

WORLD: Human Rights Defenders in Latin America

“The capitalist world has de-humanized us.”

By Andrea Curcio for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (21.09.2017) – These are the words of Alejandro Solalinde Guerra, a Mexican Catholic priest and human rights champion. Father Solalinde has dedicated his life striving to provide safe places for migrants, away from the abuses undertaken by criminal gangs. Deeply concerned with the overwhelming numbers of disappeared migrants and the continuous influx of migrants coming from the south of Mexico, heading to the northern areas, Father Solalinde is dedicated to redressing the discrimination and continuous abuses suffered by these migrants in Mexico.

Meanwhile, after the murder of the Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres in March 2016, her daughter Laura Zúñiga Cáceres continues her mother’s fight to stop the incessant abuses taking place against the environment and human rights in Honduras. Laura tries to follow her mother’s legacy, strongly supporting the work of COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras), an organization co-founded by her mother. Gathering 200 Indigenous Lenca communities, COPINH advocates for the respect of the rights of Lenca people, not only trying to defend their human rights but to protect their territory and natural resources from the exploitation of dangerous extractive industries.

Father Solalinde and Laura are two of the many brave human rights defenders (HRDs) across Latin America who put their life on risk every day to defend the environment and human rights. HRDs in Latin America suffer constant struggles that

are not properly addressed by national governments. The incapacity of governments to address such abuses in these countries are due to many factors, including the complicity of the State itself, big multinationals, corruption, and the actions of criminal gangs.

As integral allies in promoting human rights and democracy, HRDs in many countries across the world are in urgent need of protection. Providing support for HRDs is actually a central part of the EU's external policy. In 2004, and later revised in 2008, the EU Council adopted the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. In practice, there are several mechanisms undertaken and funded by the EU to address the struggles suffered by HRDs. The EU provides political, economic and moral support through political dialogues conducted between the EU and relevant States, by undertaking regular visits by EU officials to HRDs, and by providing financial assistance. Yet, as confessed by Amador Sanchez Rico, currently the Deputy Head of Division of Human Rights at the European External Action Service, "more can be done".

It is important to acknowledge the work of HRDs and to keep trying to provide them with moral and financial help, as well as with concrete protection. Most importantly, **their voice must be heard.**

The problem is that we live in a world, Father Solalinde claims, where economic profit is being prioritized over Mother Nature and the basic protection of human kind

So, has the capitalist world de-humanized us?

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