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Before national and international public opinion, the Honduran Centre for the Promotion of Community Development (CEHPRODEC) **denounces**:

- **The persecution of the leaders of many indigenous and peasant communities with whom we work, as well as the harassment and summary actions against human rights defenders, especially those who defend the land, territories and other natural assets.**

Police and military abuse of communities

1. Since the arrival of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Honduras, the Government of the Republic has decreed a State of Emergency, which has restricted several constitutional guarantees at the national level. This situation is being exploited by the National Police and other state security forces to increase their authoritarianism and to attack community organizations that seek alternatives to protect themselves from the pandemic, in the absence of solutions from some local governments and the state institutions that are responsible for combating the pandemic.
2. In many communities in the country, it is the members of local civil society who have formed surveillance and control teams to prevent strangers from entering their communities, given the danger of contamination. Problems have arisen when some members of the national police or military, who carry firearms and wear military clothing (even when not on duty), try to enter these communities to spend the night on their days off, intimidating and threatening villagers at community checkpoints.
3. All of the above have led to high levels of confrontation, raising the level of danger from death threats against and/or the arbitrary detention of leaders, triggering conflicts that have already led to the death of citizens in the northern part of the country and attacks on defenseless citizens in the municipality of Santa Elena, La Paz.

Risk for human rights defenders

4. Since human rights defenders are not allowed to move nationally, and in some cases even between municipalities, organizations like CEHPRODEC, CONROA, MILPAH and other human rights defenders cannot exercise oversight and ensure respect for the fundamental rights of the people, and their leadership, especially those who enjoy protective measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the National Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders.
5. In this sense, we have observed a deepening of the authoritarianism of the police, the military and other justice officials, who have focused on the search for persecution of leaders who have been persecuted for several years because of their role as defenders of natural assets. Human and economic resources that should be

used to meet demands for the national emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may be being arbitrarily allocated to these ends.

Division in communities

6. The current pandemic situation calls for national unity, as well as the unity of communities. But the authoritarianism unleashed, especially by justice officials and some municipal corporations, is rather contributing to the division of communities. One of the factors that most favours this division is the politicization of the delivery of state food aid, which is being used by the governing party for its electoral clientelism and which systematically excludes its social and political opposition.

Therefore, WE URGENTLY DEMAND:

1. **That the Government of the Republic** grant CEHPRODEC and other human rights organizations safe passage to operate and circulate in the midst of the pandemic with appropriate protection measures, and thus be able to contribute to the monitoring and respect of human rights in the country.
2. **That the Supreme Court of Justice** allow human rights defenders access to the courts of the Republic so that they may be guarantors of proper dispensation of justice in a country that has been listed as one of the most dangerous for those who defend land and territories.
3. **That justice officials** cease their repression of community leaders who seek only to organize and protect themselves against the pandemic, in the context of a permanent lack of protection and guidance by municipalities and state institutions.
4. **That the national police, the armed forces, judges, and the prosecutor's office** cease arbitrary actions against community leaders and human rights defenders. This demand is at the national level, but we are making it with much greater emphasis in the departments of La Paz, Comayagua, Yoro and Olancho.
5. **That the National Protection Mechanism and the OHCHR** guarantee the protection and monitoring of human rights defenders in Honduras, especially all those who enjoy protected status under national and international measures.

Tegucigalpa, May 5, 2020