

Demand Justice for Tortuguita! Stop the Assassination of Land Defenders!

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Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr
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404-458-3600

US Attorney General Merrick Garland
US Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20530-0001
202-514-2000

To Attorneys General Merrick and Carr,

We the undersigned demand justice for forest defense, climate justice and queer activist Tortuguita—Manuel Esteban Paez Terán—who was shot to death by police on January 17, 2023 while in their tent at the [Defend Atlanta Forest, Stop Cop City](#) encampment in the Weelaunee forest of Atlanta, Georgia.

A newly released autopsy revealed that Tortuguita, who was a 26 year old Indigenous, non-binary Venezuelan, was shot 57 times with their hands in the air and [the Medical Examiner of DeKalb County has ruled their death a homicide.](#)

Being a Latin American land defender is [one of the most dangerous occupations in the world](#). We stand in solidarity with our Latin American allies and land defenders across the US and the world and demand justice for Tortuguita. **This must never happen again.**

Demands

- We demand that the officers involved in the shooting of Tortuguita be arrested and tried for murder.
- We demand the cancellation of construction of “Cop City”— the \$90 million Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, which will cover nearly 300 acres of the Weelaunee Forest, Atlanta’s largest greenspace.
- We further demand that charges of “domestic terrorism” be dropped against Stop Cop City activists.

Background:

On Wednesday April 19, 2023, the DeKalb County Medical Examiner’s Office finally released the autopsy of Tortuguita, an activist who was killed by police on January 17th, 2023, while in their tent at the Stop Cop City protest in the Weelaunee Forest in Atlanta, Georgia. After the killing, Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) Director Mike Register [told](#) the media, "The individual who fired upon law enforcement and shot the trooper was killed in an exchange of gunfire," and claimed that a handgun and shell casings had been found.

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According to [media outlets](#), however, the autopsy [revealed](#) that Tortuguita was shot 57 times with their hands in the air and there was no gunpowder residue on their hands. The Medical Examiner has ruled the death a homicide.

[NBC News](#) reported, “The wounds suffered by Manuel Paez Teran, 26, were so extensive that a loose round ‘fell from the left sleeve of one of the shirts’ as coroners were undressing the body for examination, the DeKalb County medical examiner said.” This evidence indicates that Tortuguita was assassinated by the police for their leadership in the Stop Cop City movement. This may be the most blatant assassination of a radical political activist since the [murder](#) of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton in December 1969. It is the first known instance of a forest defense activist in the US being shot and killed by police.

Tortuguita was an activist who crossed many different movements, which also may have made them a target for police. “The issue of policing in the United States, the militarization of police forces, Black Lives Matter, all those issues are bound up with protection of this forest for these activists,” [stated Keith Woodhouse](#), an assistant professor at Northwestern University who wrote a book about radical environmental activism.

[Greenlatinos](#) added that “Tortuguita was Indigenous Venezuelan of Timoto-Cuica descent and queer, which contextualizes their death by the crisis of violence against land and water protectors, especially those who are indigenous, in Latin America.” According to [Global Witness](#), in Latin America between 2012 and 2022, “1733 defenders have been killed trying to protect their land and resources: that’s an average of one defender killed approximately every two days over ten years.”

“The right kind of resistance is peaceful, because that’s where we win. We’re not going to beat them at violence. They’re very, very good at violence. We’re not. We win through nonviolence. That’s really the only way we can win. We don’t want more people to die. We don’t want Atlanta to turn into a war zone.” – Tortuguita in the [Bitter Southerner](#)

Signatory Organizations

AbibiNsroma Foundation, Ghana

Assonet Band of the Wampanoag Nation, USA

Athens County's Future Action Network, USA

Biomass Action Group, Australia

Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, USA

Brooklyn Greens / Green Party, USA

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Burning Books , USA

California Communities Against Toxics, USA

Citizens for Public Schools, USA

Elev8 Soul and Science LLC, USA

Forum Ökologie & Papier, Germany

Friends of Bell Smith Springs, USA

Front Commun pour la Protection de l'Environnement et des Espaces Protégés (FCPEEP-RDC),

Democratic Republic of the Congo

GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives), Global / USA

GE Free New Zealand in Food and Environment, Aotearoa/New Zealand

Global Forest Coalition, Canada

Global Justice Ecology Project, USA

Global Women's Strike, UK

Global Women's Strike / US, USA

GMO/Toxin Free USA, USA

GreenRoots, USA

Hazelwood Urban Ag Team, USA

Heartwood, USA

Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy Program, USA

Instituto para el Futuro Común Amerindio IFCA, Honduras

Kentucky Heartwood , USA

Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition, USA

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Landelijk Netwerk Bos- en Bomenbescherming, The Netherlands

Langle Photography, USA

Latin America Coalition of Buffalo, USA

Mangrove Action Project, USA

Missao Tabita, Moçambique

Phunzirani Development Organisation Malawi

North American Climate, Conservation and Environment(NACCE), USA

Orange County Environmental Justice, USA

Our Health Is At Stake, ohias.org, USA

Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, Pakistan

Payday men's network / US, USA

Peace & Planet News, USA

Peace Action of WI, USA

Peace Coalition of Southern Illinois, USA

Protect Our Woods, USA

Red de Acción por los Derechos Ambientales RADA, Chile

Réseau québécois des groupes écologistes, Canada

RICH CITY Rides, USA

Rural Advancement of the National Sharecroppers Fund, USA

Rural Coalition, USA

Rural Coalition, USA

Seeds of Resistance, USA

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Shawnee Forest Defense, USA

Smilin' Trees Disarmament Farm, USA

South East Region Conservation Alliance Inc (SERCA), Australia

Sunflower Alliance, USA

The Corner House, UK

The Enviro Show, USA

UnitarianUniversalist Fellowship of Hidalgo County , USA

Water Justice and Gender, Peru

Women of Color Global Women's Strike / US, USA

Women of Color/Global Women's Strike, USA