

via fax: 011 504 220 4479/4352 Dr. Oscar Alvarez Ministro de Seguridad/Security Minister, HONDURAS	via fax: 011 504 221 5666/5667 Sr. Ramon Ovidio Navarro Duarte Fiscal General/Attorney General, HONDURAS
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February 21, 2005

Dear Sirs:

We have grave concerns for the safety of **Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo, Roberto Chicas Mejía, Julio Elías Hernández**, and other members of the Indigenous Communal Council of Las Olominas in La Paz Department, Honduras.

On December 31, 2004, Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo, Roberto Chicas Mejía and **Hinginio Hernández Vásquez**, Secretary of the Indigenous Council, were visiting the town of Planes, 25 km from their village of Las Olominas. They were ambushed by two armed men who shot Hinginio Hernández. He managed to run a short distance before falling to the ground; the two assailants caught up with him and slit his throat.

Despite a death threat from the killer, Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo and Roberto Chicas Mejía gave evidence to the local prosecutor on January 7. They identified one of the killers as a man from Las Olominas who has opposed the efforts of the Indigenous Council to gain communal rights to their land. Julio Elías Hernández, the son of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez, has also spoken about the killing on a local radio station. Despite the threats to their lives, Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo, Roberto Chicas Mejía and Julio Elías Hernández have received no protection from the authorities. Hinginio Hernández Vásquez had also reported death threats but no investigations were carried out or protection provided.

This is the latest incident in a campaign of intimidation to force the people of Las Olominas to give up legal rights to their land. Since 1996, when the legal papers giving the community ownership of the land were stolen from the home of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez, the Indigenous Council of Olominas has been trying to obtain a new community title to the land from the National Agrarian Institute. They have been harassed and intimidated by some members of the community who have been trying to force them off the land, enabling it to be sold unlawfully.

We strongly urge you to:

- conduct a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the killing of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez, make the findings public and bring those responsible to justice;
- take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of the family members and witnesses to the killing of Hernández Vásquez;
- Ensure that the National Agrarian Institute take immediate action on the request by the Indigenous Council of the Community of Las Olominas to obtain a new communal title to their land to replace their legal title papers which were stolen from them in 1996.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Licda. Jany del Cid, Special Prosecutor for Ethnic Affairs ~ via fax: 011 504 221 3099
 Lic. Miguel Angel Izaguirre Flores, Prosecutor for Marcala Municipality ~ via fax: 011 504 764 5889
 COPINH: Civic Council of Grassroots & Indigenous Organizations ~ via fax: 011 504 783 0817
 Ambassador Mario Miguel Canahauti ~ via fax: 1 202 966 9751
 Tom Kelly, Desk Officer for Honduras, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597
 Ambassador Larry L. Palmer ~ via fax: 011-504-236-9037
 U.S. Senator Voinovich & Representatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via email or fax

UA 19_05 Honduras

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