



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on October 3, 2011

Honduran Deaths Trigger EU Carbon Credit Clash

The deaths of 23 Honduran farmers involved in land disputes with UN-approved palm oil plantations are raising an international outcry against alleged "human rights abuses." EurActiv reports members of the European Parliament (EP) are planning an investigative mission to Honduras this month while others are calling for a ban on carbon credits to the plantations under the EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS). Additionally, it says the UN Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is weighing its validation process which originally accredited the plantations, a process critics call "only rudimentary, completely unregulated and badly documented."



Protests erupted in July when six international human rights advocacy groups presented a report to the EP detailing what they called murders and forced evictions of peasants in El Bajo Aguán Valley of northern Honduras. The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) report accuses UN-sanctioned palm oil mills of stealing farmland from Honduran natives and killing or wounding them when they attempt to defend their property. It says the companies, acting with government impunity, regularly target members of local land-rights movements who end up murdered in feigned car accidents or hunted down and shot by private security guards.

Examples of the violence are gruesome. Security guards ambushed 15-year-old Rodving Omar Villegas near his village and shot him to death with an AK-47. A car ran down and killed 60-year-old Juan Ramon Mejia. And José Leonel Guerra Álvarez was murdered inside his home in front of his wife and children by armed assailants firing from outside the house.

Reporting for EurActiv, Arthur Neslen asked a CDM board member about the approval of companies which employ such violent tactics. "We are not investigators of crimes," responded the UN official. He explained CDM's purpose is to award companies in developing countries with "emission reduction credits" (ERC) that can be traded and sold to industrialized countries to help the latter meet their Kyoto Protocol emission reduction targets. The Honduran palm oil companies met CDM criteria and are free to trade carbon credits in the [ETS](#).

Neslen also reported the EP plans to send an investigative delegation to Honduras later this month. Members of the EP Sub-committee on Human Rights already completed a [fact-finding mission](#) in May. Sub-committee vice-chairman Laima Andrikiénė of Lithuania discovered "serious problems" while there, such as "impunity, a very high rate of extra-judicial killings, and widespread rape," along with prevailing organized crime and drug trafficking. She said Honduras has the highest homicide rate in the world, despite "a plethora of public bodies responsible for enhancing the protection of human rights." Some of those groups [receive direct funding](#) from the EU but have nonetheless been found to be [complicit in civil rights violations](#).



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Andrikiéné lamented, "I am very much concerned by the numerous murders of activists and journalists, and I deplore the high rate of impunity for such crimes." And she included the FIDH report of Bajo Aguán violence in her account of the May delegation's findings. So the need for a new EP task force in Honduras is unclear.

The Honduran farmers' plight is frighteningly similar to the [situation in Uganda](#), where government authorities evicted more than 20,000 people and destroyed their homes so another UN-accredited corporation, New Forests Company, could plant trees on their property. Planting those trees would allow New Forests to earn extra ERCs from the UN, which it can turn around and sell on the international market. Such greed is also the motive behind the violence in Honduras, prompting some EP members to call for rescinding Honduran carbon credits. The European Union is more tight-lipped about Uganda, possibly because New Forests Company is backed by the World Bank and the EU. Neither of them has a financial stake in Honduran palm oil.

Photo: Honduran farmer driving an ox cart.



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