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24 November 2003

HND42187.FE

Honduras: Whether the government evicts citizens from their lands by force or with financial compensation; land disputes and their scope (2002-November 2003)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Several sources reported land disputes that caused clashes between landowners and landless peasants (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003; *Weekly News Update on the Americas* 31 Mar. 2002; FIAN 9 July 2002; Food First 9 Dec. 2002; *Honduras This Week* 28 July 2003; LRAN 29 July 2003; *WRM Bulletin* Sept. 2003).

According to *Country Reports 2002*, the security forces dislodged farmers and indigenous groups from lands in dispute in a number of instances (31 Mar. 2003, Sections 1.a., 1.c, 1.f. and 5). Sometimes government action against rural groups was legitimate because the National Agrarian Institute (Instituto Nacional Agrario, INA) did not substantiate the farmers' and indigenous groups' claims (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, Section 1.c). In other cases, the action taken in support of local landowners was "questionable" (*ibid*).

Moreover, some sources indicated that peasants and indigenous activists were threatened, injured or killed in clashes with public and private security forces over land disputes (*Weekly News Update on the Americas* 31 Mar. 2002; FIAN 9 July 2002; *Honduras This Week* 28 July 2003; LRAN 29 July 2003). Reports from 2002 describe an incident that occurred in the vicinity of Balfate, on the Atlantic coast, where guards for the Standard Fruit Company shot to death three farmers of the peasant association "1st of October" (*Weekly News Update on the Americas* 31 Mar. 2002; FIAN 9 July 2002). This land dispute started in October 2001, when 76 families applied to the INA for access to 400 hectares of land belonging to the Standard Fruit Company, a subsidiary of the transnational company Dole (*ibid.*). A police report claimed that the peasants were killed in a confrontation, but a priest said that the security guards opened fire on the peasants while they were going to work on company land (*Weekly News Update on the Americas* 31 Mar. 2002).

In a 1 November 2002 incident, 45 families were forcibly evicted from their land in La Sabana, San Pedro Zacapa, for the third time in less than a year (Food First 9 Dec. 2002). This forcible eviction was reportedly authorized by a judicial order that was made at the request of an unnamed private company (*ibid*).

In a July 2003 bulletin, the Land Research Action Network (LRAN) reported that farmer activists of the Sendero del Progreso community in the municipality of San José were violently attacked (LRAN 29 July 2003). Two landless farmers were murdered and another was seriously injured in the attack, which was carried out by guards of landowner José León Argueta (*ibid*).

In this bulletin, LRAN also reported that 35 homes and 40 *manzanas* [parcels of land] of cultivated corn fields were destroyed after a group of farmers who had claimed the land under the Agrarian Reform Act were evicted (*ibid*). Furthermore, the police detained 30 peasants, 18 of whom were released and 12 of whom were still in detention in July 2003 (*ibid*). The eviction was carried out despite the fact that the INA had recognized the legitimacy of the farmers' claim (*ibid*).

Citing a September 2003 report that was written after a visit to the Department of Olancho from 25 to 27 July 2003, the *WRM Bulletin* indicated that 100 farming families were evicted as part of the first phase of a project to expand the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve (Sept. 2003). The author of the report predicted that the second phase of the project, in which 500 more families would be evicted, threatened to "trigger off a major conflict" (*WRM Bulletin* Sept. 2003).

According to a May 2003 article, INA Director Erasmo Portillo declared that the Honduran government would earmark 35 million lempiras [CAN\$2,881,799 (Oanda 28 May 2003)] for the resolution of land disputes across the country (Honduras 28 May 2003). Hundreds of Hondurans who were affected by land disputes or unable to purchase their own land would benefit from these funds (*ibid*). However, the source did not provide any details on

how the funds would be distributed.

For more information on land disputes and agrarian reform, see HND30328.E of 30 October 1998, HND31160.E of 9 February 1999, and a May 2000 report on the agrarian reform in Honduras at <<http://hosting.fbp-systemhaus.de/FIAN/files/Library/Honduras.pdf>>.

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. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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WRM Bulletin [Montevideo]. September 2003. "Honduras: International Delegation Documents Serious Problems in Olancho." <<http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/74/CA.html>> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2003]

Additional Sources Consulted

Central America Report [Guatemala City]

IRB Databases

World News Connection/Dialog

Internet sites, including:

Amnesty International

Freedom in the World 2003

Human Rights Watch

Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico

Social Watch

Search engine:

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