

GIEI Honduras



Executive Summary

The murder of Berta Cáceres and the context that made it possible

On the night of March 2, 2016, Berta Isabel Cáceres Flores was murdered in her home in La Esperanza, Intibucá. In the same attack, Gustavo Castro Soto, the sole witness, was seriously injured. The armed break-in that ended Berta Cáceres's life was neither by chance nor an act of ordinary violence. It was the culmination of a prolonged process of persecution, surveillance, criminalization, and violence directed at the Indigenous leader who for years spearheaded the defense of Lenca territory against the imposition of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project.

Berta Cáceres was a nationally and internationally recognized figure. As coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), she played a central role in organizing Indigenous communities to resist to concessions granted without free, prior, and informed consultation in violation of the Honduran State's constitutional and international obligations. Her leadership was instrumental in halting the construction of the Agua Zarca dam, which was developed by the company Desarrollos Energéticos S.A. (DESA), and in bringing national and international attention to the social, environmental, and cultural impacts of similar projects.

From the early stages of the Agua Zarca project, company executives identified Berta Cáceres as a strategic obstacle to its implementation, placing her in a situation of foreseeable and well-documented risk. Despite precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the State failed to adopt effective measures to protect her life or to address the sources of risk associated with the territorial conflict.

The murder occurred in a broader context marked by violence, militarization, corruption, the concentration of economic power, and institutions increasingly captured by private interests. Following the 2009 coup d'état, Honduras promoted a rapid expansion of extractive and renewable energy projects, through privatization and flexible regulatory frameworks. This model relied on State decisions and corporate action, supported by financing from international development banks, whose loans conferred economic viability and institutional legitimacy on projects imposed on Indigenous territories without prior consultation. The resulting relationships between the State authorities, private companies, and international financiers operated within weak institution settings that were permeable to corruption and prioritized investment over the protection of human rights.

The Agua Zarca hydroelectric project, located on the Gualcarque River in the Lenca Indigenous territory of Río Blanco, exemplifies this model. Its authorization rested on irregular permits, flawed administrative contracts, and individual land titling procedures that disregarded collective rights. Implemented relied on militarization of the territory, co-option of the community, the use of violence, and systematic criminalization of those defending the Gualcarque River as a sacred, cultural, and subsistence space. The project was enabled by international financing granted by the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI, or BCIE in its Spanish acronym) and the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank (FMO) in 2014, despite a known territorial conflict, sustained community opposition, and clear risks to land defenders.

For many years, Honduras has been one of the most dangerous countries in the world for defenders of land, territory, and the environment. Violence against defenders is structural and targeted, systematically directed at those who challenge economic interests linked to agribusiness, mining, energy projects, and other forms of extraction of the commons. Persistent impunity has operated as an enabling factor for this violence, sending a clear message of tolerance and permissiveness toward attacks on defenders and consolidating an environment in which threats, criminalization, and killings rarely result in criminal consequences for those responsible.

Berta Cáceres's identities as an Indigenous Lenca woman, a community leader, and a public figure who profoundly challenged masculinized and racialized power structures exposed her to differentiated and aggravated forms of stigmatization and violence. The violence against Berta Cáceres must be understood not only as retaliation for her opposition to a specific project, but as part of a broader pattern of structural violence that disproportionately punishes Indigenous and Afro-Honduran women who defend land, territory, and the environment in Honduras.

Impunity has historically been the central feature of the State's response to violence and human rights violations in Honduras. The violations that culminated in Berta Cáceres's murder continue to this day, as shown by the persistent lack of demarcation and titling of the ancestral Lenca territory of Río Blanco, the continued validity of the Agua Zarca concession, and the failure to purge intelligence files used to surveil and criminalize defenders. In Berta Cáceres's case, criminal convictions were obtained against several material perpetrators, as well as against some DESA employees and a director of the company, confirming that the crime was not an isolated or spontaneous event. Nonetheless, these advances did not address higher-level responsibility, and a core of impunity remains—particularly with respect to the possible involvement of other DESA directors and shareholders, as well as the full scope of State complicity and acquiescence.

From the earliest hours following the murder, Berta Cáceres's family, COPINH, and their legal representatives called for the creation of an independent group of experts with the capacity to exhaustively investigate, in a comprehensive manner, all those responsible. Those calls arose in the context of a criminal investigation marked by omissions and bias. After years of sustained advocacy and effort to secure truth and justice, the Honduran State ultimately made a formal request for technical assistance—an important, albeit belated, step toward addressing entrenched impunity.

GIEI mandate and methodological approach

The Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI, in its Spanish acronym) was established as an extraordinary and independent mechanism, with full technical autonomy, mandated to contribute to the full clarification of the murder of Berta Cáceres and related facts connected to the Agua Zarca project. Its creation responded to the need to overcome the limits of a fragmented criminal investigation focused primarily on the material perpetrators, and to examine in an integrated manner the structural, corporate, financial, and State dimensions of the crime.

The GIEI's mandate is grounded in the Honduran State's obligation to investigate serious human rights violations with due diligence, determine individual and collective responsibilities, guarantee the right to truth for victims and society, and formulate proposals for comprehensive reparation and guarantees of non-repetition, in accordance with international standards. On February 14, 2025, the public act formally installing the GIEI Honduras took place in Tegucigalpa; at that event—and pursuant to the constitutive Agreement signed by representatives of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the State of Honduras, and the victims—the GIEI was granted an initial six-month mandate. Subsequently, on August 14, 2025, the parties signed an addendum extending the GIEI's mandate until January 15, 2026, to continue investigative, prosecutorial, and comprehensive reparation measures necessary to consolidate the advances achieved.

The GIEI's work proceeded from a rigorous, interdisciplinary, human-rights-centered methodological approach, grounded in the systematic triangulation of sources and evidence. The investigation included comprehensive review of judicial and administrative case files; analysis of DESA's financial, banking, and accounting information and that of companies linked to the project; study of hundreds of hours of telephone wiretaps and geolocation data; interviews with victims, witnesses, and experts; and a contextual assessment of the territorial conflict, State conduct, and the individual and collective impacts of the Agua Zarca project and of Berta Cáceres's murder. This approach made it possible to move beyond fragmented views of events and to reconstruct comprehensively the patterns of violence, corruption, and institutional omissions documented in the report.

The GIEI's work was guided by the principles of institutional independence, operational autonomy, and impartiality, which are essential to ensuring an objective and technically rigorous investigative process. In accordance with its mandate, the GIEI exercised full autonomy to define its investigative lines, adopt investigative measures, and determine the evidentiary tools to be used, without being subject to direction or interference by the IACHR, the State, or the beneficiaries and their representatives. It had full operational authority to conduct country visits, access relevant information, administer its resources, and organize its technical team, all protected by specific immunities provided for in the Agreement. Impartiality guided the objective verification of facts and the formulation of well-founded conclusions, without favoritism or bias. These principles did not imply distance from the victims and their relatives, who are a central party to the Agreement and the intended recipients of the information generated through the investigative process. During the exercise of its mandate, the GIEI Honduras faced pressure and attempts at interference aimed at limiting its work, including intimidating communications from lawyers acting on behalf of Mr. Daniel Atala and his family, as well as monitoring of its movements and activities. Such actions raised serious concerns due to their potential impact on the integrity of the investigation and the pursuit of truth and justice.

Main conclusions of the GIEI

The conclusions set out below synthesize the GIEI's principal findings and reflect the comprehensive analysis of the evidence gathered within the scope of its mandate. They address responsibilities, reoccurring patterns, and structural failures that made possible the murder of Berta Cáceres, the persistence of impunity, the individual and collective harms suffered, and the lack of comprehensive reparation:

The GIEI concluded that the murder of Berta Cáceres was the result of an organized criminal operation, carefully planned and carried out through a criminal conspiracy (*coautoría*). This structure encompassed hired assassins, intermediaries with military training, personnel and directors of Desarrollos Energéticos S.A. (DESA), as well as networks of support, tolerance, and omission from different sectors of the State.

The GIEI established that the crime was foreseeable and preventable. State authorities possessed concrete, real-time information warning of the planning of the murder, including judicially authorized telephone intercepts in which the crime was explicitly discussed; payments, weapons, and logistics were referenced; and decisions made at higher levels of authority were invoked. Based on the analysis of hundreds of hours of wiretaps obtained in the context of a criminal investigation initiated in 2015, the GIEI determined that Mariano Díaz Chávez—an active-duty soldier later convicted as a material perpetrator of the murder—had access to weapons, logistics, and armed personnel, and used networks linked to State security structures to coordinate illicit operations. These wiretaps revealed that, beginning on January 4, 2016, there were explicit conversations about five incursions prior to the murder of Berta Cáceres. These incursions involved planning, logistics, surveillance, and carrying weapons; they reflected the existence of a pre-conceived plan, decisions attributed to “higher-ups,” and negotiations over payments and logistics. Despite having this information in real time, State authorities did not activate preventative mechanisms or adopt timely measures to avert the murder—an omission the GIEI characterizes as a grave violation of the duty of due diligence.

The GIEI determined that funds disbursed by international development banks—principally the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI/BCIE) and the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank (FMO)—formally allocated to the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project were diverted from their original purpose and used to finance illicit activities associated to the violent management of the territorial conflict in Río Blanco. These activities included illegal surveillance and intelligence operations, armed incursions, logistics and associated payments, and ultimately, the murder of Berta Cáceres. The financial analysis identified a structured, deliberate, and functional financial architecture embedded within DESA's accounting practices, financial management, and corporate governance. This architecture was characterized by the systematic diversion of funds originating from loans granted by international development banks for the formal purpose of dam construction. The GIEI's financial investigation established that, out of a total of USD 18,540,325.62 disbursed in the project, approximately 67%—equivalent to USD 12,426,190.53—was subject to diversion and/or irregular handling.

The GIEI identified financial operations carried out immediately after the murder through which checks were cashed for amounts consistent with at least part of the payment offered to the hit squad that executed the crime. Based on initial information provided by one of the material perpetrators, the financial investigation reconstructed a diversion circuit operated by DESA that included allegedly irregular disbursements, transfers among related companies—including an offshore corporate structure—and the conversion of banked funds into cash. Analysis of the checks revealed practices that are highly irregular from an anti-money laundering perspective, including structuring of transactions and the cashing of checks by low-level company employees who were trusted by DESA's directors but lacked financial profiles consistent with the amounts involved. The triangulation of this financial evidence with communications and geolocation data made it possible to link money flows with operational coordination following the murder and to DESA's directors.

The GIEI concluded that this diversion and “check cashing” mechanism was not an isolated occurrence but rather part of a sustained *modus operandi* that enabled the financing not only of the murder, but also of prior surveillance activities, armed incursions, and other irregular operations associated with violence in Río Blanco. The GIEI documented a repeated pattern of unjustified transfers, conversion of banked funds into cash, use of low-level employees as check cashers, structuring of amounts to evade anti-money laundering controls, and alleged payments for non-existent or inflated services. The GIEI demonstrated a direct relationship between these financial movements and payments to the material perpetrators of the crime, as well as the financing of prior surveillance, intelligence, and logistics operations.

The GIEI concluded that the murder of Berta Cáceres was a crime with an entrepreneurial motive, made possible by the creation and operation of a corporate and financial apparatus in which the project's majority shareholders and DESA's senior management played relevant and decisive roles. The evidence analyzed—including digital communications, wiretaps, and banking documentation—supports that these actors were fully aware of the conflict generated by community opposition to the project, and actively participated in strategies aimed at neutralizing that opposition. These strategies included coordinating security actions, managing financial resources, and influencing institutional actors.

The GIEI documented that members of the Atala family participated directly or indirectly in coordination spaces established to manage the land conflict, including the WhatsApp group known as “PHAZ Security,” through which systematic surveillance, information gathering, and monitoring were carried out against Berta Cáceres and COPINH. In particular, the GIEI identified efforts to coordinate State interventions—including evictions—through high-level contacts in the Ministry of Security and the National Police, with the aim of neutralizing community opposition to the project. The GIEI confirmed the role of directors responsible for the company's financial management in administering accounts and payments, as well as their knowledge of—and willingness to resort to—violence as a mechanism to resolve the conflict.

Analysis of communications and geolocation data established that, in the days following the murder, DESA's principal shareholder-directors and senior managers maintained repeated and coordinated contacts, evidencing to manage the consequences of the crime. Taken together, the GIEI concluded that these elements were determinative for establishing a criminal motive of an entrepreneurial nature, linked to the protection of the economic and financial interests of the Agua Zarca project, and for consolidating the financing apparatus that culminated in the murder of Berta Cáceres.

The GIEI determined that the murder of Berta Cáceres occurred within a broader context of operations unrelated to the project's legitimate corporate purpose, characterized by a sustained pattern of suspicious payments that enabled DESA to finance illegal surveillance and intelligence activities, parapolice structures and repressive logistics; co-opt public and municipal authorities; influence State security forces; manipulate the public narrative; and financially sustain a technically non-viable and illegal project in order to secure continued international financing. The GIEI documented that this architecture included direct and indirect payments to public officials and former officials with decision-making power, as well as the use of audits, technical certifications, and external consultancies to project an appearance of legality and socio-environmental compliance. These certifications, issued despite serious irregularities and unresolved territorial conflicts, functioned as legitimizing mechanisms that enabled continued international financing and the subsequent diversion of funds. The GIEI also identified

recurring payments to informants and community groups with parapolice functions, coordinated with State forces, aimed at monitoring, intimidating, and fragmenting community opposition. It also documented the financing of media manipulation and the use of illicit funds to acquire land, which was used to launder money, weaken social resistance, and consolidate territorial control. Collectively, these mechanisms facilitated the progressive capture of multiple State institutions, in which authorities tasked with protecting human rights and the environment acted—by action or omission—in favor of private interests, thereby weakening the rule of law and guaranteeing high levels of impunity. The GIEI concluded that these practices reflected the Agua Zarca project's business model and were determinative for the configuration of the crime that culminated in the murder of Berta Cáceres.

The GIEI also documented deliberate obstruction of the criminal investigation from its earliest stages. This obstruction included the promotion of false narratives to divert attention from the corporate dimension of the crime; the criminalization of Berta's inner circle and the surviving witness; the massive interception of COPINH members' communications while failing to investigate key corporate actors; the introduction of false evidence; the tolerance of conflicts of interest among investigators; and the failure to adopt adequate protection measures in response to threats against investigators and prosecutors. Although the State secured convictions against the direct perpetrators of the murder and certain intermediate actors tied to DESA, it failed to exhaustively investigate the role of senior directors and company shareholders—particularly with respect to the crime's financing—nor did it exhaustively investigate State responsibility, by action or omission, for the conduct of public officials.

The GIEI determined that the harms resulting from the murder of Berta Cáceres and the conflict associated with the Agua Zarca project are multiple, differentiated, and both individual and collective. These harms affect her family, the surviving witness Gustavo Castro, COPINH as an organization, the Lenca Indigenous community of Río Blanco, and the Gualcarque River as a spiritual, cultural, and subsistence space. They are not isolated impacts, but cumulative harms produced over years of project imposition, violence, criminalization, and lack of State protection.

From the project's entry into Lenca territory, the Río Blanco community experienced destruction of lands and crops, restrictions on access to communal lands and the river, and a progressive deployment of territorial control mechanisms, including militarization of the territory, the creation of surveillance networks, threats, and the use of force. These practices generated a sustained climate of fear and created the conditions for systematic harassment, public stigmatization, and criminalization of defenders, as well as killings and other forms of violence aimed at dismantling community resistance. These impacts were differentiated and aggravated for Indigenous women and young people.

The GIEI concluded that the structural cause of the territorial conflict and the violence associated with the project lies in the Honduran State's persistent failure to recognize and guarantee the right of the Lenca people of Río Blanco to collective property. The absence of a collective title, the presence of overlapping individual titles on the territory, and the imposition of the project without free, prior, and informed consultation left the community particularly vulnerable to dispossession, criminalization, and violence, facilitating violations of territorial, cultural, and spiritual rights.

The murder of Berta Cáceres produced devastating and long-lasting impacts. It profoundly affected the health, life plans, and emotional well-being of her family members; it sought to weaken COPINH and the Río Blanco community as collective subjects; and it reinforced structural impunity and the weakening of the rule of law in Honduras. The GIEI found that the State has not adopted effective cessation measures or ensured comprehensive reparation, maintaining the conditions that made the violations possible and perpetuating their effects over time.

The GIEI concluded that the murder of Berta Cáceres and related violations entail differentiated and concurrent responsibilities of the State, corporate actors, and financial institutions, each according to their specific obligations under international law. Their actions and omissions facilitated the planning, financing, execution, and impunity of the crime. The human rights violations documented by the GIEI engage Honduras' international responsibility for failing to respect and ensure the rights to life and personal integrity of Berta Cáceres and Gustavo Castro in a context in which State agents participated, by action or omission, in the planning, execution, and cover-up of the crime; for the grave harms inflicted on the Lenca Indigenous community of Río Blanco as a consequence of

territorial militarization; for the absence of free, prior, and informed consultation; for failure to delimit, demarcate, and title Indigenous territory, free of encumbrances; for failure to prevent known risks to life and personal integrity; for lack of effective regulation, supervision, and oversight of business and financial activities; and for failure to conduct a comprehensive investigation reaching all responsible persons, including those who acted from positions of power and decision.

The GIEI also concluded that the national and multilateral financial institutions involved failed to meet their specific human rights obligations, particularly regarding Indigenous peoples' rights and the obligation of due diligence, and that these failures allowed the disbursement and misuse of funds in a context of violence and territorial conflict, materially contributing to the commission of the documented violations.

Finally, the GIEI underscored that the obligation to repair and guarantees of non-repetition require measures that go beyond merely formal or compensatory responses. These include the thorough investigation of criminal conspiracy (coautoría) involving senior leadership and financiers; strengthening the Public Prosecutor's Office; adopting a robust legal framework for business and financial regulation grounded in human rights; implementing effective protection measures for defenders; and providing structural, comprehensive, and collective reparations capable of transforming the conditions that enabled the violations and restoring affected communities' trust in State institutions.

The Comprehensive Reparation Plan and Recommendations

Within this framework, the GIEI proposes the foundations of a Comprehensive Reparation Plan that includes measures of cessation and restitution, as well as rehabilitation, compensation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. The Plan is conceived as a comprehensive, collective, and transformative process, indispensable to restoring the dignity of the victims, rebuilding the social fabric of the Río Blanco Lenca Indigenous people, and ensuring that crimes such as the murder of Berta Cáceres never happen again. These recommendations aim to guarantee the rights to truth, justice, and comprehensive reparation and to establish effective guarantees of non-repetition.

Based on the findings and evidence identified throughout the GIEI's investigation—relating both to the murder of Berta Cáceres and to the individual and collective harms caused in the context of the Agua Zarca project—the GIEI formulated the following recommendations. The GIEI emphasizes that these recommendations are not a set of suggested measures or a glossary of good practices; they have been formulated with a view to mandatory compliance, on the understanding that their effective implementation is a necessary condition for confronting structural problems of impunity and violence that directly affect communities and historically discriminated groups in Honduras.

Comprehensive Reparation Plan

The GIEI recommends that the State adopt the following measures of cessation and restitution:

- Fully and definitively revoke the legal instruments of the Agua Zarca project within the first 30 days following publication of this report.
- Demarcate, delimit, and provide title to ancestral Lenca territory of Río Blanco within 60 days of the publication of this report, and fully free the territory of encumbrances (*sanear*) within 240 days of publication of this report.
- Issue a binding administrative instruction prohibiting municipalities from granting individual property titles in violation of applicable national law and to the detriment of the collective rights of the Lenca community of Río Blanco, within 15 days of publication of this report.

- Initiate and complete *ex officio* the dissolution and liquidation of DESA, and allocate recovered assets to reparation measures within 180 days of publication of this report.
- Purge the intelligence archives, open them to public scrutiny, and integrate them into a historical memory archive within 240 days of publication of this report.

The GIEI recommends that the State adopt the following rehabilitation measures:

- Create the “Berta Cáceres” Program for medical, psychological, psychosocial, and community-based care, and begin operating the program within 90 days following publication of this report.
- Implement the “Berta Cáceres” scholarship program.
- Launch an agricultural and productive plan to restore affected livelihoods—including crops, animals, and material goods—through community projects of collective economy, accompanied by public investments in infrastructure, basic services, and market access that ensure long-term sustainability, within 60 days of publication of this report.
- Develop, with the participation of Lenca spiritual leaders and COPINH, intercultural restorative justice processes within 120 days of publication of this report.

The GIEI recommends that the State adopt the following measures of satisfaction:

- Carry out a public act, presided by the highest government official, acknowledging responsibility in this case within 90 days of publication of the report.
- Build a permanent memorial honoring Berta Cáceres and the Gualcarque River within 180 days of publication of this report.
- Incorporate educational content about land rights defenders and about Berta Cáceres into public school and university curricula.
- Ensure publication and wide dissemination of the report within 30 days of publication. Ensure wide dissemination of the report in accessible formats, including in the Lenca language, within 90 days following publication of this report.

The GIEI recommends that the State adopt the following compensation measures:

- Create and finance the “Berta Cáceres” Reparation Fund, with a shared governance model, to ensure effective and opportune compensation—without replacing access to judicial remedies—for material and non-material harms and life-project damages suffered by direct and indirect victims, in accordance with applicable Inter-American standards, through issuance and publication of a decree within 180 days following publication of this report. Ensure that within the following 90 days, budgetary resources for the program are allocated and accessible.

The GIEI recommends that the State adopt the following guarantees of non-repetition:

- Ensure the investigation, prosecution, and punishment of all those responsible for the murder, including all corporate actors linked to the crime.
- Adopt a National Protocol for the Investigation of Crimes against Human Rights Defenders within 90 days of publication of this report.

- Reform the National Protection Mechanism by incorporating a national risk diagnosis; participatory civil society governance; fully operational differentiated approaches (gender, intercultural, and territorial); corporate human rights due diligence obligations in high-risk sectors in line with international standards; and an inter-institutional approach with commitment from the Public Prosecutor's Office and sufficient budget allocation.
- Promote a comprehensive reform of the Public Prosecutor's Office aimed at overcoming its crisis of effectiveness and legitimacy by adopting models of strategic criminal prosecution; strengthening the investigation of criminal markets, including specialized financial and anti-corruption investigative capacities; creating a technical coordination unit with financial regulators; reinforcing internal and external control mechanisms; and improving staff selection processes, with the aim of dismantling the main criminal networks, curbing arbitrary criminalization of vulnerable communities, and combating the structural impunity affecting the country.
- Urgently adopt a comprehensive legislative and administrative framework establishing clear and enforceable human rights due diligence obligations for all national and international companies and financial institutions operating in the country, in line with international standards—including the UN Guiding Principles—regulating financing for development and resource extraction projects; ensuring respect for free, prior, and informed consultation; requiring social and environmental impact studies and remedies; guaranteeing transparency regarding beneficial ownership; and establishing effective inter-institutional supervision systems with participation of civil society and Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. Ensure the immediate adoption of an administrative decree to this effect while the corresponding legislation is approved.
- Create a specific coordinating body, grounded in a normative framework, with technical autonomy and operational capacity, tasked with coordinating responsible institutions, tracking full compliance with measures, and ensuring effective participation by victims, affected communities, and civil society organizations, without replacing each implementing authority's own obligations.
- Create an independent Monitoring Committee with technical and financial autonomy, composed of persons of recognized human rights expertise and agreed with the victims, tasked with monitoring, evaluating, and supervising implementation of the Reparation Plan, publishing periodic reports, and ensuring transparency, with unrestricted access to information and a stable and sufficient budget.

Recommendations to the State of Honduras

The GIEI recommends that the State of Honduras:

- In light of advances achieved and the limitations of the investigation period, continue the GIEI's mandate in order to deepen lines of investigation not yet clarified and to complete comprehensive clarification of the facts.
- Implement processes of institutional vetting and internal control within SERNA, ENEE, SEN, and INA.
- Improve vetting and internal control within the Armed Forces and the National Police.
- Initiate administrative, commercial, and judicial proceedings for the dissolution, liquidation, and cancellation of DESA's commercial registry.

- Conduct a thorough audit of DESA's financial records and those of related companies to identify assets to be allocated to the comprehensive reparation plan.

The GIEI recommends to the National Agrarian Institute (INA) and the Property Institute (IP):

- Prioritize and finalize the demarcation, delimitation, collective titling, and clean title (*saneamiento*) of the ancestral Lenca territory of Río Blanco.
- Conduct an *ex officio* review of the legal status of individual titles and concessions granted in a manner incompatible with the community's collective land rights.
- Instruct municipalities and local registries to prohibit issuance of new individual titles within the territory pending regularization and ensure that regularization and titling decisions are binding on all State institutions.

Recommendations to the National Protection Mechanism

The GIEI recommends that the State:

- Reform and strengthen the National Protection Mechanism to ensure priority attention to defenders of land, territory, and the environment.
- Incorporate collective and community measures and risk assessments that account for structural factors of violence and criminalization.
- Establish specialized terms of reference for risk analysis staff with training in gender approaches, interculturality, socio-environmental conflict, and complex criminality.
- Update the catalogue of protection measures to transform it into a comprehensive protection mechanism.

Recommendations to the Energy and Environmental Sector

The GIEI recommends that the National Electric Energy Company (ENEE):

- Review and reform procedures for evaluating and approving power supply contracts.
- Verify, through documentation, the existence of valid free, prior, and informed consultation before approving energy contracts.
- Certify the absence of serious socio-environmental conflicts or domestic or international precautionary measures before approving energy contracts.
- Create an independent socio-environmental and human rights due diligence unit tasked with evaluating risks before contract signing, monitoring compliance during implementation, and recommending suspension or termination of contracts in cases of serious or persistent violations.
- Establish an online, public, and accessible registry of power supply and operating contracts including their essential terms, the location and characteristics of projects, impact studies and oversight, and sanctions, suspensions, or terminations due to environmental or social non-compliance.

- Create a corruption-prevention unit with functional independence tasked with preventing conflicts of interest, supervising project financial management, receiving reports of irregularities, and ensuring transparency in tenders and contracts.

The GIEI recommends that the Secretariat of Natural Resources and Environment (SERNA):

- Establish a specialized unit for environmental inspection and enforcement.
- Implement mandatory periodic monitoring protocols with special emphasis on projects located in areas of socio-environmental conflict.
- Ensure culturally appropriate prior consultation processes aligned with Inter-American and international standards.
- Conduct *ex officio* reviews and, where appropriate, annul irregularly granted environmental licenses.
- Design and implement a national monitoring system coordinated with ENEE, SEN, INA, and IP.
- Establish an enhanced environmental evaluation procedure for high-impact projects in Indigenous territories incorporating cumulative impacts, risk analysis for defenders, and participation of independent experts proposed by communities.
- Create a corruption-prevention unit with functional independence tasked with preventing conflicts of interest, supervising project financial management, receiving reports of irregularities, and ensuring transparency in tenders and contracts.

The GIEI recommends that the Secretariat of Energy (SEN):

- Adopt measures for institutional transparency and prevention of conflicts of interest.
- Review and reform the regulatory framework for hydroelectric concessions to ensure free, prior, and informed consultation in Indigenous territories and exclude projects in zones of high conflict, violence against defenders, or corruption.
- Create a publicly accessible National Registry of Hydroelectric Concessions, including information on concessions and beneficial owners.

Recommendations on Indigenous Peoples' Land Rights

The GIEI recommends to the National Agrarian Institute (INA):

- Establish a National Collective Titling Program with defined goals, adequate budget, and direct participation by Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.
- Create a Territorial Recognition and Community Cartography Unit tasked with validating community maps, applying participatory and anthropological methodologies, and recognizing historical continuity and traditional occupation of lands, consistent with Inter-American jurisprudence.

- Implement an extraordinary mechanism to review individual titles issued within Indigenous territories.
- Guarantee that regularization and titling decisions are binding across the State apparatus.

The GIEI recommends that the Property Institute (IP):

- Establish a Special Public Registry of Indigenous Territories that identifies lands in the titling process, suspends registrations that affect them, and guarantees the unenforceability of fraudulent titles.
- In coordination with INA, conduct retroactive registry audits to identify irregularities in title issuance in Río Blanco and other territories affected by large-scale projects.
- Implement registry early warning systems.
- Adopt proactive transparency measures through publication of histories and disciplinary procedures.

The GIEI recommends that local registries and municipalities:

- Suspend registration of acts and permits in Indigenous territories when there are regularization processes, fraudulent titles, or community complaints.
- Validate with Indigenous authorities before issuing municipal permits.
- Safeguard historical archives, cadasters, and communal documentation.
- Incorporate prior consultation into municipal administrative procedures.
- Adopt policies to prevent corruption and money laundering.

Recommendations to the Justice System and National Congress

The GIEI recommends that the Judiciary:

- Adopt a mandatory protocol for transmitting copies of judgments to SERNA, ENEE, INA, IP, the PGR, and other relevant institutions when criminal or civil judgments reveal possible administrative, environmental, or patrimonial illegality.
- Establish inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, with peremptory deadlines, so that recipient institutions adopt immediate corrective actions.
- Incorporate Inter-American standards into judicial training.
- Strengthen judicial oversight of special investigative methods.

The GIEI recommends that the Public Prosecutor's Office:

- Promote an organic and functional reform prioritizing strategic criminal prosecution and overcoming institutional fragmentation through integrated approaches to complex criminal phenomena, including the creation of a Directorate of Criminal Analysis and a Directorate of

Financial Analysis with specialized capabilities to investigate criminal networks, patterns of structural violence, and illicit financial flows.

- Implement interdisciplinary joint investigation teams composed of prosecutors, analysts, experts, field investigators, and specialists in economic, financial, and corruption crimes.
- Strengthen international cooperation and financial information exchange.

The GIEI recommends that the National Congress:

- Approve structural reforms to modernize the criminal justice system.
- Review and repeal regressive norms contrary to international standards.
- Harmonize the property law with ILO Convention 169 and Inter-American jurisprudence.
- Create specific frameworks to prevent corruption and corporate criminality that regulate conflicts of interest and revolving doors, supervise private security financing, and guarantee parliamentary oversight, transparency, and social auditing in extractive and energy projects.
- Reform the Criminal Procedure Code to expand the figure of the private prosecutor and allow the participation of international bodies in cases of corruption, economic criminality, environmental crimes, and serious human rights violations.
- Approve a comprehensive reform of the regime of effective cooperation (collaboration) and plea/benefits mechanisms that, with reinforced judicial control and external oversight, ensures verifiable and substantial cooperation, comprehensive protection for cooperating persons, and the exclusion of benefits that would shield senior leadership or intellectual authors.
- Extend banking, tax, and telecommunications data retention and reporting periods to strengthen investigation of complex crimes.

Recommendations on Finance, Oversight, and Professional Ethics

The GIEI recommends that national, regional, and international financial entities:

- Publicly acknowledge their responsibility in this case.
- Contribute substantially and proportionally to the “Berta Cáceres” Reparation Fund.
- Review and strengthen their human rights and environmental due diligence frameworks to effectively prevent repetition of these events.
- Guarantee full transparency toward affected communities and national supervisory authorities in high-risk projects.
- Adopt effective controls over the financial management of funds to prevent and flag diversions and irregular fund requests or movements.
- Cooperate with national and international authorities and share relevant files and information.

The GIEI recommends that the National Commission of Banks and Insurance (CNBS) and the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF):

- Design and require enhanced controls for obligated entities.
- Improve early detection of suspicious transactions.
- Strengthen identification of money laundering typologies.
- Prevent use of the financial system for bribery, co-optation, or criminalization.

The GIEI recommends that media supervisory bodies and professional associations:

- Establish mandatory rules on conflicts of interest and financing of content.
- Create effective mechanisms for reporting, investigating, and sanctioning practices of disinformation, stigmatization, or paid campaigns aimed at criminalizing defenders, social organizations, or communities.
- Prevent disinformation and stigmatization of defenders.
- Promote professional ethics standards compatible with human rights.

Recommendations to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR/CIDH)

The GIEI recommends that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH):

- Expand the use of Interdisciplinary Groups of Independent Experts.
- Promote cooperation and follow-up mechanisms to ensure compliance with these recommendations.
- Strengthen assistance to the State in criminal and financial analysis.
- Adopt measures to monitor and protect the security of COPINH and the GIEI experts.