

29 August 2019

## Honduras: Upcoming hearing of members of **Comité Municipal de Defensa de los Bienes Comunes y Públicos** amid increasing tensions

On 27 August 2019, nine human rights defenders, all members of the **Comité Municipal de Defensa de los Bienes Comunes y Públicos**, were sent to pretrial detention in connection to the trial they are facing related to the defense of the San Pedro and Guapinol Rivers. The next hearing on the case is scheduled for 29 August 2019.

The [Comité Municipal de Defensa de los Bienes Comunes y Públicos](#) (CMDBCP) is an organisation in Tocoa, in the department of Colón, comprised of several organisations defending land and environmental rights: the Environmental Committees of Sector San Pedro (13 communities) and Sector Committee Abisinia (14 communities); the Environmental Committee of the Community of Guapinol, campesino groups and the organisations Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguán (COPA); Fundación San Alonso Rodríguez (FSAR) and Parroquia San Isidro de Tocoa. The objective of CMDBCP is to provide a platform in which these organizations can mobilise resources in order to protect public goods in the region and to advocate for the right to food, water and a safe environment.

On 27 August 2019, nine members of the Environmental Committee of the Community of Guapinol and Environmental Committees of Sector San Pedro Colón, were sent to pretrial detention after appearing voluntarily before the National Jurisdiction Court on 26 August 2019. This decision was taken as part of the trial against human rights defenders **Antonio Martínez Ramos**, who died three years before the events he allegedly took part in, **Porfirio Sorto Cedillo**, **José Abelino Cedillo**, **Kelvin Alejandro Romero**, **Arnold Javier Alemán**, **Ever Alexander Cedillo**, **Orbin Nahún Hernández** and **Daniel Márquez**. They are being charged with "unlawful association", "damages", "arson" and "deprivation of liberty". **Jeremías Martínez Díaz** is being held in pretrial detention in La Ceiba for the same case since December 2018. Furthermore, Arnold Javier Aleman is currently facing an initial hearing related to the same case and for charges of "illegal occupation" and "damages". Both hearings are scheduled to take place in the National Jurisdiction Court in San Pedro Sula on 29 August 2019.

The trial is connected to the human rights defenders' activities to protect the San Pedro and Guapinol rivers in 2018. In August and September 2018, the communities part of CMDBCP peacefully occupied the margins of a road that leads to the mining company *Los Pinares*. The human rights defenders maintained this peaceful protest against violations of the rights to access to land, food and water for more than three months, establishing the Guapinol camp in defense of water and life. The extractive activities began in 2014, contaminating the water of the Guapinol River and resulting in the death of animals and the spreading of disease among inhabitants of the area. There are allegations of irregularities in project licensing and implementation.

The legal process against the defenders of environmental and land rights began on 13 September 2018, when a Honduran court specialising in organised crime issued an arrest warrant against 18 of the members of the CMDBCP. In February 2019, a judge of the National Jurisdiction Court dismissed all charges against the defenders for lack of evidence, however, this decision was appealed by the Public Prosecutor's Office.

On 27 October 2018, members of the CMDBCP suffered police and military repression, where ammunition and tear gas bombs were used. The events resulted in the murder of a human rights defender. Ever since, state security forces are maintaining a constant presence in the region. Members of the CMDBCP defend the right to land against human rights violations in the context of a mining project that was carried out without free, prior and informed consent of the communities. So far, six people have been killed in this conflict, the most recent killing occurred on 28 August 2019. Front Line Defenders is concerned at the escalation of military and police presence related to the ongoing trial against the human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders remains concerned at the criminalisation of human rights defenders based on fabricated charges and the impact that this may have on their work defending environmental rights in Tocoa. Furthermore, Front Line Defenders remains worried at the misuse of pretrial detention that seeks to curtail their work and create a chilling effect on other members of the organisation.

**Front Line Defenders urges authorities in Honduras to:**

1. Drop the charges/appeal against the human rights defenders of the CMDBCP and immediately release them from pretrial detention;
2. Cease any further legal harassment against members of CMDBCP as well as other organizations defending environmental rights in Honduras.
3. Refrain from using military presence in the region as it can be seen as a way of intimidating human rights defenders in view of the upcoming hearing and instead ensure their security through other means.
4. Guarantee that human rights defenders in Honduras can continue their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and without restrictions, including judicial harassment.