

14 February 2022

International Forum calls for immediate release and reparations for defenders of the Guapinol River

The International Forum for Human Rights in Honduras welcomes the granting of two injunctions on 10 February 2022 by the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice in favour of the 8 defenders of the Guapinol River in Honduras; decisions that recognise the illegality of the process and declared a mistrial, resulting in the definitive dismissal of the case and an order for the immediate release of the prisoners.

The Guapinol River defenders have been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty for more than two years, since their arrests on September 2019. The arbitrariness of their detention was determined by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in its report on 25 February 2020 , which called on the Honduran government to release them. The Working Group concluded: "that the source has presented a credible and clear case about the violation of the elements guaranteeing a fair trial for the eight defenders, including the violation of their rights to equal treatment before the law, of the guarantee of non-discrimination and of the independence of the courts in pursuing the cases brought against them".

The day before the Supreme Court decisions, on 9 February, the Trujillo Sentencing Court sentenced six of the eight defenders: Porfirio Sorto Cedillo, José Abelino Cedillo, Orbin Naún Hernández, Kelvin Alejandro Romero, Ewer Alexander Cedillo and Daniel Márquez, for the crimes of aggravated damages and simple damages against the company Inversiones Los Pinares and unjust deprivation of liberty.

As confirmed by the Supreme Court, we are concerned that the Trujillo Sentencing Court not only based its conviction on a deficient investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office that never managed to prove the guilt of the defenders, but also ignored all the information presented on the illegality of the concessions that originated this socio-environmental conflict.

We call on the Trujillo Court and the Olanchito Penal Centre to speed up the procedure fulfilling the ruling of the Supreme Court on 10 February for the immediate release of the six defenders, who are still deprived of their liberty.

We also demand that the government of Honduras, in compliance with the recommendations of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, provide full reparation to the defenders of Guapinol and the immediate and independent investigation of the events that unjustly kept them deprived of their liberty for more than two years.

We remind the government of Honduras of its duty to protect those who defend human rights, intensifying efforts to respect and protect the exercise of their work without this representing an imminent risk, as well as to ensure the immediate cessation of the misuse of criminal law for the persecution of human rights defenders. **Honduras must move towards ensuring that cases such as that of the Guapinol River defenders do not happen again.**