

29 August 2013

Honduras – Killing of indigenous environmental rights defenders, Ms María Enriqueta Matute, Mr Armando Fúnez Medina, and Mr Ricardo Soto Fúnez

On 25 August 2013, around 5pm, human rights defenders Ms **María Enriqueta Matute**, Mr **Armando Fúnez Medina** and Mr **Ricardo Soto Fúnez** were killed in an attack. The three belonged to various tribes of the Tolupán indigenous people, from Locomapa, in the Yoro zone, and had been involved in a peaceful protest against a local antimony mining operation and the construction of a hydroelectric dam in their indigenous zone.

On 25 August, María Enriqueta Matute of the San Francisco Campo community, Armando Fúnez Medina of the Las Brisas tribe, and Ricardo Soto Fúnez of the Cabeza de Vaca 1 tribe, were reportedly participating in a peaceful sit-in protest in San Francisco Campo, blocking the main road to Locomapa together with some 150 other Tolupán indigenous people. The protesters refused to let any traffic through. Around 5pm, the protesters were approached by two men known locally, who after a short exchange of words opened fire on the three human rights defenders. It is reported that Armando Fúnez Medina and Ricardo Soto Fúnez died on the spot, while María Enriqueta Matute ran to her nearby home, where she was tracked down by the gunmen and fatally shot. Reports indicate that to date, the police has not yet opened any investigation into the killings.

The roadblock involved several indigenous communities in the area and had been in place since 14 August 2013. However, the indigenous local residents of the region have been organising social protest for the past four years, since an antimony mining operation started up in the region. In addition to this, a large hydroelectric dam is currently under construction and the inhabitants have had their traditional community lands seized by local landowners. None of the large-scale development projects engaged in the required prior consultation with the local population. In July 2012, the community sent an open letter to the Minister for Justice and the Secretary for Indigenous Affairs about a timber magnate in the area, whose forestry operations had resulted in death threats and arbitrary arrests of members of the community who voiced their opposition to the mining and forestry operations.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned by the death of these three human rights defenders and urges the authorities in Honduras to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Front Line Defenders is alarmed at the deteriorating security climate for human rights defenders in Honduras, resulting in a situation in which human rights defenders, particularly defenders of environmental rights and those belonging to indigenous groups, frequently operate in a context rife with killings and other serious threats to their safety, while prosecution levels for crimes against them remain almost negligible.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Honduras to:

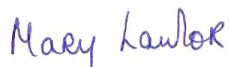
1. Carry out a thorough, impartial and immediate investigation into the killing of human rights defenders María Enriqueta Matute, Armando Fúnez Medina and Ricardo Soto Fúnez, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all the necessary measures to ensure the safety and the physical and psychological integrity of other community leaders involved in the Locomapa protest and their families;
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 restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5 (a): *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully,”* to Article 9 (5): *“The State shall conduct a prompt and impartial investigation or ensure that an inquiry takes place whenever there is reasonable ground to believe that a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms has occurred in any territory under its jurisdiction,”* and to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Lawlor
Director