

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

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

February 12, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are very disturbed about a public relations smear campaign targeting three Honduran organizations: Lenca Indigenous Movement of La Paz (**MILPAH**), the Honduran Center for the Promotion of Community Development (**CEHPRODEC**), and the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (**COPINH**), all which work to defend land and environmental rights. This campaign puts them at increased risk of further harassment and physical attacks. The smear campaign also targets the international organization **Global Witness**, an international, independent not-for-profit organization that works with local human rights defenders to end exploitation of natural resources and corruption in global political and economic systems.

The weekend of January 28, a poster began to circulate on social media, accusing members of the organizations named above of discrediting the country, of being allied with radical groups and of funding smear campaigns against Honduras. On January 31 Global Witness published a new report about the situation of land, territory and environmental defenders in Honduras. On February 1, Amnesty International called on the Honduran authorities to publicly recognize the legitimate and important work of these human rights defenders.

On February 2 the intensity of the smear campaign increased after a member of Global Witness and two members of MILPAH appeared on a morning TV show. Participants on the show criticized the Global Witness report, called indigenous peoples and organizations who supported the report “liars, opponents of development and enemies of the Honduran people who are looking for jobs.” Global Witness members reported that after the show, several news reporters asked them questions using the same stigmatizing language used throughout the show.

Human rights organizations are concerned that the intensity of the smear campaign against human rights defenders, and the silence of the Honduran authorities rejecting statements that stigmatize their activities, facilitate physical attacks against them.

We strongly urge that you

- strongly reject the smear campaigns against defenders of the land, territory and the environment;
- provide comprehensive protection for the human rights defenders of MILPAH, COPINH, CEHPRODEC;
- guarantee the security of Global Witness's staff Billy Kyte and Ben Leather, as well as that of the local human rights defenders associated with the Global Witness report that reveals killings of land and environmental defenders in Honduras
- drop any plans for legal action that would undermine and politicize the Global Witness report
- publicly recognize the defenders’ legitimate and important role in promoting human rights

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinators

and

Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Amabassador 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
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for Honduras and for the Rights of Indigenous People, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3992
 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: