

via fax: 011 502 2221 4423 or 2221 4445 Sr. Jimmy Morales President of Guatemala	via fax: 011 502 2411 8168 or 2411 9210 Lic. Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández Attorney General of Guatemala
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September 23, 2016

Dear President Morales and Attorney General Aldana:

We are shocked and saddened by the recent attack against **Esteban Hermelindo Cux** and **Fredy Qib**, two indigenous community leaders. On September 2, approximately 20 masked men armed with machetes and firearms attacked the home of Esteban Hermelindo Cux, an indigenous Q'eqchi' organizer in Panzós in Alto Verapaz Department. He and several family members were injured. The home was vandalized and windows were shattered by rocks and bullets. Fredy Qib was hospitalized for significant facial wounds.

After the initial attack, the attackers again attempted to assault Fredy Qib in the hospital. They have also threatened to return and kill Esteban Hermelindo Cux and members of his family. It is believed the assailants have assault rifles, grenades and other weapons and are planning another attack. They pose an immediate threat to the lives of these two community leaders, their family members and others in the area who are associated with the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC). Esteban Hermelindo Cux is a national leader of CUC.

Large landholders and agri-businesses have been strategizing against campesino organizations in Alta Verapaz by filing false criminal charges against leaders. They are also waging a disinformation campaign in the media. These strategies have increased the climate of tension between landowners and campesino communities in El Pastor and Panzós.

This is not the first time that Esteban Hermelindo Cux's life has been threatened. His committed nonviolent work toward indigenous rights and environmental justice has made him a target of those exploiting indigenous lands. It appears that the Guatemalan government has taken no steps to protect his life or that of Fredy Qib.

In light of this attack and the continued danger for human rights defenders in Guatemala, we **strongly urge** that you:

- take immediate action to arrest those responsible for the September 2 attack;
- take measures to protect the lives of Esteban Hermelindo Cux, Fredy Qib, their families and others in the area;
- fulfill Guatemala's obligations to protect human rights defenders, pursuant to the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and under the Constitution.

Sincerely,

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez and Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies Gladys Maritza Ruiz de Vielman, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
 Todd Robinson, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011 502 2331 2348
 Thomas Lee, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via email LeeT2@state.gov
 Enrique Gil Botero, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458 3992
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458 3650
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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