

Honduras

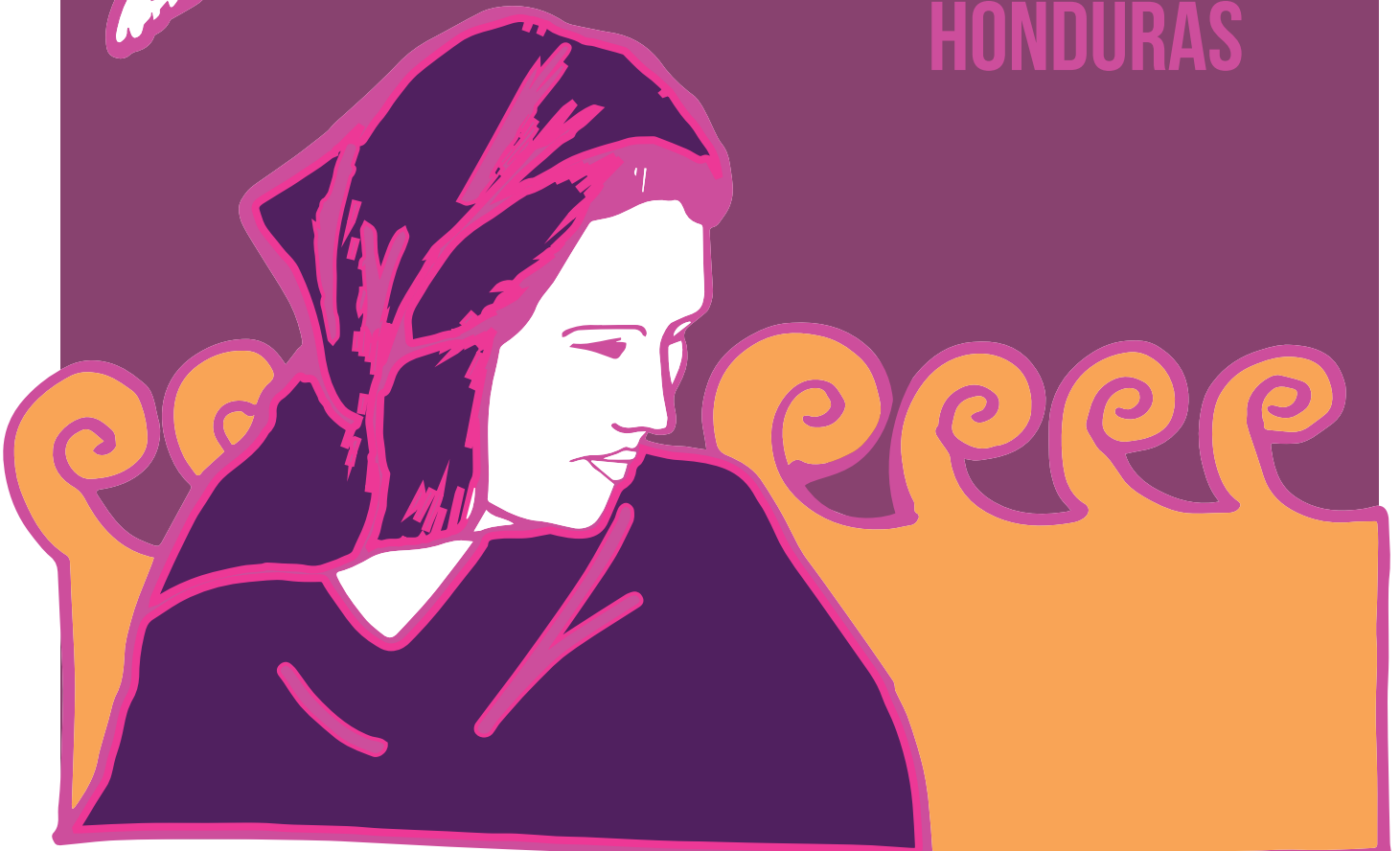
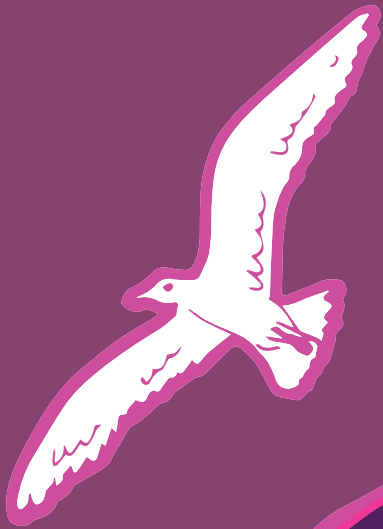
GUARDIAN  
STORIES



# THANK YOU GOD

my story

*Ada Inés Osorio*  
**HONDURAS**



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# THANK YOU GOD my story



Once upon a time, there was a very small and remote town called Pranza. Located in the municipality of Puerto Lempira, region of Gracias a Dios, it was better known as the Moskitia. In that place, a girl named Apubrat (Ada Inés Osorio) was born. From the age of four she suffered an abandonment that no girl should go through. Groped by adult men, Ada Inés lived with her maternal grandmother. Her mother gave birth to her at a very young age and then left with another man, which is why her grandmother took her away to take care of her. Living in an area full of refugees from the civil war in neighboring Nicaragua, poverty forced my grandmother to go out every day in search of food. Meanwhile, I would go to the mountains or go to the neighbors' houses to ask for a bite to eat.

My neighbors gave me what was left in the pot, scowling at me, until one day they poured into my small hands a very hot watery rice with curiles (clams). I got burned. I ran home and never asked anyone for food again. I never said anything to my grandmother. Back then, girls were not listened to.

I talk a lot about my grandmother because she was the one who raised me, more than my mother. Because I was a daughter born out of wedlock, my grandmother would not leave me with my mother. Because the man who was with her was not my father and my grandmother was afraid he might abuse or mistreat me.

One day, very early in the morning, my grandmother woke me up and told me to get ready because we were going to move to a community called Mocoron. Since we had no money, I walked barefoot and without clothes from Pranza to Mocoron. It was about 70 kilometers away, fleeing the horror of the war that was being fought in Nicaragua, the neighboring country, but that had crossed the border.

In the Mocoron community, we settled in an inn. We build a little shack and that's where I started studying. I made it to the 5th grade. I did not have a birth certificate, something common even today in Moskitia. Very angry, my teacher told me one day that I could not come back to class if I did not show my documents. So, my mother got my birth certificate and put my step-father's last name down, who I now see as an exemplary father.

At school I suggested many episodes of excessive violence. The teenagers did not stop chasing me and insulting me, I never knew why. When I told my grandparents what was happening to me, they ended up punishing me and threatening to take me out of school, something that for me was the worst thing that could happen to me. That is why I decided to stop telling them what was happening to me.

I suffered from a terrible disease for 5 years. I did not know what it was, until tuberculosis and chronic anemia were discovered. I was rejected and discriminated against because of the disease. Thanks to God, UNHCR (the United Nations refugee agency) had a small hospital in Mocoron and I was hospitalized there for a year. The doctors took good care of me and the nurses adopted me until I was cured.

Another event that marked my childhood was that in Mocoron I saw the abuse of the military live. They took women by force and brought them to the battalion headquarters to prostitute them for the high command regardless of whether the women were married, single, or underage.

Many women were thrown from military trucks and killed or seriously injured because they were taken away against their will. There were no reports or complaints of all this because they were the kings and lords of everything that was there. Many girls were prostituted by the soldiers. They were called *yucaleras*. If there was a large number of *mestizos* born, they were born in the 80s and 90s.

In Mocoron, I managed to finish elementary school, but that's where my opportunities to continue studying ended. For my grandmother, the best thing was to marry me to one of the three old men who asked for my hand. But I still felt like a girl, so I told my mom what was happening and she supported me so that I could go study in the municipal capital. I moved to Puerto Lempira with the intention of studying. However, my mother had no resources for me to do it. That made her look for a job because what I wanted was to study. A relative took me in and there I was helping with household activities and studying.

There came a time when my relative's husband, an 80 year old man, and a grandson who was about 18 years old, began to bother me at night. They wouldn't let me sleep. They came to touch me and try to rape me. It was the same every night. I finally told my aunt, the owner of the house. But she kicked me out, calling me a liar.

I asked to stay at my cousin's house and did stay there for a while, even though I had to leave the house every day. But I stayed there until they also started touching me at night and wouldn't let me sleep. Since I couldn't stand them, I went back to Mocoron with my mom. I missed a year of my studies.

A teacher gave me a babysitting job to take care of her six month old son. Her husband worked as a driver for COHODEFOR, a government institution. She taught classes all day while I took care of the baby and did the housework. Four months passed and one afternoon, while I was with the baby, the husband arrived and wanted to rape me. I defended myself as best I could, I jumped out the window and hit my knee.



I told the teacher what had happened and she got upset because she was pregnant. They took her to the hospital and later her husband showed up with a gun outside my grandmother's house, firing shots to intimidate us. He threatened to kill me because his wife was sick in the hospital with symptoms of miscarriage supposedly because of me. The husband was from Orlancho and people were very afraid of him.

With the signing of the peace agreement, we moved back to our community of Pranza with the help of UNHCR. Once there, when we thought everything was over, a new nightmare began. I was young. The military began to harass me. They were watching all my movements, to the market, to the river, to the mountain. It was an unbearable pressure. There were some people, mainly a family from my community, who would persuade the military to follow me and not let me out of their sight with the sole intention of harming my step-father, who is now my father. And indeed, that's how it was. When I told the soldiers to leave me alone, they made fun of me and told me that I believed that I was such a big deal, that I believed myself to be Marilyn Monroe.

This kept happening until my parents scolded them, telling them that I was underage and asking why they were doing this. With that claim, the soldiers entered our house and broke a little radio that belonged to my father, fired shots into the air, insulted us, and threatened to imprison my father as a spy. From that moment on, my father was persecuted for a long time by the military. Every once in a while, they invented some claim that brought him before the fifth batallion. My father was frowned upon by the military.

I could not continue living in my community. I decided to go to Puerto Lempira to continue with my studies. Thank God, this time I finished my common cycle, going from house to house helping, until for my good behavior in the youth choir of the Daughters of Charity Catholic Church awarded me a half scholarship for my studies. It was 400 lempiras a month. With that, I covered my school needs.

I became part of the Liberal Party as an activist. I worked very hard to overthrow the National Party and therefore the military power. All my family and my community who belonged to the National Party ended up voting for the Liberal Party.

The Liberal Party won. We removed the military from our community and to date, it is the only border community where there is no military base and where the Moskitias are united.

Now, women live their lives freely, without harassment or threats from the military. I went to San Pedro Sula to work and study. I graduated as a commercial expert and public accountant and worked for three years.

I finally returned to Pranza to visit my parents, without the nightmares of the military. I stayed in Pranza, where 28 women organized ourselves under the name of OMIKS (Ignika Kumisa Women's Organization, which can be translated as Light for Women). The first thing that OMIKS managed was water, to avoid having to walk many kilometers to get water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene. Then we would take care of having solar energy in the houses. We worked in the defense and protection of the rights of women and indigenous people, the conservation of our natural resources, and the promotion of our Miskito culture, in addition to territorial defense against third parties. Pranza is the only community where there are no third parties.

I found a job with an Italian NGO called the Civil Volunteer Group and I stayed there for five years.

I acquired strength and a lot of experience in community work with families to make them see all the wealth that exists in our piece of the jungle. And I grew up as a Miskito woman.

Then I worked in the Miskita indigenous women's association, MIMAT. For ten years as the head of this organizations, we involved Miskito women in the promotion of their human rights and territorial rights, strengthening their capacities with local initiatives for economic autonomy and independence to reduce domestic and social violence.

Currently, women have their own spaces. There are many women who raise their voices thanks to these organizations because they cannot do it alone. Now they know, defend, and protect their rights as women.



I retired from MIMAT because I was the first woman to occupy a position in the Territorial Council of FINZMOS (Mocoron Segovia Zone Federation), which covers from Mistruck to Awasbila. It is an organization that defends the indigenous and territorial rights of that area. Unfortunately, the president was a corrupt man, a puppet of a landowner who came from the capital and allied with the people who controlled the best lands in Honduras for drug trafficking and cultivation industries, dispossessing the inhabitants of their lands, among others. Those whom we call settlers or third parties.

This man who became a leader by buying people's consciences and taking advantage of the people's poverty, disregarded the agenda of the Miskito people. He dedicated himself to selling the best and most fertile land and water sources. I made his macabre plan public and he removed me and five other colleagues from the board of directors and I began to receive threats and to be defamed. I was reported to the public ministry. They began to pressure the organization that I worked for to kick me out. The mayor and like-minded politicians with the same interests began to persuade some women from the Women's Organization, which was my space where I worked. They managed to get them to turn against me, saying that they did not want the organization to be involved in such matters and saying that it was all my fault. The situation boiled over. They filed a complaint with the prosecutor's office. I reported all these acts and we are awaiting the resolution of the Public Ministry.

Among all of these lawsuits, a very serious illness struck me. I began to have severe problems and, as a consequence, depression, insomnia, loss of vision, dizziness, weight loss, etc. It ended up being diabetes. I was relocated to Tegucigalpa for three months. I returned to MIMAT, but the situation was really bad because the persecution also reached them. They began to pressure, blackmail, and defame the organization. What some of the members began to tell me was that it would be better for me to stay on the sidelines so as not to compromise the organization, but the majority supported me in the fight. They continue to use other strategies in order to not expose the organization. In these adventures and in view of my precarious state of health, which was not improving noticeably, I decided to leave my job. But I would never give up the fight.

Despite all the bitter experiences I have had, I have three children. I never left them alone or in the care of their father, nor with my mother. I worked hard to educate them. I have them by my side studying as I write these words, and to all the women and children who suffer or have suffered the same as me, I continue to fight and I ask that they do the same, so that their rights are respected as they deserve. It is justice.

The voice of the voiceless is us, the survivors of all those bitter experiences, who will promote changes in our attitude and help reduce violence.