

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing on

The Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Americas
Friday, November 20, 2020 - 10:00am

Statement of Record

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Thank you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for inviting Oxfam America to submit this statement of record on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Latin America. Oxfam America is part of an international confederation of 20 organizations networked together in more than 90 countries as part of a global movement for change to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. This international confederation has forty years of working in Latin America and working with indigenous peoples in defending their rights and territories. Oxfam respectfully submits the following four resources to help inform and enrich the discussion on indigenous rights in Latin America, with special attention on Honduras.

[“Averting Ethnocide: Indigenous Peoples and Territorial Rights,” Oxfam 2020](#)

The June 2020 Oxfam report “Averting Ethnocide: Indigenous peoples and territorial rights” states that a “cry for help has gone out from the indigenous peoples of Latin America, as COVID-19 is reaching even the most impenetrable corners of the Amazon.” Further and more ominously, the report states “indigenous and civil society organizations are already warning of possible ethnocide.”

With extreme poverty rates that are three times those of the rest of the Latin American population, this report demonstrates that indigenous peoples are one of the most vulnerable groups in the face of the pandemic. The majority lack adequate health infrastructure and secure access to basic services such as clean water and sanitation. Moreover, indigenous peoples without secure land rights face high levels of food and nutrition insecurity, and a higher prevalence of preexisting diseases. The global pandemic has exposed the profound social and territorial inequalities in access to basic and health services.

This report offers short, medium and long-term recommendations to Latin American governments to protect and enhance the rights of indigenous peoples. The recommendations include respecting the self-protection measures adopted by indigenous peoples; immediately suspend exploitation and extractive activities in indigenous

territories; follow the recommendations of the Pan-American Health Organization in providing timely information in native languages to prevent the spread of COVID-19; address food insecurity; invest in health and access to water infrastructure; and guarantee that economic recovery plans and investment projects respect the rights of indigenous peoples.

The report can be downloaded here: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/averting-ethnocide-indigenous-peoples-and-territorial-rights-crisis-face-covid-19-latin>

“Abandonment has a Face and Consequences” (*“El abandono tiene rostro y consecuencias”*)

Oxfam in Honduras with copartner FOSDEH (the Social Forum on Debt and Development in Honduras) adapted the aforementioned report “Averting Ethnocide” to address the situation of indigenous populations in Honduras in the report “*El abandono tiene rostro y consecuencias*” (in Spanish only). The report demonstrates how the Honduran government’s response to COVID-19 has deepened the exclusion of indigenous peoples and the Afro-descendent communities using a human rights framework. This report echoes the recommendations in “Averting Ethnocide” calling on the Honduran government to respect the self-determination and territorial sovereignty of these people, while also including them in health and economic revitalization plans to recover from the pandemic.

The report in Spanish can be accessed here: https://fosdeh.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020_fosdeh_el_abandono_tiene_rostro.pdf

Report of the UN Human Rights Council’s Working Group on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations visit to Honduras

In August 2019, the UN Human Rights Council’s Working Group on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations conducted an official visit to Honduras to evaluate the Honduran Government’s progress on implementing the Guiding Principles on Business and Human rights. The trip report expressed concern at the lack of governmental action on measures to address the root causes of social conflicts, and urged the Honduran government to enact the legislative and institutional reforms need to create a participatory and transparent environment for responsible business conduct. The Working Group noted the absence of regulations and an institutional framework to protect people from business-related human rights abuses, and the lack of accountability for violations that have occurred. It also condemned the Honduran government for the lack of accountability for human rights violations, noting the attacks, harassment and intimidation against human rights and land defenders. The Working group also noted that the “root cause of the majority of social conflicts in Honduras is the systemic lack of transparency and meaningful participation of affected communities in decisions regarding development projects and the exploitation of natural resources, and in the energy and

agribusiness sectors.” It recommends that the government and private sector respect indigenous peoples’ right to free, prior and informed consultation and consent in line with international standards. Finally, the Working Group warned that government inaction along with entrenched impunity and corruption have eroded confidence in government institutions, especially those in vulnerable situations such as indigenous peoples.

A copy of the report can be downloaded here: <https://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/visit-honduras-report-working-group-issue-human-rights-and-transnational>

Territories at Risk II: Mining, hydroelectric power, and oil and gas in Honduras

In 2019, Oxfam partner FOSDEH released “Territories at Risk II: Mining, hydroelectric power, and oil and gas in Honduras”, a second study on concessions to national and transnational extractives industries. This critical report (in Spanish with an executive summary in English), documents the growth of the extractive industry in Honduras from 2012 to 2018 and links it to the marked increase in the militarization of the country and the criminalization of and attacks against human rights and land defenders, including indigenous peoples and women. From 2014 to 2018, 65 human rights and land defenders (both women and men) were murdered, and from 2016 to 2017, more than 1232 attacks were documented. In the five-year period of the report, it documents that 54 mining concessions, 36 electric power generation projects and 1 oil and gas concession on indigenous and afro-descendant territories were granted. If all applications and exploration projects were approved, the report states, there would be a 575% increase in mining concessions and 260% increase in electrical projects in their territories, frequently without consultation or consent. Finally, the report states that these projects impose costs that exceed potential benefits, generate social conflict and have irreversible impacts on the environment because investors are favored over a real energy policy that favors Hondurans at large.

The English Executive Summary is here: https://oi-files-cng-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/honduras.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Summary%20-%20Territories%20at%20Risk%20II%20-%202019.pdf

The complete report in Spanish, can be found here: https://oi-files-cng-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/honduras.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Teritorios%20en%20Riesgo%20II%20-%20Miner%C3%ADa,%20generaci%C3%B3n%20de%20energ%C3%ADa%20el%C3%A9ctrica%20e%20hidrocarburos%20en%20Honduras.pdf