

via fax: 011 503 2243 7857; 2243 9930 Sr. Elias Antonio Saca President of El Salvador	Via fax: 011 503 2222 0655 Oscar Humberto Luna Ombudsman for the Defense of Human Rights
via fax: 011 503 2243 9930; 2243 7857 Lic. Felix Garrid Safie Attorney General of El Salvador	

September 14, 2007

Dear Sirs:

We are shocked and outraged at the illegal arrest on September 4 in the cities of Ahuchapan and Santa Ana of eight trade union members from the board of directors of SIGEESAL (Association of Workers in Health Care of El Salvador) for participating in a July 6 demonstration against the privatization of the national health system. They are **Ana Luz Ordoñez Castro, Mirian Ruth Castro Lemus, Elsa Yanira Paniagua, Noemi Barrientos de Perez, Ana Graciela de Carranza, Jorge Emilio Perez, Manuel Trejo Artero and Anemias Armando Cantadeiro**. They were acting in solidarity with SIGEESAL members in the department of San Vicente who carried out a work stoppage in the Santa Gerturdis National Hospital and the offices of the Basic System of Integral Health (SIBASI), a public clinic in the outskirts of San Vicente. Their activity denounced the lack of medicines and plans for “decentralization” (i.e., privatization) of public health care services and acts of corruption tolerated by the regional health care director, Manuel Abarca.

On July 10 and 11 agreements were signed with the general director of hospitals, Dr. Alcides Urbina, which included a commitment to initiate conversations in San Vicente and western regions and initiate investigations into cases of corruption by the directors and advisors of the San Vicente Hospital. The agreements included respect for the freedom to unionize and the government’s word to not retaliate against the unionists who participated in the protests. Unionists abided by the agreement to clean up spray paint that was done in the context of the protest.

The arrested trade union members have been falsely accused of public disorder and damage to private property, charges which have recently been changed from misdemeanors to criminal charges, which carry a penalty of up to 10 years in jail. These arrests are a blatant violation of the constitutional right to protest, and more specifically, a violation of the International Labor Organization (ILO) agreements 87 and 98, which became law on September 7 and 8 and grant workers the right to organize and unionize.

In light of these facts we **strongly urge** that you

- immediately release the eight union leaders named above;
- comply with Conventions 87 and 98 of the ILO that guarantee the Freedom of Association and Protect the Right to Organize (C87) and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining (C98);
- protect the right to public health care for all Salvadorans (Arts. 65 & 66 of the Constitution) and reject the plans to privatize El Salvador’s health care system, leaving the country’s poor majority more vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan-Szittai
 Coordinator

CC: Ambassador Charles L. Glazer, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ via fax: (503) 2278-6011
 Ambassador René Antonio Leon Rodríguez, Embassy of El Salvador in the US ~ via fax: (202) 232-3763
 Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States ~ via fax: (202)458-3992
 Florentín Meléndez, El Salvador member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States ~ via fax: (202)458-3992
 Paul Degler, El Salvador Desk, US State Department ~ via fax 202.647.2597
 CIS ~ via fax 011.503.2235.1330
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Regula, Ryan, Sutton, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

CIS/El Salvador

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