

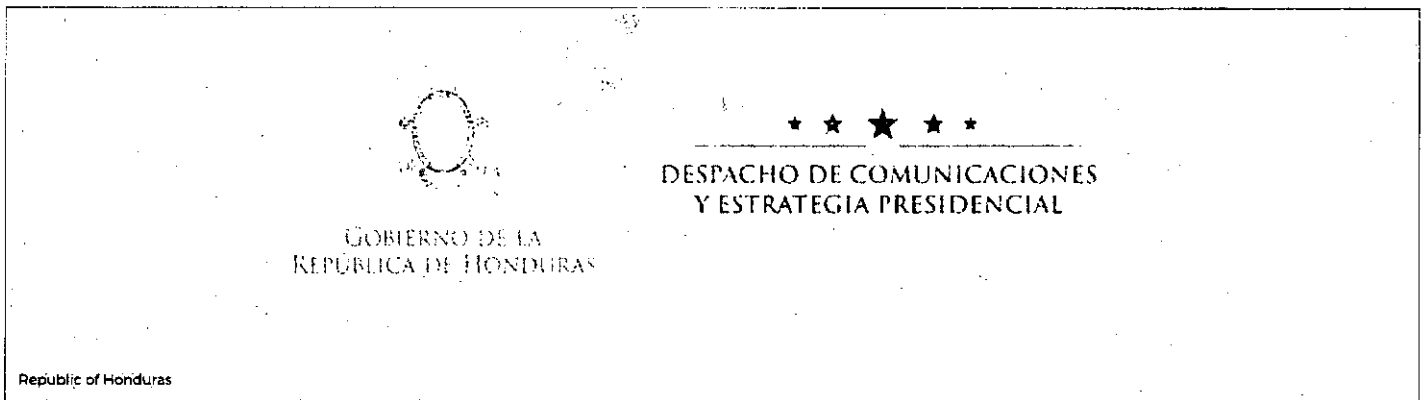


Honduras Attorney General's Office Arrests Two More in Connection with Activist's Murder

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Republic of Honduras →
08:05 ET

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Nov. 21, 2017 /PRNewswire/ -- Yesterday, the Honduran Attorney General's office announced that the Special Unit for the Prosecution of Justice Sector Officials and the Technical Agency for Criminal Investigation, or ATIC, have arrested two individuals for tampering with and misrepresenting evidence related to the March 2016 murder of environmental activist Berta Cáceres.



Investigator Juan Carlos Cruz and ex-police officer Miguel Arcángel Rosales Izcano are accused of intentionally misleading government officials during the initial investigation into Cáceres's murder.

According to the ATIC, Cruz and Rosales presented false evidence to throw off the investigation into Cáceres's murder, which led government officials to believe the killing was the result of a robbery.

ATIC dismissed the possibility that Cáceres's death was the result of a robbery after an investigation named "Operation Jaguar." The initial operation led to four arrests, including an employee of DESA, the company building the dam Cáceres had been protesting prior to her assassination.

As part of its investigation, ATIC conducted a technical analysis of the murder weapon, which brought the number of suspects up to eight. To date, the Attorney General's office has arrested all eight suspects, including the two masterminds behind the crime. All are facing criminal charges for murder.

The suspects include DESA official Sergio Rodriguez, Army Maj. Mariano Diaz, ex-military member Douglas Bustillo, brothers Edilson and Emerson Duarte, Elvin Rapalo, Henry Hernandez, and Oscar Torres.

The Attorney General's office has assembled an interdisciplinary task force to investigate this crime, including the Special Prosecutors Office of Crimes Against Life, the Special Prosecutor for Ethnic Groups and Cultural Heritage, the Bureau of Forensic Medicine, and the ATIC.

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Honduran President Touts Country's Plummeting Homicide Rate

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TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Nov. 21, 2017 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Today, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández applauded a third-party analysis of Honduras's declining homicide rate. The country will likely close out 2017 with half the homicide rate it had in 2012.

"My administration has made Honduras a much safer place than it was before I took office almost four years ago," President Hernández said. "But we still have work to do. I won't stop fighting until every Honduran feels safe and secure."

Homicides dropped more than 20 percent in the first half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016, according to figures reported by *InsightCrime*, a foundation that studies organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean.

InsightCrime attributes the lower homicide rate to anti-extortion measures, police reform, improvements in criminal justice, and the allocation of government funds to crime prevention.

Last month, the Honduran Supreme Court swore in 30 judges to sit on the newly-created Specialized Courts in Extortion Matters. The Courts will try individuals, mostly gang members, suspected of extortion.

The Hernández administration has also removed one-third of the national police force for various offenses and implemented a new law banning lifetime police appointments.

In just the past year, the administration has opened new maximum-security prisons designed to prevent criminals from operating organized crime rings while incarcerated. Such prisons now hold more than 2,000 criminals.

"Thanks to the combined efforts of government officials, the national police, and international organizations, Honduras is growing safer by the day," President Hernández said.

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