

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
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January 24, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are very disturbed by the attack on **Víctor Vásquez**, President of the Lenca Indigenous Movement of La Paz Honduras (MILPAH). On January 13, he was shot in the knee by military personnel while he was providing assistance to a wounded man during a violent eviction of small farmers in Santa María in La Paz Department.

Víctor Vásquez was accompanying residents of the Small Farmers' Group "9th of July" (Grupo Campesino 9 de Julio), whom local authorities had threatened to evict from the lands which residents consider illegally privatized and sold by local authorities. At about 9:00 a.m., approximately 150 to 200 military and police officers arrived in the area and used tear gas to forcefully evict the farmers.

Víctor Vásquez began recording the events with his cellphone. One of the farmers who ran to escape the violent acts was caught in a barbed wire. When Víctor Vásquez ran back to help the man untangle himself, he was shot in the knee. Several other farmers received gunshot wounds as a result of the operation conducted by the army and police.

Víctor Vásquez has been repeatedly persecuted and threatened by local landowners and by elected officials: Gabino Argueta Gálvez, the mayor of Santa María, and René Melgar Argueta, the Governor of La Paz Department.

Lenca indigenous rights defenders and the communities they protect have been under relentless attack. Members of MILPAH in La Paz have been the target of judicial harassment, death threats, arson attacks, assassination attempts and killings because of their activities defending their rights to their ancestral lands (cf our letters of Jan 21 2015, Feb 22 2016, Feb 25 2016, May 23 2016, Dec 23 2016). They have sought protection of their environmental rights through the application of ILO Convention 169 on the right of indigenous communities to previous, free and informed consent. Many of its members are beneficiaries of precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, including 2016 Frontline Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk laureate Ana Mirian Romero.

Because of our concern about the repeated use of violence by State authorities towards human rights defenders, we **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the aggression against Víctor Vásquez, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures, in consultation with the defenders, to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Víctor Vásquez, as well as of the members of MILPAH;
- provide and cover the cost of the necessary medical treatment for Víctor Vásquez, including any required psycho-social support;
- cease targeting and using State violence against human rights defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
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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

Frontline Defenders 1/18/2017_HONDURAS

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