

HONDURAS: Lawyers representing communities defending their territories face an environment of intimidation and threat ahead of a critical hearing scheduled for April 9, 2026, in Tegucigalpa. The hearing concerns criminal charges against Lenir Pérez, a senior executive at Emco Pinares/Ecotek, a mining company linked to a prolonged conflict marked by allegations of violence, intimidation, and repression targeting human rights defenders in the Bajo Aguán region. This broader struggle has already resulted in loss of life, including the assassination of environmental defender Juan López in 2024. The international community is urgently called upon to closely monitor these proceedings and to take all available steps to help ensure the safety of local human rights defenders.

Environmental and Human Rights Defenders Under Threat in Honduras: Call for International Attention to the April 9, 2026, Hearing in the Case Against Lenir Pérez at the National Jurisdiction Court, Tegucigalpa

I. Introduction

We write with grave concern to bring to the attention of the international community a situation of serious and ongoing risk to human rights defenders, legal representatives, and community members in the Bajo Aguán region of Honduras. On April 9, 2026, a critical judicial hearing is scheduled to take place before the National Jurisdiction Court for Matters of Organized Crime, Environment and Corruption, Francisco Morazán, in Tegucigalpa, in the criminal case against Lenir Pérez, President of Grupo Emco Holdings, whose company's mining operations within a protected national park have been at the center of years of documented violence, criminalization, and repression against members of the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Communal and Public Resources, Comité Municipal de Defensa de los Bienes Comunes y Públicos de Tocoa (CMDBCPT) and its allies.

This letter documents the alarming conditions observed during the most recent hearing on March 27, 2026, and calls upon the international community to approach the April 9 proceedings with the utmost urgency. The intimidating and hostile environment that surrounded the March 27 hearing was not an isolated incident, rather a recent manifestation of a systematic pattern of threats and violence against those who defend territorial and environmental rights in the Bajo Aguán region.

II. Background: The Mining Project and the History of Violence Against Human Rights Defenders

The Carlos Escaleras Botaderos Mountain National Park, located in the Colón Department of Honduras, forms a critical part of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and serves as the primary watershed for communities throughout the Bajo Aguán valley. For years, communities organized



under the CMDBCPT have defended this territory against the alleged illegal encroachment of extractive interests, specifically the mining operations of the company Pinares/Ecotek, linked to Grupo Emco Holdings and its president, Lenir Pérez.

The company's operations within the protected park were conducted without the required environmental and legal authorizations and included the construction of roads within the park's core zone, mineral extraction, installation of a crushing plant and waste dump, and other works that have caused extensive damage to the ecosystem and surrounding watershed, contaminating river waters that numerous downstream communities in Guapinol and San Pedro historically depended upon. These facts were formally established in judicial proceedings that led to the historic indictment of three senior Pinares/Ecotek executives in May 2025. These proceedings represent the first time that senior executives of a mining company have faced criminal prosecution for environmental crimes in Honduras. The judge characterized the case as emblematic and identified indications of potential collusion between the company and public officials.

The human cost of this struggle has been devastating. In 2024, Juan López, a founding leader of the CMDBCPT and an internationally recognized human rights defender, was the fourth committee member to be assassinated. His murder drew international condemnation and brought global attention to the risks of life under which environmental defenders operate in the Bajo Aguán valley. López had been a central figure in efforts to hold the mining company legally accountable and was himself a beneficiary of precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). His murder remains mired in impunity, as do the cases of other defenders who have been threatened, attacked, or killed in connection with this struggle.

The IACHR precautionary measures granted in 2023 in favor of members of the CMDBCPT remain in force to this day. This fact alone speaks volumes: the risk that gave rise to those measures has not diminished. It is in this context of ongoing impunity, active precautionary measures, and the assassination of prominent human rights defenders that the events of the March 27, 2026, hearing must be understood.

III. The March 27 Hearing

After many delays in scheduling his preliminary hearing, Lenir Pérez finally appeared in court on March 27, 2026. However, lawyers from the *Bufete de Justicia para los Pueblos* (Bufete), who are representing the CMDBCPT as private accusers and are themselves beneficiaries of IACHR precautionary measures, felt threatened by the consortium of Ecotek mining representatives who flooded the tribunal for the hearing, preventing community access to the court room. The Bufete attorneys described the courtroom environment as threatening and incompatible with the safe exercise of their legal functions. This hostile environment contributes to a pattern that significantly elevates the physical risk to defenders, lawyers, and community members who must be present at the April 9 hearing.

IV. Broader Context: Impunity and Political Uncertainty

The April 9 hearing does not take place in a vacuum. It comes on the heels of a presidential transition in Honduras and heightening concerns about political pressure on an already fragile judicial system. Those concerns have been reinforced by the rapid impeachment and removal of Attorney General Johel Zelaya and the forced resignation of Supreme Court President Rebeca Obando—moves that critics argue circumvented due process in order to consolidate power. These developments signal a shifting political landscape whose implications for justice in Honduras cannot yet be fully assessed but warrant serious vigilance.

The legal proceedings surrounding the Tocoa mining project have already demonstrated the potential for economic and political interests to obstruct justice. There have been arbitrary detentions and dilatory tactics including (i) an unfounded appeal filed by the defense against the May 2025 indictments that stalled the preliminary hearing for months; (ii) the rescheduling of subsequent hearings at the defense’s request; and (iii) the failure to appear by the defendant Lenir Pérez himself until after his arrest warrant was lifted, permitting his free return to Honduras from abroad. These substantial delays and procedural setbacks in this case raise concerns about the influence of powerful interests in delaying accountability.

Meanwhile, impunity for the intellectual authors in the cases of Juan López and other defenders harmed in connection with this struggle remains, emboldening those who seek to intimidate. The IACHR precautionary measures remain in force as a recognition that the threat is real and present.

V. CALL TO ACTION

In light of the documented intimidation at the March 27 hearing and the persistent environment of risk surrounding this case, we urgently call upon the international community, including states, diplomatic missions accredited to Honduras, United Nations human rights mechanisms, regional human rights bodies, and international civil society organizations, to extend all available forms of support and attention to the **April 9, 2026 hearing** to be held at the National Jurisdiction Court in Tegucigalpa. Specifically, we call upon relevant actors to:

- Request the Court¹ to livestream the April 9 hearing and make the transmission available for external viewing;
- Request that the State ensure that the governmental protection mechanism coordinates directly and effectively with the beneficiaries (the Committee and BJP), with a view to adopting comprehensive protection measures that are adequate, timely, and effective before, during, and after the hearing; and
- Attend the hearing in person as representatives of your country and/or organization.

¹ Send requests to: Abg. Alejandro Caballero, Coordinador, Juzgado con Competencia Nacional en Materia de Criminalidad Organizada, Medio Ambiente y Corrupción, Francisco Morazán, Tegucigalpa. comunicaciones@poderjudicial.gob.hn



The communities of the Bajo Aguán region, and those who have chosen to stand with them, face great personal risk and deserve nothing less than the full weight of international solidarity. April 9, 2026, is a moment of particular danger, and an opportunity for the international community to demonstrate in concrete terms that their commitments to human rights, access to justice, and the protection of environmental defenders are not mere rhetoric.

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