Translated version of *Dignidad y Justicia para el Pueblo Tolupán*

**DIGNITY AND JUSTICE FOR THE TOLUPÁN PEOPLE (translated by Greg McCain)**

San Pedro Sula, Honduras.  

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**How long?**

The Tolupán people continue paying with their blood to defend their land and natural assets. On Sunday August 25, 2013 at about 4:30 pm in the tribal community of San Francisco de Locomapa, in the Department of Yoro, Armando Fúnez Medina, Ricardo Soto Medina, and Maria Enriqueta Matute were killed. They were murdered for being part of a group of indigenous people belonging to the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ, in its Spanish acronym), who opposed the illegal logging of the forests of their tribe, the illegal installation of an hydroelectric dam that has not had an Environmental Impact Study done on it nor has consent been granted for its construction by the tribe, and for opposing the illegal extraction of antimony¹ in different locations in the mountains of the tribe exploiting the margins of the law.

Their murderers, Selvin Matute and Carlos Matute, killed them in cold blood without any resistance. Both murderers are part of a band of thugs operating in the area who provide their services as hired assassins to businesses that want to seize the spoils of the natural resources on the tribal property of San Francisco. This criminal Matute Gang operates unpunished and freely in the area. They can be seen traveling in pairs on their motorbikes with guns slung on their backs, sometimes shooting in the air, guarding the pick-ups that come loaded with brushwood and with antimony. The police do nothing to stop them, nor have they issued a warrant for their arrest nor do they simply enforce the rule of law in the area. The Matute Gang is untouchable because they guard the interests of the great plunderers of the tribe.

**State Violence**

The indigenous Tolupán, with more than 5000 years of existence, consists of 32 tribes currently living in the mountainous region of the Departments of Yoro and Francisco Morazan. They are

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¹ (trans. note) Antimony is a silvery-white metal that is found in the earth’s crust. Antimony ores are mined and then mixed with other metals to form antimony alloys or combined with oxygen to form antimony oxide... Antimony isn't used alone because it breaks easily, but when mixed into alloys, it is used in lead storage batteries, solder, sheet and pipe metal, bearings, castings, and pewter. Antimony oxide is added to textiles and plastics to prevent them from catching fire. It is also used in paints, ceramics, and fireworks, and as enamels for plastics, metal, and glass. [http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/toxsubstance.asp?toxid=58](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/toxsubstance.asp?toxid=58)
a peaceful indigenous people accustomed to living in harmony with nature, which they suddenly see endangered. Their lives and their livelihoods have been taken away by the ambitions of entrepreneurs of the forest industries, mining and hydropower, entrepreneurs with sufficient political and economic power to impose their will with bloodshed and firepower with no institutions capable of putting an end to their boundless ambition. Given this reality, the resistant Tolupán, the last of the dispossessed—which have survived for several decades—have been stable, peaceful, quiet, full of fear and humiliation, but brave and dignified.

It is true, the affirmation of the Honduran State, that currently the Tolupán people are the most martyred ethnic group among the entire universe of indigenous people that exist in Honduras. As stated and recognized officially by the Secretary for the Development of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-decedents, and the Tolupanes themselves feel in their flesh and in their souls the suffering which causes the ongoing bloody river, fed with pain and humiliation, from the veins of their children.

If the Honduran State recognizes and - further - denounces this reality, why don’t they decide to end this silent and progressive slaughter of the Tolupán people? Until it does, the criminal violence of the businessmen and politicians against Tolupanes will also be State sanctioned violence, a heinous genocide.

The River of Tolupán Blood
An incomplete list of the most renowned Tolupán leaders killed since the eighties so that we remember some of them:

+ Marcelino Centeno (1980), who served as chief of the Tribe Guajiniquil de El Negrito, Yoro. Killed for defending the lands of the tribe besieged by farmers in the area.

+ Martyrs Martinez, chief of the Tribe of Tepemechin Vegas.

+ Vicente Martinez Tribal leader of Santa Rosita.

+ Dionisio Martinez, also of the Tribe Santa Rosita.

+ Rutilius Matute, of the Aguas Caliente tribe of Olanchito de Guadarrama.

+ Natalia Castillo, chief of the tribe Anicillos the Rio Abajo.

+ Jerónima Perez of the tribe La Bolsita.

+ Marcelino Polanco, director of the Board of the tribe Subirana, Yoro.

2 You can read on the official website of the SEDINAFRO: http://www.sedinafroh.gob.hn/index.php/tolupanes.
+ **Eduardo Vieda**, of the tribe Candelaria.

+ **Florencio Caceres**, chief of the San Esteban tribe.

+ **Jorge Castro**, of the Tribe Mataderos.

+ **Ramon Medina Silva**, of the Tribe La Bolsita.

+ **Vicente Matute**, President of the Federation of Tribes Xicaques Yoro, FETRIXY. Killed September 1991.

+ **Teodoro Martinez**, Vice President of the Council of the tribe of San Juan, Montaña de La Flor, who was brutally beheaded in 2003.

### San Francisco: the Tribe With the Most Victims

Without a doubt, among the 32 Tolupane tribes currently existing, the tribe San Francisco de Locomapa is the most tormented, they have reported more continuous murders so far this century, without justice being done in even one of the murders.

We remember:

+ **Luis Soto Madrid**, Chief of the tribe in the eighties. He was hacked to death with a machete on May 1, 2002. He was murdered because of a complaint he made of the companies deforesting tribes forests and the reporting of accomplices within the tribe.

+ **Faustino Cordova**, Chief of the tribe at the time of his murder which occurred on September 7, 2008. He was robbed of life for defending the tribe's forest heritage.

+ **Albino Matute**, Lagunitas resident in the village where one of the illegal mines is in operation. He was assassinated in 2011.

+ **Antonio Matute**, a resident of the village Pedregales. Murdered by machetes on December 22, 2011.

+ **Matute Soto Osman**, a resident of the village Pedregales. Was assassinated in June of 2012 with a firearm.

And the last link in this chain of murders was committed against **Ricardo Soto Fúnez, Armando Fúnez Medina and María Enriqueta Matute.** Indigenous leaders of the tribe, members of MADJ, killed on Sunday August 25, 2013.

Regarding this last crime, since the 12th of August, these indigenous people had initiated an exercise in territorial autonomy with a roadblock that connected the Locomapa sector with the San Francisco tribe in a manner in which they were not blocking the passage of any person or conveyance. I personally was at the roadblock one week before the crime and found that no one was denied passage except the trucks which came from the forests of the tribe and did not have legal permission to log nor a permit to transport wood. These trucks were detained and delivered to the custody of the police station in the village of El Ocotal and the village of Havana. One wonders why the police, once they had in their possession the cargo of timber illegally obtained and transported, left without seizing the cargo and arresting those responsible for the transporting. Also, I was able to observe that the pickups were loaded with antimony brush, an illegal extraction, not authorized nor endorsed by the Honduran Institute of Geology and Mines (INHGEOMIN) nor by prior consent of the tribe.

On the day of the crime, according to the survivors and neighbors, at around 4:30 pm the brothers Selvin and Carlos Matute arrived at the scene of the roadblock. After demanding that the Indigenous people leave the place, they snatched the national flag, argued with the people and then drew their weapons shooting Ricardo Soto Medina, Armando Fúnez Medina and Maria Enriqueta Medina and then fled.

More than a month after this murder, and despite the murderers being identified, not only have they not been caught, but also they remain in the area intimidating the rest of the indigenous population and subjecting them to humiliation.

The last of these intimidations took place on September 2 when the gunmen left the following message at the house of the MADJ coordinator of the tribe, Mr. José María Pineda:

**Email to Chepito and family:**

*Today yes, get ready because the fire's been lit, because you haven't curbed your tongue. We know where you are but we're going to get you where it hurts most. You don't know who you're messing with, so it's best if you get ready. We're giving you due warning. We don't think twice about eliminating people, even less so rats which are only good for fucking with.*

*Yours sincerely, your enemies!*

Because of this hostility and refusal of the police and public ministry to curb the impunity with which the Matute gang operates, MADJ opted to protect the lives of local leaders plus another 6 people among who are key witnesses to solve the crime. The slowness with which the police are acting has led MADJ to solicit international protection for the survivors who are being persecuted at this time.
How many Tolupanes have been killed?
The exact figure is difficult to know, however there is consensus by those who have taken the time to investigate that the number of murders of the Tolupán people is alarmingly high:

- In a 2000 report by the Department of Justice of the United States the number of indigenous killed stood at over 43 across the country, among which includes Tolupanes or Xicaques:

Numerous indigenous activists have been killed with impunity by gunmen evidently in the pay of large landowners—at least 43 in the last five years alone, according to indigenous and Honduran rights organizations—and in a number of cases there has been evidence of involvement of military and police personnel. Murdered activists have come from a number of different indigenous groups, including the Lenca, Maya-Chortí, Tolupán, Xicaque, and Garífuna.  

The report admits that the actors of these crimes enjoy impunity, linking large landowners as intellectual authors, as well as military and police.

- On July 20, 2002, in a public conference, Elijah Julian Licona, then president of the Federation of Xicaques Tribes of Yoro (FETRIXY), claimed that landowners and military have killed at least 65 Indigenous people.

- In another document, this one from the UN in 2005, the Commission on Human Rights denounced that landowners reportedly killed at least 58 Tolupanes for opposing the invasion of their lands.

- The State of Honduras, for its part, through the Secretariat for Ethnic Development reports the crime of 57 Tolupanes murdered:

Approximately 57 Tolupanes leaders have been killed, crimes in which there have been no punishment for the perpetrators and masterminds, which makes them the most martyred of the nine tribes of indigenous people that still exist in Honduras.

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How many more have to die before the state finally assumes its role in ensuring justice for the Tolupán people and the rest of the nation of Honduras?

What Do They Have In Common, the Murders of Tolupanes?

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Killed for reporting the theft of their natural assets.

Prior to their murders, the martyred Tolupanes bravely faced, as a result of their denunciations, dispossession and abuse of which their communities are still being subjected to by those who keep the people living in anxiety and terror; a terror which by not being investigated by successive governments has become a state terror.

They are targeted assassinations.

These are not deaths attributable to common crimes, as some have tried to make them appear, nor deaths that have occurred at random, but rather murders of targeted people as a way to intimidate and demobilize the tribes and local organizations. The Indigenous people killed have fallen defending Tolupanes natural assets and essential collective life in the communities and villages of the tribes.

It is pre-mediated murder.

These leaders were threatened and persecuted before their deaths materialized. There were organizations in several cases of these murders that reported these threats and the Honduran government was not able to provide effective protection. In the case of the last of these crimes, MADJ had warned for more than a year that, if the state did not act diligently, the outcome would be disastrous for the San Francisco Tribe.

Similarly, within five days of the last slaughter, Radio Progress publicly requested rapid and effective intervention of the State in order to prevent a tragedy like the one that occurred. The state, through its agencies charged with delivering justice, ignored the civil society organizations requests for state mediation, also ignored were the indigenous people themselves who, in territorial resistance, sought the responsible intervention of the state for the management of their natural assets.

Justice has not been served for any of them.

They share, in addition, the despair that they have not been shown justice even after several decades of continual slaughter. The perpetrators, much less the masterminds, have not been convicted. There judgments sleep the sleep of impunity in the different courts of the country and, interestingly, in those cases where there have been key witnesses or persons whose testimony could lead to the truth, these people are also killed.

The State does not serve or act.

The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of the human rights defenders in Honduras this past December 13th highlights the danger faced by the men and women leaders of
the Tolupán people and rest of the indigenous peoples as well as others who defend the right to live in a safe and healthy environment:

"There are certain categories of human rights defenders exposed to a particular risk, such as ..., indigenous, Afro-Hondurans, environmentalists and Land rights defenders"\(^6\)

In another section the same report notes that:

"There have been cases of human rights defenders that protect natural resources (Forests, land and water) who have been repeatedly arrested, beaten and in some cases killed because of their activities. Others who report environmental problems and instruct citizens about their rights to land and food have been described as members of resistance fighters, terrorists, political opponents or criminals "\(^7\)

If the Honduran State had provided the suitable means and more viable alternatives to anticipate the situation of danger for the lives of the Indigenous people, surely the slaughter of the Tolupanes of San Francisco would not have taken place, nor would more murders have happened to other indigenous peoples, specifically to the Lenca people, where Tomas Garcia was killed for exercising his right to free consent of a hydroelectric project that operates outside the law in Lenca territory.

In the name, therefore, of justice and the right to live in peace and harmony amongst themselves and with their environmental settings, we, The Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice, echo the cry of the Tolupanes and all the peoples of Honduras to call the attention of the national and international communities and enforce the rule of law in the indigenous villages of Honduras.

For now the demands fall within the following actions:

1. The formation of a special police team that arrests the assassins Selvin Matute and Carlos Matute, murderers of Tolupanes of the San Francisco tribe, and undertake a thorough investigation of the crimes of "the Matute Gang." There are fears that the police of Yoro not will proceed in their arrest, in fact have failed to do so, despite these thugs continuing to intimidate the tribal population of San Francisco de Locomapa.

2. Request for provisional measures to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the OAS as well as to the High Commissioner of Human Rights of the UN. The slowness with which the Special Prosecutors for Ethnic Groups is acting and the inability of the national police of Yoro to capture the murderers and protect the tribal population, additionally, this siege by the thugs rushing into the tribe to intimidate and continue the illegal exploitation of the mines of

\(^6\) ONU (2012). *Informe de la Relatora Especial Sobre la Situación de los Defensores de los derechos Humanos en Honduras*, Margaret Sekaggya. Párrafo 64.

\(^7\) ONU (2012). *Informe de la Relatora Especial Sobre la Situación de los Defensores de los derechos Humanos en Honduras*, Margaret Sekaggya. Párrafo 82.
antimony, is causing the displacement of several indigenous families. They flee for their safety, for fear of the threats and the absence of a police force to protect them. We must protect them and this can only be possible with the intervention of international workers of justice in the area of human rights.

3. Proceed to order the official termination of illegal mining of mineral deposits in San Francisco de Locomapa and proceed according to the law to withhold the respective civil and criminal liability of those who currently operate outside the law.

The Tolupanes, within their tribes, stay to themselves to the extent possible. Five hundred years later they continue, accompanied with the blood of their martyrs, the eternal popular resistance which rises against the oppressive powers, against a genocidal state, against a capitalism of ecocide and wickedness, against everything that means more death and pain to their tribes.

Let us accompany the Tolupan people. Whatever it takes to make sure that the indigenous cry for justice does not drown in impunity, delay and denial of justice at this time to characterize the bodies responsible for the application of the law of the State of Honduras.