
[Honduras: Peasants demand Government to halt hydroelectric project](#)

An alliance of Honduran peasants is asking the Government to halt the construction of a hydroelectric dam being built by the Energisa company in the area of Gualaco, Olancho, some 240 kilometres to the north-east of Tegucigalpa. The inhabitants affected by the project consider that it is causing damage to the environment and that the construction of the dam will prevent water being supplied to thousands of inhabitants, in addition to the fact that they may be obliged to leave their lands.

They are also asking the Government to investigate and bring to justice the building company's employees who, according to witnesses of the incident, killed Carlos Roberto Flores, an environmental leader and opponent to the construction of the hydroelectric dam on the Babilonia river falls. Together with the National Coordination Against Impunity (CONACIM) they also called on the authorities to annul the warrant for the arrest of their community leaders (for more information see request for support in the July section of "requests for action" in our web page).

Energisa has carried out environmental impact assessments but the local communities allege that the assessments submitted by the company to obtain the licence are false. According to information given at a press conference, the project is located in the Sierra de Agalta National Park buffer zone, declared protected zone in July 1987. This project for the generation of electric energy will produce 4,400 kilowatts, to be sold to the National Electric Energy Company (ENEE), as approved by the National Congress the year before. The plant will be fed by water from the Babilonia river. The councils of the villages and hamlets in the sector, together with the municipal authorities are opposed to the project as they are convinced that it will alter the productive heritage of the zone because the land will be affected by the dam.

They also consider that the falls that give beauty and identity to the site will disappear and the river's aquatic life will be impoverished. The parish priest of Santa María del Real, Osmín Flores, believes that the project lacks a really serious and scientific environmental impact assessment, according to studies carried out by the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), which warn that "there are various geological faults that could endanger the communities, once the project has been implemented." They conclude that "Energisa intends to build the dam apparently in violation of national and municipal legislation and omitting important data in the Environmental Impact Assessment."

In spite of this report, it has been affirmed that the Secretary for Natural Resources, Xiomara Gómez has granted the environmental licence and later signed, with the president of the company, Héctor Julián Borjas, the contract for mitigation measures. On his part, Juan Ramón Zúniga, a coffee planter from the area, reported that they have already received various threats from the company. "Last January, the military arrived and arrested us, and even sentenced three of us, who had done nothing. We know this is persecution and intimidation by Energisa. The judge at Catacamas has sentenced community leaders and coffee planter families to prison for having tried to prevent Energisa employees from entering their lands without prior consent."

Among other cases of abuse, prior to the murder of Carlos Roberto Flores, mention can be made of

that of the parish priest of Gualaco, Fredy Cornelio Benítez, coordinator of the local forest forum in the zone, who was stabbed in the back last March as a consequence of his opposition to the progress of the project. The Mayor, Rafael de Jesús Ulloa has also received various threats and has been pursued by an unidentified vehicle.

The Committee of Relatives of those Detained and Disappeared (COFADEH) reported the illegal detention by the anti-riot police, of 1500 indigenous people from various communities that were marching towards the capital to support the struggle of the inhabitants of Gualaco. The inhabitants of Gualaco were also evicted with tear-gas bombs, water hoses and beatings, leaving a total of some thirty people seriously injured. To this should be added the threats received by the US citizen, Daniel Graham, for taking photos of the serious events taking place in the zone.

To the initial concern over the impacts that the dam might cause on the environment and its people, are added repression and the threats of death for those who continue to oppose the project. The Government of Honduras must take immediate action to protect all those people who are at risk, and also carry out an independent and exhaustive investigation on the death of Carlos Roberto Flores and the threats that the local communities and their leaders have repeatedly received.

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