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Honduras: A cooperative called Movimiento Campesino del Aguán (Aguan Farmer or Peasant Movement) in Sonaguera, Colon, and violent military actions against its members to force them to sell their land to the military (February 2002)

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The Aguan Peasant Movement (Movimiento Campesino del Aguán, MCA) is a group that has received wide coverage in recent years; it was formed through an agreement between peasant organizations upon the advice of Anibal Fiallos, then head of the National Agrarian Institute (Instituto Nacional Agrario, INA), to claim land from an abandoned United States regional military training centre (Centro Regional de Entrenamiento Militar, CREM) that had been transferred to the INA in 1991 for its land reform activities (FIAN 28 Apr. 2001). The land was occupied by approximately 6,000 members of the organized peasant groups on 14 and 15 May 2000, in what is described as the largest land occupation in Honduran history (ibid.). Later in the year the government began transferring 1,200 hectares of former CREM land, and on 12 October 2000 then-President Carlos Flores "travelled personally to Silín in order to hand over the title deeds to 45 peasant associations" (ibid.).

The only report available of violent confrontations between MCA members and security forces refers to a 28 June 2001 incident in the community of Silín, where MCA members blocked a highway (*El Tiempo* 5 Jan. 2002). This report attributes the blockade to a demand by MCA members for property titles to the land of the former CREM, adding that the efforts to dislodge the blockade resulted in injuries for 10 MCA members and six policemen (ibid.). In mid-January 2002, over 1,500 MCA members in Silín reportedly blocked again the highway leading to Trujillo, Colon department, to demand payments that the government had scheduled for July 2001 as part of its land transfer program, and which had only been partially disbursed (Honduras 14 Jan. 2002). Although the Preventive Police reportedly maintained some 15 officers nearby to face possible problems, the blockade was lifted over the weekend without incident, although the peasants threatened to block it again some day (ibid.). In mid-February 2002 the Spanish charitable organization Caritas Diocesana de Oviedo reportedly asked Honduran President Ricardo Maduro to expedite the disbursement of 30 million lempiras for the 45 peasant organizations belonging to the MCA in accordance to the government's own decrees recognizing these groups' rights (*El Tiempo* 14 Feb. 2002). In March 2002, the Minister of Finance of Sweden was reported to be meeting with the MCA in Colon as part of a visit to review development projects and the signing of an agreement with his Honduran counterpart (ibid. 17 Mar. 2002).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References

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