



**Laura Zuñiga Cáceres,
translated from Spanish by
Matt Ginsberg-Jaeckle**

Guardian Spirit of the Rivers

La Madre Tierra militarizada, cercada, envenenada, donde se violan sistemáticamente los derechos elementales, nos exige actuar.

Mother Earth, militarized, fenced in, poisoned, where the most basic human rights are systematically violated, demands that we take action.

—Berta Cáceres, from her speech upon receiving the Goldman award, April 20, 2015

Berta Cáceres, guardian spirit of the Rivers, embraced her historic and ethical role, defending the peoples of the world with tenacity and love, those people who are living through the tremendous violence of a system that prioritizes the profits of the few over life itself.

This sister contributed her spirit, her strength, her intelligence and her body to the great struggles of the world. They shot her body, her heart stopped beating; the body of this sister, guardian spirit of the



*“Berta Cáceres no se murió, se multiplicó!” Mural
by Fanny “Aishaa”*

Berta Cáceres, leader autochtone Lenca du Honduras, co-fondatrice du Conseil civique d’organisations populaires et autochtones du Honduras (COPINH) et défenseure de l’eau et de la vie, a été assassinée le 2 mars 2016 en raison de sa lutte pour protéger la rivière sacrée Gualcarque, convoitée par l’entreprise Desarrollos Energeticos-DESA pour la construction d’un barrage hydroélectrique. En tant que symbole de la résistance et lutte des peuples contre le système capitaliste qui dépouille et saccage les communautés et les territoires, Berta Cáceres a laissé un héritage d’articulation des mouvements, de dignité et de combativité. Son assassinat a provoqué une vague de mobilisation et d’indignation à travers le monde. Partout sur la planète, des centaines d’activistes sont poursuivi.e.s, agressé.e.s et assassiné.e.s en raison de la lutte qu’ils et elles mènent en défense de l’eau, de la terre, de la dignité et de la vie.

This mural was first unveiled at the World Social Forum in Montreal on August 10, 2016 at a vigil in homage of Berta Cáceres and water and land protectors, and in the presence of two of Berta Cáceres’ daughters, Laura Zuñiga Cáceres and Bertha Zuñiga Cáceres.

ivers, is no longer with us. But this sister, guardian spirit of the rivers, is the powerful ancestor who keeps calling on us to wake up, who protects us and gives us the loving energy that entices us to keep going.

From our land, with the commitment that we feel towards life, we too embrace our role as guardians of Mother Earth, who today suffers the multiple forms of violence of the powers that be. Our cry and our struggle joins with the many struggles around the world defending life in the face of weapons that try to quiet us, in the face of men in uniform who repress us, who assassinate us, in the face of those for whom our lives are disposable, as people with a multiplicity of bodies, with Indigenous, Black and rebel spirits.

We speak to you from Honduras, where they are in the midst of plundering our mother. Where extractive corporations, both national and transnational, enter our territories, protected by the police and military. We see clearly what the priorities of the Honduran government and its “partners” are – providing security and protection for corporations, even when they trample over the

decisions of our people, or worse, over our lives.

Ever since the 2009 coup d’état, supported by the United States, we have lived through the re-enforcement of state security forces, whose weaponry has been modernized, whose military training has been strengthened, and whose budgets have been fattened, aided by the governments of the United States, Canada and several European powers. We suffer from policies of militarization that directly impact our communities and organizations when, for example, the soldiers and police act to contain the populations who rebel against the imposition of hydroelectric or mining projects. We have lived through the assassination of sisters and brothers by the military. We have been the target of repressive policies that seek to sow terror amongst those of us who dare to dream of another world. Soldiers and police officers have

beaten us for crying out and demanding justice. Businessmen have accused us of being violent for exercising autonomy and not allowing their machines in to destroy our rivers. And today we cry, with a heavy heart and our lives hanging on by a thread, for our sister, Berta, who taught us how to fight, who was assassinated for her struggle and suffered in her own flesh the pain of confronting the militarization of the continent, promoted by the United States.

We speak to you from Honduras, from our indigenous worldview, to say we assume the responsibility for carrying on the legacy of our sister, the guardian spirit of the rivers. Though the governments and corporations disregard our knowledge, for over 500 years we have been breaking the silence they have subjected us to with weapons and fire. They said that we didn't have spirits, that we didn't have minds, they repeat time and again that we are unable to plan for the future, not seeing that it is they themselves, the rich and powerful, who are carrying this planet towards death. As a people marching towards our emancipation we "re-affirm the commitment to continue defending the water, the rivers, the well-being of ourselves and our environment, as well as our rights as peoples."¹ With our sister Berta as our guide, we continue to struggle in defense of life and to build a new world, from our roots. We continue confronting extractive industries, both national and international, governments who promote this system of death, and international financial institutions who forget about our lives. Pain doesn't paralyze us, terror doesn't inundate us; we keep on fighting, dreaming, creating and building the future that we deserve.



Wild Woman, B.

Laura Zuñiga Cáceres is the daughter of assassinated Honduran indigenous land-defender Berta Cáceres and a member of COPINH, the Civil Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations. ▼

1 From Berta's speech upon receiving the Goldman award