

### La Nueva Esperanza



La Nueva Esperanza is a small community which has fought for over 12 years to defend natural resources from mining interests – Chinese, Italian and Honduran. The struggle intensified in 2012 when a mining exploration concession was granted to Minerales Victoria, whose owner, Lenir Perez, is the son-in-law of the notorious major landowner Miguel Facusse. Guards from Orion security company entered the village with police escort and threatened those who refused to sell their land to the mining company.

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### Triunfo de la Cruz

Triunfo is a community of Garifunas, Afro-indigenous descendants exiled from the island of St. Vincent in the 18th century. It is defending its land from tourist schemes promoted by the local municipality which, in 1993, without consultation, expanded the Tela city boundaries to include Triunfo despite the fact that the Garifunas have full collective title to the land. The community founded CODETT (*Committee for the Defense of Triunfo Territory*), and the first Garifuna radio station in Honduras, Radio Coco Dulce (Sweet Coconut) to mobilize resistance. They have endured persecution as a result of their efforts.



Garifuna communities on the Honduran coast have lost or are in danger of losing their ancestral land to agricultural or tourist companies or to organized crime. OFRANEH (*Honduran Black Fraternal Organization*), which mobilizes on a national and international level on behalf of the Garifuna communities, has brought five Garifuna cases before the Inter-American Human Rights System on the issue of losing land. Two of them, Triunfo de la Cruz and Punta Piedra, will appear before the Inter-American Court in 2014. PROAH has been supporting Triunfo's case with an amicus curiae brief, and is seeking international lawyers' organizations to do the same.

**ADEPZA** (*Association for the Development of the Zacate Grande Peninsula*)

The Zacate Grande peninsula consists of 10 communities with about 5,000 inhabitants and their struggle is related to access to the land and the sea, as most live from agriculture and/or fishing. Although the peninsula is national territory, and many of the campesinos' families have lived there for over eighty years, the land is increasingly being taken by members of the wealthy elite such as Miguel Facusse.

In April 2010, ADEPZA established the radio station *La Voz de Zacate Grande* (Voice of Zacate Grande) to mobilize the community. As threats increased, including judicial persecution of the members of ADEPZA associated with the radio, COFADEH, along with the Italian organization CICA (Italy-Central America Collective) decided in 2011 to found a permanent human rights observer camp next to the radio station. The security situation continues to worsen.



**APUVIMEH** (*Association for a Better Life for Persons Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS in Honduras*)

As well as advocating for people infected with HIV/AIDS and their families, APUVIMEH also defends the rights of members of the LGBTI community.

APUVIMEH organizes monthly demonstrations to protest against the impunity surrounding the members of the LGBTI community, with more having been killed in the first six months after the 2009 coup than in the previous 10 years. PROAH accompanies the protests as well as some of the activists when they enter the Public Prosecution Service headquarters to get an update on the investigations into murders of members of the LGBTI community.



# PROAH

## Annual Report 2013

**Mission Statement:** *PROAH provides international accompaniment to human rights defenders, including human rights and social movement organizations and individuals. Our partners find themselves under threat or harassment due to their individual and collective human rights work in an environment of repression and political persecution. Accompaniment is based on the principles of nonviolence, non-interference, and political independence.*



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# PROAH

## Annual Report 2013

In 2013, PROAH placed 12 international human rights accompaniers from seven countries in Honduras, their average stay being 6 months. Currently Peace Watch Switzerland and School of the Americas Watch collaborate with PROAH in providing volunteers.



2013, PROAH's third year as a program, was marked by an escalation in the persecution and criminalization of human rights defenders in Honduras. Particularly targeted are those acting to protect the environment against megaprojects, which are promoted by the post-coup government through measures such as legislation and providing military security.

The controversial Mining Law, which relaxed many of the controls on mining, and the Law for the Promotion of Development and the Restructuring of the National Debt, which encourages the selling off of national assets and natural resources, were both put in place this year.

The Honduran state is relying on megaprojects to balance its books, and uses security forces and a corrupt justice system to impose its will in the face of peaceful opposition.

In the tense months preceding general elections in November, human rights defenders suffered increased stigmatization as well as persecution, threats, criminalization and murder. The election was condemned as fraudulent by international and national observers.

Given that the official 'winner' is the National Party, which presided over a dramatic deterioration in the human rights situation since the 2009 coup, many Hondurans are deeply concerned about the future.



These developments, as well as increased militarization of the country since the 2009 coup, have directly impacted the people and organizations that PROAH accompanies as well as three critical areas of PROAH's accompaniment work: **Dissuasion, Documentation, and Dissemination.**

**Dissuasion:** Offering physical accompaniment to human rights defenders – communities and human rights organizations – with the intention of dissuading attacks. This year, PROAH undertook around 90 accompaniments, from court hearings in the capital to days in rural communities. Many of the court hearings centered on the use of excessive force by the police and military.

**Documentation:** Being witnesses and supporting the process of documenting the situation and human rights violations, to then form the basis for...

**Dissemination:** Providing information and consistent, reliable analysis to the international community, publication of the human rights situation in Honduras; links to and translations of articles and documents; and briefings for lobbying in the US, among others. Please see our blog and website for this piece of our work: <http://hondurasaccompanimentproject.wordpress.com/>; <http://www.friendshipamericas.org/honduras>

Due to Honduran state's increased emphasis on megaprojects, PROAH forged closer alliances with CEHPRODEC (Center for Alternative Development), which has taken a leading role in opposing the new Mining Law and its effects on rural communities, and MADJ (Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice), an anti-corruption organization that is actively defending the environmental rights of campesino communities.

In July, two PROAH team members, Daniel Langmeier (Swiss) and Orlane Vidal (French), were kidnapped by armed security guards contracted by Minerales Victoria, the mining company operating in the village of La Nueva Esperanza.



The team undertook a detailed analysis of the incident and its implications for PROAH's work and security. The team also engaged in intensive advocacy work to draw attention to the situation in La Nueva Esperanza and to ensure that justice was achieved, not only in relation to the abduction, but also to the persecution endured by villagers and their supporters. An arrest warrant was issued for the leader of the kidnappers, but as of the close of 2013, it has not been implemented.

**Organizations and communities that PROAH works with and accompanies include:**

**COFADEH** (*Committee for the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras*)

COFADEH, as well as seeking justice for cases of forced disappearance, defends and promotes the full spectrum of human rights and is one of Honduras' leading organizations in the field. COFADEH's activities include high level advocacy directed at the UN, bringing cases before the Inter-American System and the Honduran courts, as well as awareness-raising locally and internationally. COFADEH provides training to create and strengthen local human rights networks.



COFADEH is PROAH's main partner organization and it receives the most accompaniment. There were over 50 accompaniments in total: court cases, investigations into human rights abuses, and workshops throughout Honduras. Many of the court



cases are high-profile hearings involving the police and military. The accompaniment of lawyers at hearings serves a two-fold purpose: to underline the fact that the lawyer, and COFADEH more generally, has international support, thereby serving as protection, and to seek to ensure the court case is subject to due process.

**COPINH** (*Civic Council of the Indigenous and Popular Organizations of Honduras*)

COPINH has been working for over 20 years to defend the rights of the Lenca indigenous people in western Honduras, increasingly under threat due to the imposition of megaprojects in their territory. In 2013, COPINH's work focused on their peaceful campaign against the Agua Zarca hydroelectric plant. Much of PROAH's accompaniment of COPINH this year has been at court hearings, in response to the criminalization of its leadership because of this work.

