
Honduras: Loggers offer bullets

Bertha Oliva's life was indelibly marked by the kidnap and disappearance of her husband Tomás Nativí, in June 1981, by government security forces. In 1982 she founded the Committee of Families of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), an organization she still heads today.

But two years ago she took on a new cause: defending the environment. The decision came after two ecologists were assassinated in the northeastern department of Olancho. A fierce battle against deforestation is under way there. An average of 80,000 hectares of Honduran forest disappears each year.

The journalist Thelma Mejía, contributor to the publication Tierramérica, interviewed Bertha Oliva.

Thelma Mejía - What is the connection that unites the search for those who the government kidnapped and "disappeared" in the 1980s and the fight to defend the environment today?

Bertha Oliva - The defense of life and the forest, particularly when they assassinated two ardent defenders of the environment in Olancho, Carlos Luna and Carlos Flores. That marked a new context for me.

Thelma Mejía - What does "life" mean for you?

Bertha Oliva - It is everything. Water, forest, air. Life has been given to us to live, to give more of ourselves, not so much to receive.

Thelma Mejía - What do Andrés Tamayo and Osmín Flores -- two Catholic priests about to be expelled from Olancho for organizing the community to defend the forest -- symbolize for Honduras?

Bertha Oliva - Two pillars of resistance. Without them Olancho would have run out of breath. From the pulpit they made the residents see that if nature dies there is no life. That is why I support them, even though the loggers offer me bullets because I am preventing their foreign bank accounts from growing.

Thelma Mejía - Loggers, forest and Olancho... What does that sound like?

Bertha Oliva - Ahh! It sounds to me like death, depredation and destruction!

Extracted from "The loggers offer me bullets", by Thelma Mejía, Tierramérica, <http://www.tierramerica.net/2002/1201/ipreguntas.shtml>

