

via fax: : 011 502 2239 0090 Oscar Berger President of Guatemala	via fax: 011 502 2251 2218 Juan Luis Florido Attorney General, Guatemala
via fax: 011 502 238 1734 Sergio Morales Guatemalan Ombudsman for Human Rights	

April 14, 2006

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Taskforce on Central America, are concerned by the recent police raids on community radio stations. On March 2, Guatemalan authorities illegally raided the offices of **La Asociación de Medios Comunitarios y Comunicadores Sociales (AMECOS)** in Sololá, and **La Asociación de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala (ARCG)** in Palin, Escuintla. The raid order was not signed by a judge, which is a legal requirement.

The raids happened just hours after three leaders of the country's community radio movement arrived in the United States to seek support for the protection of community radio in Guatemala. Under the 1996 Peace Accords that ended the 36-year civil war, the government promised to legalize community radio and protect its bandwidth. Instead, they have bowed to pressure from large media corporations that control 40 percent of the radio waves; community radio operators and associations have faced frequent threats, arrests for illegal broadcasting, and confiscation of equipment.

This harassment disproportionately impacts indigenous communities. Sixty percent of Guatemala's 14 million citizens are indigenous. Since many do not read or understand Spanish, Guatemala's 250 community, indigenous language radio stations are their sole source of news.

We urge you to:

- Immediately end the illegal raids and property seizures of these community radio stations;
- Withdraw the government order to capture the radio associations' presidents;
- Establish a process that would ensure the legalization and freedom of expression protection of community radio, as called for in 2002 and 2005 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights;
- Pass the reforms to Guatemala's communication laws to protect community radio, supported by Consejo Guatemalteco de Comunicación, which are currently stalled in the legislature.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Coordinator

CC: Minister of the Interior **Carlos Vielman** ~ via fax
 Guatemalan Ambassador **Jose Guillermo Castillo** ~ via fax
 U.S. Ambassador **James Derham** ~ via fax
 Courtney **Turner**, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax
 US Senators **DeWine & Voinovich** ~ via email
 US Reps **Brown, Gillmor, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Regula, Ryan, Tubbs Jones** ~ via email