

Murder in Honduras - Remembering Berta Cáceres: 'I'm a human rights fighter and I won't give up'

Saturday 5 March 2016, by [LAKHANI Nina](#) (Date first published: 3 March 2016).

Nina Lakhani recounts an interview in 2013 with the Honduran human rights activist, who was murdered early on Thursday at her home in La Esperanza.

I met Berta Cáceres - the Honduran indigenous activist who was murdered at her home on Thursday morning - in December 2013, when she met foreign observers of the country's general election to describe the threats she had received after campaigning to protect her community's territory against a hydroelectric dam project.

She looked and sounded exhausted but agreed straight away to give me an interview in her home town of La Esperanza, in western Honduras, a couple of days later. She wouldn't give me her address or a phone number, but promised if I made my way to the office of Copinh - the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations, which she had founded more than 20 years earlier - her colleagues would bring me to her.

It was a long drive to La Esperanza, and by the time I was escorted to her gated family home she was anxious about the late hour as she needed to get on the road again before nightfall. At that time, Cáceres almost never spoke on the phone, she rarely stayed in one place for more than a night, and she never travelled alone. She didn't have bodyguards, but often travelled with international volunteers who she trusted.

Her house was a collection of small rooms set around a courtyard of flowering trees, and in the end we spoke for more than an hour in a shady spot. Surrounded by pine-covered mountains it felt very peaceful, but twice she stopped mid-sentence as army patrols drove past. "They're always watching me," she said

Cáceres spoke quietly and steadily as she described the gruesome threats of sexual violence and murder that she and her family had received over the previous years. At that time, , her son and two of her three daughters were in exile, but she was determined to stay and keep fighting.

"I cannot freely walk on my territory or swim in the sacred river and I am separated from my children because of the threats. I cannot live in peace, I am always thinking about being killed or kidnapped. But I refuse to go into exile. I am a human rights fighter and I will not give up this fight," she told me.

But she feared for her life, and told me that in the end no matter what precautions she took, if her enemies decided to kill her there would be nothing she could do.

"The army has an assassination list of 18 wanted human rights fighters with my name at the top," she said.

“I want to live, there are many things I still want to do in this world. I take precautions, but in the end, in this country where there is total impunity I am vulnerable. When they want to kill me, they will do it.”

Nina Lakhani

P.S.

* The Guardian. Thursday 3 March 2016 18.10 GMT Last modified on Friday 4 March 2016 17.42 GMT:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/03/remembering-berta-caceres-interview-la-esperanza-honduras-human-rights>

- This article was amended on 4 March 2016. An earlier version “three of her four daughters” where it should have said “her son and two of her three daughters”, and had a subheading that implied incorrectly that Cáceres was murdered at the family home where the 2013 interview with her took place; she was staying at another house when she was murdered, because of concerns about her safety