

via fax: 011 504 2239 3298
Sr. Juan Orlando Hernández
 President of Honduras

via fax: 011 504 2221 5667
Sr. Oscar Chinchilla Banegas
 Attorney General of Honduras

December 23, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged over the intimidation and death threats against members of the Indigenous Councils Santiago Apóstol and San Isidro Labrador in La Paz department. On December 7, **Ana Mirian Romero, Roberto Gómez, María Felicita Lopez and Rodolfo Vasquez** received death threats and were intimidated by two supporters of Víctor Ventura (the mayor of Santa Elena municipality in La Paz Department) and by local authorities from the neighboring indigenous community of El Potrero. All of these persons are advocates for the recognition of ancestral lands in Santa Elena and are beneficiaries of precautionary measures (MC589/15) granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR).

Ana Mirian Romero, a member of the Lenca Indigenous Movement of La Paz (MILPAH), is a leader of the San Isidro Labrador Indigenous Council; María Felicita López and Rodolfo Vásquez are members. Roberto Gómez, president of the Indigenous Council of Santiago Apóstol, is a defender of environmental and indigenous peoples' rights. They have been active in opposing the construction of the Los Encinos hydro-electric dam on the Chinacla River, owned by Los Encinos S. de R.L.

Permission to build the dam was granted without the free, prior and informed consent of the affected indigenous peoples. On July 10, MILPAH organized a community consultation about the hydroelectric dam: 825 votes against and 94 in favor. The mayor of Santa Elena threatened to withdraw government benefits and stop development projects in the neighborhoods. He also ordered state security agents to harass, intimidate and attack local human rights defenders opposing the dam.

On December 7, a group of persons from El Potrero and three supporters of Mayor Ventura went to El Volcán, the community in which the human rights defenders live. When asked to leave by El Volcán residents, the El Potrero group responded with intimidation and threats. A man named Santos Vásquez López stated he was the El Potrero spokesperson. He threatened to hit Ana Mirian Romero with a cane and told Roberto Gómez that he would "find and kill him." El Potrero resident Hernán Ventura threatened María Felicita López and Rodolfo Vásquez with a machete. The police intervened to prevent further confrontation.

Since 2014, members of the councils have been subjected to constant threats and attacks (cf our letters of Feb 22, 2016 and May 23, 2016). Despite the precautionary measures, the attacks have not stopped. Therefore we **strongly urge** that you:

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the allegations of intimidation and death threats described above, publish the results and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- take immediate action, in consultation with the victims, to implement the existing IAHCR precautionary measures (MC589/15).

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
 James Nealon, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax 011 504 2236 9037
 Olivia Franken, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
 Jose de Jesus Orozco Hernandez, Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ via fax: (202)458-3650
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for Honduras and for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

12/23/16 Frontline

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