News
EarthBeat



Honduran environmental activist and lay Catholic leader Juan Antonio López was killed Sept. 14, 2024. (Video screen grab)



Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — September 23, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis expressed his grief over the killing of a church worker in Honduras, expressing solidarity with those "who see their fundamental rights violated" and are targeted for their advocacy for the poor and for the care for the planet.

"I have learned with sorrow that Juan Antonio López has been killed in Honduras," the pope said after praying the Angelus Sept. 22. "Coordinator of social pastoral care in the Diocese of Trujillo, he was a founding member of the pastoral care of integral ecology in Honduras."

López, a Catholic human rights and environmental activist, was killed in his car by a hitman Sept. 14 after attending Mass, Vatican News reported. The 46-year-old husband and father of two recently had been working to shut down an iron oxide mine in a national park that was said to be contaminating two rivers in the area and threatening the local population's water supply.

Related: Catholic leaders mourn the killing of Honduran environmental activist Juan López

"I join in the grief of that church and condemn every form of violence," Francis told visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square. "I am close to all those who see their fundamental rights violated and to those who work for the common good in response to the cry of the poor and the earth."

In a statement after the murder, the Honduran bishops' conference said, "We strongly repudiate this vile murder and ask the authorities not only to talk about justice, but to work diligently and sincerely in the duty of guaranteeing it to all citizens."

The Latin American bishops' council said Sept. 15 that López's killing "reflects a small portion of society that is intolerant, unjust and that wants to impose its will through force."

Advertisement

The U.N. Human Rights Office in Honduras said in a statement that the "measures adopted by the State of Honduras were insufficient" to protect López's life, despite his being under government protection after receiving threats, and it called on the government to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation to hold those responsible to account.

After the Angelus, Francis also greeted a group working to raise awareness about the conditions of prisoners, noting that prisoners must be kept in dignified conditions since "anyone can make a mistake." He also called for peace in Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Myanmar and "the many countries that are at war."

"Unfortunately, tensions are high on the war fronts," he said. "Let the voice of the peoples, who are calling for peace, be heard."