

Joint statement by Mirtha Colón, president of the Organización Negra Centroamericana (ONECA), delivered on behalf of ISHR, ONECA, and Race & Equality.

Thank you, Mr. President. This is a joint statement.

My name is Mirtha Colón, president of the Organización Negra Centroamericana (ONECA). With almost 28 years of existence, ONECA is the only Network of Afro-descendant organizations in Central America. We work to combat racism and discrimination.

We, the Garifuna communities of Honduras, with a population of approximately 650,000, with a rich history and culture, were declared Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2001. Unfortunately, the current situation of our communities has its origin in social exclusion, institutionalized racism, and racial discrimination that produce conditions of marginalization and invisibility.

For the Garifuna population of Honduras, migrating continues to be the only hope. There is no confidence that our right to an adequate standard of living will be protected. Consequently we, the women, continue to be the largest group migrating in recent years.

Honduras is ranked as one of the most dangerous countries for land rights defenders, as stated by organisations such as Amnesty International. Human rights violations are widespread and range from confrontations with security forces, detentions, threats, forced disappearances, and in some cases, assassinations of Garifuna leaders.

Afro-descendants have limited access to quality education and health services, housing, and social security, and in Garifuna communities, this is even more accentuated. They are too often subject to discrimination in the administration of justice and face alarming rates of police violence, as well as racial/ethnic profiling.

We call on the HRC and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to urge the State of Honduras to:

- *Guarantee the rights to education, employment, and development that allow for positive changes for the Afro-descendant population, especially the Garifuna;*
- *Stop criminalising human rights defenders of the Garifuna community, especially those who defend territory and natural resources.*
- *Make use of the tools offered by the International Decade for People of African Descent and the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent to promote actions that generate full inclusion of the Garifuna and Afro-descendant people, and to fight racism, discrimination, and related forms of xenophobia.*

Recognition, justice, and development!