

## Dominico-Haitian activist Sonia Pierre dies at age 48

Sonia Pierre died of an apparent heart attack on Saturday while visiting the village where she was born in the Dominican Republic. For three decades, Sonia led the struggle against violence and discrimination against Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. Undeterred by personal hardships and political persecution, Sonia Pierre spoke out with eloquence and passion against the injustices suffered by the poorest and most vulnerable.

Sonia was the executive director of *Movimiento de Mujeres de Dominico-Haitianas* (“MUDHA”), a human rights organization based in Santo Domingo. In 1998, under Sonia’s leadership, MUDHA partnered with the International Human Rights Law Clinic (IHRLC) at UC Berkeley’s School of Law to initiate international litigation against the Dominican government for discriminatorily denying children of Haitian ancestry the right to Dominican nationality. On October 7, 2005, MUDHA, IHRLC and the Center for Justice and International Law won a landmark ruling from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognizing the right of Dominican-born children of Haitian ancestry to nationality and education. A recent amendment to the Dominican Constitution denies Dominican-born Haitians the right to nationality and subjects them to denaturalization and summary expulsion. Despite constant threats and harassment, Sonia was advocating fearlessly for the Dominican government to comply with the Inter-American Court’s historic ruling.

Sonia worked tirelessly to meet the needs of her community. MUDHA led efforts to build schools and health clinics in *bateyes*—the name given to settlements for sugar cane cutters working for the State-owned sugar company—as well as to establish day care and adult education programs. Born in 1963 on a *batey*, Sonia grew up experiencing the social, economic and legal obstacles that prevent Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent from enjoying their basic human rights.

Sonia grew up in *La Lechería*, a *batey* located east of Santo Domingo. Her mother, a cane cutter, raised Sonia and her eleven siblings in a one-room barrack. Sonia walked several miles a day to attend the nearest school and eventually studied social work in Havana, Cuba. She founded MUDHA in the early 1980s with a group of feminists to promote empowerment of women in the Dominco-Haitian community.

In recognition of her dedication, courage and commitment, Sonia received the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award in 2006 and the International Women of Courage Award from the U.S. State Department in 2010. Sonia Pierre is survived by her five children. She will be profoundly missed by IHRLC faculty and students who found her passion a source of inspiration and were deeply honored by her friendship.