

Ana Alejandra Pineda Hernández
Minister of Justice and Human Rights
Secretaria de Estado en los Despachos de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Col. Lomas del Mayab, Ave. República de Costa Rica,
Entre BAC-BAMER y BANHCAFE
Tegucigalpa MDC, Honduras
Fax: 011 504 2235 8379

January 26, 2014

Dear Minister Pineda:

We are saddened and horrified to learn of the death of **Justo Sorto**, indigenous Lenca leader, human rights defender, and an active member for twenty years of the Civic Council of Popular Indigenous Organisations (COPINH). On January 21 he was found dead on a farming estate of the Yance community in the municipality of Jesús de Otoro, in the Department of Intibucá. He was killed by gunshot wounds to his head, chest and right thumb from a high-caliber weapon.

COPINH works for the defense of the land and the environment, and for improving the living conditions of indigenous peoples and their communities. Justo Sorto led the Lenca community in the defense of its forests and against the execution of mining projects in the region. He was a founding member of the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Peoples' Power of Honduras (CIPPH) and the Morazanist Movement of Popular Power (MMP).

Police detained Justo Sorto on several occasions for his participation in the blocking of roads while campaigning for the expulsion of lumber dealers who were destroying the forests in the Departments of Lempira, Intibucá and Santa Barbara where the Lenca community lives. He also spearheaded many projects, including the struggle against the construction of the Tigre Dam on the border between Honduras and El Salvador.

We **strongly urge** that the government of Honduras:

- carry out a thorough, impartial and immediate investigation into the killing Justo Sorto, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee at all times the security of the family and colleagues of Justo Sorto, in strict accordance with their wishes; and
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Honduras are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of violence, restrictions or reprisals of any kind.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

CC: Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
Lisa Kubiske, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via email RanzinoGf@state.gov
Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax 202 458 3650
Kelsey Cambronne, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax 202.647.2597
Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Frontline 1/24/14_Honduras

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: