

Janeth Urquía, was found on a rubbish dump with machete wounds to the head.⁶¹

MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

Seven men have been charged with the murder of Berta Cáceres, two of whom have links to DESA, the company that owns the Agua Zarca dam, and four of whom have ties to the Honduran army.⁶² Sergio Ramón Rodríguez was an environmental engineer employed by DESA, and Douglas Geovanny Bustillo was the firm's former head of security, as well as an ex-army lieutenant and military intelligence specialist. Edison Duarte and Henry Javier Hernández Rodríguez were retired military officers and Major Mariano Díaz was a special forces veteran and trainer of the Military Police.⁶³ Bustillo stands accused of hiring Edison and his brother Emerson as hit men.⁶⁴

However, the links between the Honduran army and Cáceres' killing do not stop there. A former member of an elite US-trained unit of the Honduran military, interviewed by the Guardian, claims that Cáceres' name appeared on a military hit list in the months before her death.⁶⁵ He told the newspaper that a list featuring the names and photographs of dozens of social and environmental activists was given to two elite units, with orders to eliminate each target.⁶⁶ COPINH leader Tomás Gómez told Global Witness of a similar hit list being touted to hit men, offering US\$1,000 to kill Berta.⁶⁷ In September 2016, COPINH discovered a military spy had infiltrated the organisation and, for a year, had been passing information on their activities directly to the president's office.⁶⁸

DESA's links with the Honduran military run to the highest levels. According to company records seen by Global Witness, DESA's president is Roberto David Castillo Mejía, a former military intelligence official and employee of the Honduran state-owned energy company Empresa Nacional de Energía Eléctrica.⁶⁹ In 2009, a public auditor's office found evidence of corrupt acts by Castillo – he was still receiving a salary from the army having left the institution – and a company he owned was selling products to the military at inflated prices.⁷⁰ A few months before her death Cáceres told Global Witness that Castillo called to try and bribe her to stop opposing Agua Zarca.⁷¹

Court records below show the dam company DESA calling for the persecution, punishment and neutralization of COPINH

La amenaza de los imputados BERTHA ISABEL CACERES FLORES, TOMAS GOMEZ MENBREÑO Y AURELINO MOLINA VILLANUEVA que lideran COPINH es destruir a mi representada DESA a través de atentados perpetrados sabotaje y manipulación de las masas, es una realidad que obliga al Estado Hondureño a actuar con todos los recursos a su alcance para perseguir, sancionar, neutralizar y disuadir aquellas conductas individuales y de grupos que pretenden enervar la autoridad, infundir terror, destruir vidas humanas y bienes materiales, públicos o privados, atentando contra la propia independencia y soberanía nacional.



Berta Cáceres was one of 123 land and environmental defenders killed in Honduras since 2010. © The Goldman Prize

THE ATALA FAMILY AND DESA'S WEB OF POLITICAL CONNECTIONS

DESA's company records show that some of Honduras' most well-connected business and political elites are on the board. Company Secretary, Roberto Pacheco Reyes is a former minister for governance and justice within the Honduran government.⁷² DESA's vice president, Jacobo Nicolás Atala Zablah, is the President of the BAC Honduras bank and member of one of Honduras' wealthiest business families, the Atalas.⁷³

Jacobo's cousin is the billionaire Camilo Atala, a former cabinet minister and owner of Ficohsa Bank*.⁷⁴ Camilo Atala is also one of the main investors in the controversial Indura Beach and Golf resort, covered in Case study 5. Jacobo's brother, José Eduardo Atala Zablah, is also on DESA's board⁷⁵ and is President of the US–Honduras Chamber of Commerce and the ex-Honduran Director of the regional bank Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica (BCIE).⁷⁶ The BCIE is one of the main investors in DESA's Agua Zarca dam project.⁷⁷ Another member of the Atala family, Daniel Atala Midence, is DESA's finance head.⁷⁸

INTERNATIONAL INVESTORS

The Agua Zarca project is a good example of how international investors and development banks are implicated in the corruption and human rights abuses that take place in Honduras. The Dutch development bank FMO, together with Finnish government-owned Finnfund, and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) are financing DESA's construction of the Agua Zarca dam.⁷⁹ FMO is the lead international investor with US\$15 million committed⁸⁰ of the US\$64

* This report originally stated that Ficohsa and Camilo Atala Faraj were "currently being investigated for money laundering". In fact the allegations of money laundering were dismissed for lack of probable cause in 2016. We have also been asked to point out that neither the bank nor the Atala Faraj family have ever had any involvement in the DESA project.