
[We call for solidarity with Garifuna communities of Honduras!](#)

We call on human rights organizations, Indigenous Peoples, social movements, labor unions, academic institutions, networks of solidarity, and civil society organizations around the world to join this urgent call.

Five members of the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH, by its Spanish acronym) were arrested during a violent eviction in the Garifuna community of San Juan, in the municipality of Tela, on the Caribbean coast of Honduras. The incident took place in early July, and even though the individuals were released, **they are facing criminal charges for "aggravated usurpation" of their own territory.**

This criminalization is occurring in a context of escalating violence against Garifuna communities, and it coincides with the enactment of the "Law to Strengthen and Protect the Agro-Industrial Sector, Energy Projects, Tourism, Livestock, and Small Agricultural Producers." The provisions of this law threaten the survival of communities and peoples, especially those who are defending the earth and the territory.

We call on people to express their solidarity in two ways:

1- To send an email to the Presiding Justice of the Supreme Court of Honduras, requesting the dismissal of the criminal proceedings against the members of the Garifuna community of San Juan, and reminding the Honduran State of its obligation to comply with the rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights – which protect the territorial rights of the Garifuna People.

International solidarity has been key in defending human rights in Honduras. Your voice can help ensure that the State upholds its international obligations and protects those who are peacefully defending their ancestral territories.

Email your letter to: wvallecillo@poderjudicial.gob.hn and presidencia@poderjudicial.gob.hn

2- To sign onto the letter to Wagner Vallecillo Paredes, Presiding Justice of the Supreme Court and Head of the Judiciary of Honduras, [using the form on this link](#).

To Wagner Vallecillo Paredes
Presiding Justice of the Supreme Court and Head of the Judiciary of Honduras

Honorable Judge,

We, the undersigned organizations, send you this letter after having received particularly troubling information regarding the criminalization and unlawful judicial persecution of five members of the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH): Deinor Osmany Mejía Arzu, Irbin Rene López Cortes, Carlos Enrique Fernández Guzmán, Onil Rigoberto Hernández Zelaya and Sara Abigail Acosta.

These five individuals were arrested when police officers arrived in the community of San Juan to undertake a violent and unlawful eviction. The individuals were subsequently released; however, they continue to face charges of "aggravated usurpation" of their own territory. This criminalization is occurring in a context of escalating violence against Garifuna communities, and it has coincided with the enactment of the **"Law to Strengthen and Protect the Agro-Industrial Sector, Energy Projects, Tourism, Livestock, and Small Agricultural Producers."** The provisions of this law threaten the survival of communities and peoples, especially those who defend the land and the territory.

We emphasize that the lawsuit against the five human rights defenders and members of OFRANEH is plainly illegal and arbitrary.

On the one hand, it violates the territorial ancestral rights of the Garifuna people, which are internationally recognized:

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) has issued four rulings in which it condemns the Honduran State and **recognizes and protects the territorial ancestral rights of Garifuna communities**: [Case of the Garifuna Community of Triunfo de la Cruz and its Members V. Honduras \(2015\)](#); [Case of the Punta Piedra Garifuna Community and its Members V. Honduras \(2015\)](#); [Case of the Garifuna Community of San Juan and its Members V. Honduras \(2023\)](#); and the [Case of the Cayos Cochinos Garifuna Community V. Honduras \(2026\)](#).

In its rulings, the Inter-american Court of Human Rights **orders, among other measures, the restitution of lands; and it recognizes collective property**. It also acknowledges the serious impacts caused by violations against the Garifuna people's rights, especially taking into account their close relationship with their lands, natural resources and the intangible elements that stem from them.

On the other hand, this unlawful judicial persecution has particularly serious consequences, not only for the five individuals directly affected, but also for their organization and community; it is an attack on their legitimate and recognized work of defending human rights.

Therefore, we express our deep concern about the racial hate campaign that has been growing against the Garifuna people since the start of this unlawful judicial persecution against five of its members. What particularly concerns us are the numerous statements and publications with racist undertones that have falsely claimed that there is a controversy about land ownership in San Juan – when the Inter-american Court of Human Rights's ruling unequivocally established that the land is collectively owned by the Garifuna communities.

We note that we are familiar with the work of OFRANEH and the organized Garifuna communities. Their work is legitimate, inspiring, and widely recognized nationally and internationally. They have tirelessly carried out ongoing actions to care for the environment and create dignified living conditions for their residents – in a context of institutional neglect, inequality, poverty and racism.

Based on the foregoing, Honorable Judge, we respectfully request that you take all necessary actions to:

- **Guarantee the immediate and definitive cessation of the illegal judicial persecution of the five human rights defenders and members of the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH): Deinor Osmany Mejía Arzu, Irbin Rene López Cortes, Carlos Enrique Fernández**

Guzmán, Onil Rigoberto Hernández Zelaya and Sara Abigail Acosta.

- **Guarantee the full and proper compliance with the four rulings issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in favor of the Garifuna People.**
- **Prevent any further criminalization or prosecution of the Garifuna People.**
- **Guarantee an end to the racial hate campaign that has been growing against the Garifuna People, and which threatens their physical safety and legitimate work.**

Our organizations will remain especially vigilant regarding this situation.

We await your response to this letter.