and delegate listen to indigenous and environmental leader Berta Cáceres, mere weeks before her assassination.*

PHOTO CREDIT: LYN PEGG

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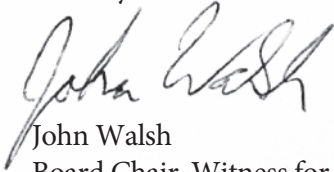
# Message from the Board Chair

Some moments are turning points, for better or worse. The assassination of Berta Cáceres is one of those. Either the world will be shaken awake by the brazen nature of her murder and the manifest lack of justice in its aftermath — or oppression and violence will descend even more heavily, abetted by U.S. government funding and cloaked with diplomatic maneuvers.

We must work to cause a fundamental change in U.S. policy toward Honduras. We must work to ensure that the rights of the Honduran people count for much more than the profits and power of private interests. The time for us to act is now.

Your voice matters! Get informed. Stay in touch. Join us in taking action. Help make this a turning point for the better.

Thank you,



John Walsh  
Board Chair, Witness for Peace



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struggle to defend the Lenca's ancestral land rights. Later that day, the delegates met with U.S. Ambassador James Nealon to deliver COPINH's demands, including protective measures for its leaders, suspension of all U.S. security aid to the Honduran government, and a meeting with COPINH's leadership.

The day after the delegation left, the WfP Honduras Team accompanied a protest led by COPINH against the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam. Police and private security encircled and detained the protesters. It took rapid international communications to ensure everyone's safe exit.

And in mid-April, four WFP members accompanied the ¡Berta



Minnesota delegate Ricky DeFoe, from the Fond du Lac reservation of the Ojibwe Nation, said of his people and the Lenca of Honduras, "We are one in the same."

PHOTO CREDIT: KATHY BOUGHER

Cáceres Vive! International Gathering in Honduras. They joined with 1,500 human rights defenders from around the world to support COPINH, build analysis, and connect movements with common struggles.

## DELEGATIONS

### Colombia

#### *The People Behind the Coal*

June 10-17, 2016

Delegation Coordinators

Avi Chomsky, 978-542-6389

achomsky@salemstate.edu

Steve Striffler, 479-283-4795

striffler@hotmail.com

#### *Post Accords is Not Post Conflict:*

#### *Delegation to Support a Just and*

#### *Inclusive Peace Process*

September 6-15, 2016

Delegation Coordinator

Gail Phares, 919-624-0646

gailphares@earthlink.net

### Cuba

#### *The Search for Better Trade: Land Rights,*

#### *The Cuban Model, and Capitalism*

June 10-20, 2016

Delegation Coordinator

Kaela Berg, kaela@citizenstrade.org

#### *Economy, People, and the Next Generation*

July 10-20, 2016

Delegation Coordinator

Omar Barberena, profesor00@yahoo.com

#### *Faith, Politics, Economics, and Changing*

#### *U.S.-Cuban Relations*

September 20-29, 2016

Delegation Coordinator

Steve Bowie, 920-222-3596

stephenlbowie@gmail.com

#### *Art, Culture, and the Cuban Revolution*

November 20-30, 2016

Delegation Coordinator

Arianna Genis, 763-957-0131

a.genis706@gmail.com

Jeremiah Ellison, 612-396-1998

agentbey.ellison@gmail.com

### Honduras

#### *Learn from Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous*

#### *Leaders in the Face of Ecological, Economic,*

#### *and State Violence*

July 16-25, 2016

Delegation Coordinator

Walker Grooms, walker@witnessforpeace.org

### Mexico

#### *The Drug War and Social Control:*

#### *Militarization, Displacement, and Immigration*

January 13-22 2017

Delegation Coordinator

Elise Roberts, 920-421-2269

wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org

### Nicaragua

#### *Fair Trade Teen Delegation*

June 17-30, 2016

Delegation Coordinator

Witness for Peace Southeast, 919-856-9468

office@wfpse.org

# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Grassroots Action

**Witness for Peace Midwest** honored Berta Cáceres in local memorial gatherings in Duluth and Minneapolis, MN, and is now working on a follow up event entitled *Learning from Berta: Wisdom for Honduras, Mexico, and Minnesota*. We were excited to welcome four new members to our regional board in February, and we're currently recruiting for delegations in Colombia, Mexico, and Cuba. We're planning a regional speaking tour Sept. 25 -Oct. 15, 2016 with a land rights leader from Mexico, focused on militarization, displacement, and migration. Contact Elise at [wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:wfpumw@witnessforpeace.org) to schedule a speaking tour event or get involved locally in the Midwest.

**Witness for Peace Southeast** Our November speaker's tour featured Nadin Reyes from the Mexican organization Hasta Encontrarlos. It covered NC, SC, FL, AL, and GA, finishing at the SOA vigil, and had over 1,500 event attendees. We had several legislative meetings during the tour, concerning the destructive impacts of Plan Mérida. In March, we had our 30th annual Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, walking through eight NC communities, raising awareness about Black Lives Matter, immigration reform, workers' rights, and climate justice. Over 300 people attended our events/walks, and we were featured in a number of media reports. We've been active in opposing TPP and supporting in-state tuition for immigrant youth. We're recruiting for a Teen Delegation to Nicaragua, Jul. 16-30; a delegation to Colombia in support of a Just and Inclusive Peace Process, Sept. 6-15; and a couple of delegations to Cuba. Visit [wfpse.org/events/upcoming](http://wfpse.org/events/upcoming) for more information. In the fall, we'll be hosting our annual speaker's tour, Oct. 8-28, 2016.

**Witness for Peace Southwest Latin America 2016: People's Power and Popular Democracies in the Face of U.S. Imperialism** opened Southwest's 2016 this January in San Pedro, CA. In the last months, Southwest has held a regional face-to-face meeting and is in the process of launching our six-month *Latin American Liberation Webinar Series*. In early March, Southwest's Regional Organizer Jeanette Charles gave a talk at the Claremont Colleges: *Pillars of Resistance: Garifuna and Lenca Women in the Fight for Ancestral Lands and Against Neoliberalism in Honduras*. For more info regarding upcoming SW delegations, events and a webinar series starting this April, contact: [jcharles.wfpsw@gmail.com](mailto:jcharles.wfpsw@gmail.com).

**Check out our website and Facebook page for further updates. To get in touch with your regional organizer or to learn more about upcoming events and delegations, please visit [witnessforpeace.org/grassroots](http://witnessforpeace.org/grassroots).**

## Developments in Colombian Peace Process Continue, U.S. Communities of Faith and Conscience Prepare for DOPA

**May 22-23**, faith communities and others will engage in the Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia (DOPA). Witness for Peace DC office's Walker Grooms originated this year's theme: *Building Peace from the Ground Up*. The Colombian government and the FARC-EP, the country's largest guerrilla group, missed their initial deadline of March 23 to complete a peace accord; it is still being negotiated in Havana. The government and the ELN, the country's second largest guerrilla group, announced the beginning of peace talks on March 30. This comes amid continuing calls for substantive inclusion of Colombia's Afro-descendant and indigenous populations in peace talks. This year's DOPA emphasizes the need for an inclusive, bottom-up peace process, in addition to high-level talks. WfP has accompanied and partnered with local peace initiatives in Colombia, including the Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space in the port city of Buenaventura, which celebrated its second anniversary in mid-April. And we remain vigilant about continued assassinations and other violence against land rights and other human rights defenders in Colombia. More info about DOPA: [facebook.com/DoPAColombia](https://facebook.com/DoPAColombia).

## Witness to Berta Cáceres Assassination Returns Home to Mexico after International Outcry

Mexican journalist, environmental activist, and Witness for Peace coalition partner Gustavo Castro was the sole witness to Berta Cáceres' assassination in her home in Honduras, and was shot twice in that early March 3 attack. Kept by U.S.-supported Honduran authorities in conditions that amounted to torture, his life at risk, and subject to other human rights abuses by said authorities following the attack, he was not allowed to leave Honduras until the end of March. But thanks to the actions of WfP supporters and others calling for his safety and ongoing protection, as well as the countless Latin American organizations that called for his being allowed to leave Honduras — he is back home in Chiapas, Mexico.



*Activists and family members of Berta gather for a vigil outside the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in April*

PHOTO CREDIT: JAMES PLOESER

For full program updates and travel schedule details, visit [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org).



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# The Cry For Justice

The audacity of the assassination of Berta Cáceres, arguably the highest profile murder in Honduras since the 2009 coup, demonstrates the enormous need for solidarity. It marks a new level of terror against social leaders in Honduras. And the lack of a fair and transparent process to investigate her murder signals a new level of impunity and corruption.

The day of the assassination, WfP issued an action alert that quickly generated more than 1,000 emails to the U.S. embassy in Honduras. The alert echoed COPINH's demands, and insisted the U.S. ambassador be recalled for consultations until impunity ends and human rights are protected. WfP is pressuring Congress with four key demands: an independent international investigation of the murder, a suspension of U.S. funding for the Honduran security forces, a review of

U.S. participation in multilateral funding of megaprojects such as Agua Zarca, and scrutiny of USAID's links to Agua Zarca.

## Speaking Out

Berta's daughter Laura Zúñiga and COPINH's Gaspar Sánchez spoke before members of Congress, activists, and others in March in Washington, DC. Despite the trauma she's endured, a smiling and animated Laura invited an energized crowd of more than 100 to join the chant: "¡Berta no murió, se multiplicó!" (Berta didn't die; she has multiplied!) Members of WfP said the event was powerful and moving.

In April, another of Berta's daughters, Bertita Zúñiga, addressed the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. COPINH General Coordinator Tomás Gómez Membreño spoke at a congressional

briefing, and both met with other officials and groups.

WfP and others held a vigil in memory of Berta in front of the World Bank. More than 100 people attended and listened as Tomás described the struggles against megaprojects in Honduran

indigenous territories. He explained that while Berta's organizing efforts were instrumental to the Bank withdrawing from Agua Zarca in 2013, U.S. and international "development" financing continued until Berta's murder. It continues today, Tomás emphasized. Before attendees and international media, Bertita criticized the U.S.-backed Honduran state, its militarization, and its repression and lack of protection for rights defenders like her mother.

## We are at a Critical Moment

Even in death, Berta Cáceres has galvanized all those who are demanding justice. While we believe that those directly responsible for Berta's assassination will ultimately be held accountable, we must continue her work. Although painful, the deaths of social justice giants like Berta and other rights defenders bring into focus the impact of underlying systems of militarism, neoliberalism, and the U.S.-led Drug War. It's incumbent on us to call the world's attention to the impacts of these systems: the violence and oppression of our sisters and brothers in Latin America, and the devastation of ecology on which a shared, sustainable future depends.

Join WfP as we seek meaningful change to the U.S. policies and policymakers behind this violence, both overt and structural. As Berta still reminds us, "¡Despertemos, humanidad! Ya no hay tiempo." Wake up humanity! We're already running out of time.



WfP members (seated, in blue shirts) accompany the iBerta Cáceres Vive! International Gathering in Honduras in mid-April.

PHOTO CREDIT: ELISE ROBERTS

## Leave A Lasting Gift For Social Justice

Make a gift to support the cause of peace, justice and sustainability by naming Witness for Peace in your Will. It's an easy way to make a lasting statement of your dedication to human rights. Your gift may be in the form of cash, stocks, or bonds. Contact [paul@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:paul@witnessforpeace.org) or call 202-547-6112 for more info..

Here is our suggested legal language for making a bequest to Witness for Peace:

For a bequest of a specific sum: *"I give, devise and bequeath to Witness for Peace, Federal Tax Identification Number 22-2566937, the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ for its general purposes."*