

**Oral Statement of Bertha Zúniga Cáceres from the Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH) and the Honduran Network of Women Human Rights Defenders before the general discussion of the UN CSW60
New York, March 2016**

Madam Chair, representatives of governments of the world. My name is Bertha Zúniga Cáceres. Last March 3rd, my mother Ms. Berta Cáceres, was murdered. She and the Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH), had been denouncing serious human rights violations against the Lenca people as a result of the imposition of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam project by the company, DESA, on the Rio Blanco within Lenca Indigenous territory, in Honduras.

Today, Member States and civil society organizations are gathered here in the UN to reach agreements that will make Agenda2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals a reality, such as ending with poverty in all its forms, reducing inequality within and amongst countries or promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. The world has lost a women human rights defender who dedicated her whole life to making these international commitments a lived reality, by defending the river, the ancestral territories, a life with dignity, challenging the dominant extractivist and exploitative development model, and in particular, promoting the human rights of all women.

Her assassination was not an isolated event; on the contrary, it took place in a violent context that had already taken the lives of several members of COPINH and dozens of human rights defenders across Honduras and Mesoamerica.

The past few days have been painful and complicated. But the most difficult part has been the total secrecy that surrounds the investigation of her assassination and the attempts to criminalize members of COPINH and other human rights defenders by the Honduras State and media, such as the Mexican environmentalist and human rights defender, Gustavo Castro.

Ladies and gentleman, as the Expert Group on the CSW60 stated, the implementation of Agenda 2030 will never be a reality if women human rights defenders continue to be threatened, murdered and criminalized, and if there are systematic violations of indigenous people's right to free, prior and informed consent in the construction of infrastructure and extractive projects in their land and territories. Unfortunately, this is a reality faced by

indigenous peoples and other communities in Honduras, Latin America and other regions of the world.

On behalf of my family, COPINH and the National Honduran Network of WHRD, I would like to demand that:

- The Honduran State takes immediate action to implement in a transparent way the precautionary measures that were issued in favor of COPINH and my family.
- The Honduran State should seriously consider the request to ask the Inter American Human Rights Commission to create a team of expert independent investigators, people who are trusted by COPINH and our family, to lead, supervise and participate in the investigation to clarify the vile assassination of my mother. This crime should not remain in impunity, a sad but common reality in our countries.
- Security and protection be provided for my family, other human rights defenders of COPINH and from the National Honduran Network of WHRDs.
- The Honduran State intervenes in concrete ways to end the flagrant existing impunity in the face of a growing number of executions of human rights defenders, particularly those who defend environmental and land rights in the country.
- The will of the Lenca and other indigenous, afro-descendent and rural communities be respected and Honduras comply with ILO Convention 169 recognizing prior consent by immediately ceasing the construction of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam in Rio Blanco and by a comprehensive review all other infrastructure and development projects to determine whether free, prior and informed consent has been obtained.
- Governments, transnational corporations, financial institutions and investors respect and honor the rights of indigenous peoples and ensure free, prior and informed consent for any construction or development on their land and in their territories.

Without respect for these basic rights and conditions, Agenda2030 will never come to pass and benefit very few interests and the expense of many and the planet.

Today I want us to honor my mother's legacy, which is a legacy for all peoples. She fought for life, for true, deep and integral transformations. This is why Berta will return; her spirit will inspire millions to fight for life and our sacred earth. She already has.