

via fax: 011 502 2413 8546 <b>Sr. Angel Rodriguez Tello</b> Acting Minister of the Interior	via fax: 011 502 2285 2938 <b>Ing. Alfonso de Leon</b> Secretary for Agrarian Affairs
via fax: 011 502 2411 9124/9326 <b>Lic. Juan Luis Florido</b> Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office	

August 11, 2008

Dear Sirs,

We are extremely concerned for the safety of peasant rights activist **Rafael Gonzalez** and Semau peasant community members **Maria Martin Domingo, Fabiana Ortiz Sales**, as well as other members of the Semau peasant community. Rafael Gonzalez runs the umbrella organization of Guatemalan peasant groups, the National Peasant Organizations Coordinating Body (CNOB) and is also Deputy Coordinator of the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC). Both organizations work to promote labor rights in the countryside, the land rights of indigenous communities, agrarian reform and help peasant communities facing forced eviction.

Early in the morning of July 1 Rafael Gonzalez joined members of the Semau community in the village of Teleman, in Alta Verapaz Department, who were preparing for a demonstration against a local company whose security guards had blocked the community's attempt to occupy a vacant part of the farm rented by the company. (The indigenous community of 60 families says that the land currently available to them is not sufficient to grow their own food.) At about 9am security guards and two men working for the company arrived. One of the men approached Rafael Gonzalez and told him: "So here you are, you son of a bitch; now you're going to die."

Moments later the private security guards started firing their semi-automatic fire arms into the air to intimidate the demonstrators, who scattered immediately. They seized two community residents, Maria Martin Domingo and Fabiana Ortiz Sales, took them to a private house, and questioned them for about three hours.

We are gravely concerned for the safety of land rights defenders in Guatemala. We have written at least eight letters over the past several years to Guatemalan officials regarding human rights abuses carried out against CUC members, including the murders in Morales, Izabal Dept., of Edgar Gustavo Caceres Guevara and Ervin Manuel Monroy (2002) and Jorge Gómez, Edi Lopez Oiliva and Santiago Soto (2003). CUC members and leaders have been intimidated and killed in several other departments, including Suchitipequez, Retalhuleu, and Quiché.

We therefore **strongly urge** that you

- take immediate and effective measures to guarantee the safety of Rafael Gonzalez, Maria Martin Domingo, Fabiana Ortiz Sales and all members of the Semau peasant community, in accordance with their wishes;
- carry out a swift, impartial and full investigation into the death threat, intimidation and illegal detention that took place on July 1, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice.
- protect the rights of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

copies: Comite de Unidad Campesina ~ via US mail  
 Jose Guillermo Castillo, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908  
 James Derham, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011-502-2334-8477  
 Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ via fax: (202)458-3992  
 Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597  
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Regula, Ryan, Sutton, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

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