

SOLIDARITY

Notes

Berta Cáceres: ¡PRESENTE!

In the old protest song “Joe Hill,” about a labor leader who was executed in 1915, Joe Hill appears, “alive as you and me,” and says, “I didn’t die...What they can never kill, went on to organize.”

This idea that grassroots leaders live on through their movements is being expressed today in Honduras when members of COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras) assert that their leader, Berta Cáceres, who was murdered in 2016 for her role defending the land and rights of the Lenca people against corporate interests, is: “¡PRESENTE!”

To say Berta is *presente* means that she is not forgotten, and that she is inspiring the movement that is carrying on the struggle in her name. While the hydroelectric corporation DESA conspired to have Berta murdered for her efforts to stop its massive dam project, DESA couldn’t kill the grassroots vision for a better world motivating her and many others. The movement that Berta physically left behind *went on to organize*.

A Campaign of International Solidarity

That movement, since Berta’s death, has been building an international solidarity campaign to end



Photo courtesy of COPINH

corporate impunity. COPINH has mobilized allies across the globe to demand justice for Berta through actions including: organizing a tour throughout Europe; securing support from legal experts in the U.S and Latin America; organizing international sign-on letters; and planning actions at UN meetings in Geneva. Because of this pressure, the president of DESA was put on trial for being a co-conspirator in her murder. During the trial, COPINH and another Grassroots International partner, OFRANEH, joined social movements from

across Honduras in the “Berta Lives!” Feminist Encampment outside the Supreme Court. Through the relentless organizing of COPINH and their allies, the President of DESA was ultimately found guilty in the Honduran courts as a co-perpetrator in Berta’s murder. This historic verdict sets an important precedent that corporations cannot continue to

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murder Indigenous land defenders with impunity; movements — in partnership with allies across the globe — will hold them accountable.

Building a New Vision Rooted in Indigenous Traditions

In addition to launching these tremendous campaigns of resistance, COPINH has also been building a new vision for society that is deeply rooted in Indigenous traditions. One example is UTOPIA, which COPINH describes as a, “gathering space for people, communities, ideas, struggles, proposals, and dreams. A space open to anyone who dreams of a more just world.” The programs at UTOPIA include political formation workshops and trainings in agroecology.



Photo courtesy of COPINH

A Political Opening

In January 2022, with the support of many grassroots movement groups, leftist Xiomara Castro was inaugurated as the first female President of Honduras. This marks the end of what movement groups describe as the “narco-coup” government that was in place since the ousting of popular president Manuel Zelaya, Castro’s spouse, in a US-backed coup in 2009. At the inauguration, Bertita Cáceres, Berta’s daughter and the coordinator of COPINH, passed the traditional Indigenous Lenca baton of leadership, a sacred symbol, to Xiomara Castro. Many hope this election reflects a turning point in Honduran politics that could open up more space for grassroots movements and enable their impacts to be felt even more broadly.

Notes From the Executive Director

True Solidarity Knows No Borders:

This issue of *Solidarity Notes* profiles the power of international solidarity. One example is organizations around the world coming together to support Honduran movements in their efforts to end impunity for the assassination of Berta Cáceres and other Indigenous land defenders who have been killed for protecting their sacred land. Another example is movement groups in West African countries organizing a transnational caravan to amplify their common struggle in defense of land, water, and peasant agroecology.



These stories illustrate a tenet that is central to all of Grassroots International’s work: **true solidarity knows no borders.**

At Grassroots International, we seek to advance the understanding that in order to solve the most intractable problems of our day, we need to look beyond our own borders. This means learning from people worldwide most negatively impacted by imperialism, colonialism, and related systems of oppression. From people who, at great risk and often under tremendous repression, are creating a radical vision for a more just world and organizing powerful grassroots movements to make that vision a reality.

Together with you, we redistribute resources from the U.S. to the frontlines of social movements in the Global South, to movement groups with which we have entered into long-term partnerships. We connect our donors to those movements, to learn their historical and political contexts, and to deepen solidarity. This is part of a broader model of radical giving we call Global Solidarity Philanthropy.

Rainer Maria Rilke wrote: “I live my life in widening circles that reach out across the world.”

We at Grassroots International — with donors and movement partners — are building a circle of radical love and solidarity in a joyful struggle for our collective liberation. Thank you for being part of this circle.

In gratitude and solidarity,
Chung-Wha Hong, Executive Director

The West African Caravan for Land, Water, Seeds, and Peasant Agroecology

Peasant agroecology is at the heart of the traditional food system in many West African nations. In recent years, though, foreign and multinational agribusiness corporations have been buying up vast tracts of land in West Africa and evicting the communities who live there – grabbing their land, water, and seeds. Through industrial agriculture, corporations pollute the land and waters, and replace the diversity of seeds selected and maintained by communities for thousands of years with genetically



modified mono-crops. This model results in environmental destruction, as well as impoverishment of the impacted communities.

The Malian Convergence Against Land Grabbing, a Grassroots International grantee, has been at the forefront of resistance.

While organizing locally, it has also been building a Global Convergence Against Land Grabbing, connecting and strengthening alliances and regional networks to build a transnational movement for food

sovereignty and peasant agroecology in West Africa and beyond.

The West African Caravan is one of the manifestations of this growing international solidarity. Held every two years since 2016, the Caravan brings together people across West Africa who are resisting land grabbing, while also advancing a vision for food sovereignty. At the center of this vision is peasant agroecology, a way of producing food that is rooted in traditional wisdom and that is environmentally sustainable.

The 2021 West African Caravan took place despite the challenges of COVID. In November and December, over two hundred participants traveled across Gambia, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, and Guinea Conakry, and concluded their journey with a hybrid gathering in Sierra Leone. The Caravan sought to build unity in West Africa around a vision of a food system in the hands of the people.

A DONOR'S STORY

Maria Fernandez was part of our 2021 Donor Engagement Group (DEG) on internationalist Black Liberation. The DEG members met virtually, over the course of five months, to engage in political education, learn fundraising skills, and raise money from their networks for Grassroots International's partners and work. Maria describes her experience:

"The DEG and fundraising for international Black struggles was and is very important to me. As a Black internationalist in the U.S., I believe we have a responsibility to struggle against U.S. imperialism, and help support global movements that advance our people's liberation. . . For me, the DEG wasn't just about raising money. It was about conversing about Black internationalism with my family, colleagues, and friends. It made Black internationalism real for so many of us. [This] is just the beginning of what is possible when we understand solidarity as an active verb."

The 2021 DEG was offered in partnership with Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD) and the Giving Project Network. Maria is pictured here, in 2018, on a Grassroots International delegation to Haiti.



Grassroots International works in partnership with social movements to create a just and sustainable world by advancing human rights to land, water, and food through global grantmaking, building solidarity across organizations and movements, and advocacy in the US.

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