

UN Group Declares Berta Caceres a 'Champion of the Earth'



United Nations, December 5 (RHC)-- The U.N. Environment Program has posthumously awarded assassinated Honduran Indigenous leader Berta Caceres its "Champion of the Earth" Prize.

Erik Solheim, director of the UN Environment Program, awarded the Indigenous leader and community activist for her "action and inspiration" so that "her death would not be in vain."

"Our family hopes that this award will help make sure that Berta's wonderful life, as well as the struggle of our Lenca people, is not forgotten and that it will give heart to all those struggling for their environmental rights around the world," said Caceres' brother, Juan Manuel Caceres, who participated in the award ceremony at the COP13 UN Biodiversity Conference taking place in Cancun, Mexico.

Caceres, who at age 20 co-founded the Civic Council of Popular Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, was cited for her "tireless grassroots struggle for the rights of marginalized and poverty-stricken indigenous peoples in her native Honduras." The award citation also highlighted her "defining struggle" against the US\$50 million Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam in her native Lenca territory, work which put her at the receiving end of numerous death threats and culminated in her assassination on March 3 of this

year.

"Berta fought for Indigenous people who live in harmony with the ecosystem. Then corporations come who don't care [about Indigenous people] and kick them out of their land. These corporations not only destroy ecosystems, but they come and murder," added Caceres.

The prize is the U.N.'s highest environmental honor and recognizes "visionary people and organizations all over the world that exemplify leadership and advocate action on sustainable development, climate change and a life of dignity for all."

Other award winners this year included Rwandan President Paul Kagame, for his leadership in implementing that country's national environmental strategy; the Moroccan Agency for Sustainable Energy, for its work making solar energy affordable and innovative approaches to green financing; and Mexican environmental activist José Sarukhán Kermez, for a lifetime of leadership and innovation in the conservation of biodiversity in Mexico and around the world.

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