

August 14, 2008

Luis Alberto Moreno, President
Inter-American Development Bank
1300 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20577

Dear Mr. Moreno:

We are extremely concerned about the support given by the Inter-American Development Bank to the development of the biofuel industry in Guatemala. Representatives of biofuel agribusinesses are deforesting indigenous lands to plant sugar-cane for ethanol and African palms for palm oil and are attacking indigenous peasant communities in the process. We are especially concerned for the safety of members of the **National Committee of CUC** (the Campesino Unity Committee), and for the safety of members of the **Maya Kekchi communities** of La Isla, Caserio el Mirador Sema, Corazon de Mais, and Teleman Punto 15, all in the municipality of Panzós, Alta Verapaz.

Three years ago, the biofuel agribusiness Ingenio Guadalupe invaded the territory of Finca Los Recuerdos, which has been farmed by the above mentioned indigenous communities, and began cutting forests and planting large extensions of sugar cane. On June 30 of this year, when a group of 60 Kekchi families entered the Finca at 7:00am to establish temporary shelters and once again begin planting, they were viciously attacked by paramilitary security forces associated with Ingenio Guadalupe. A company helicopter flew a few feet off the ground, fired on the group, and forced them to abandon the land. **Cristobal Coc Cuc**, a 35-year old father of three children, was shot and hospitalized.

CUC representatives and 200 members of families peacefully gathered the next morning in the town of Teleman to protest the violence of June 30 and to demand prosecution of those responsible and the clarification of land titles. Carlos Withman and Guillermo Urrutia, managers of the ethanol agrobusiness Chabil Utzaj, SA, accompanied paramilitary guards who fired into the peaceful crowd, dispersing them, and seeking out CUC National Committee members **Aparicio Pérez** and **Rafael González**, shouting that they intended to kill them. When the men escaped, two women, **Maria Martin Domingo** and **Fabiana Ortiz**, members of CUC's National Committee, were kidnapped and held in a house for several hours until a judge and the police entered to liberate them, in response to legal actions initiated by CUC in Guatemala City.

Since 2002 we have written at least eight letters to Guatemalan authorities (July 29, 2002; Feb 24, Apr. 23, May 22, 2003; July 18, July 19, 2005; Mar 21, May 12, 2007; Aug 1, 2008) about threats and attacks on members of CUC who are defending their land rights in agrarian conflicts, which are now exacerbated by massive investment in biofuel production.

We strongly urge that you suspend your support for the biofuel industry in Guatemala, whose representatives are perpetrating violence, devastating the environment and violating the special rights of indigenous communities, which are guaranteed by international human rights standards.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

Copies: Ing. Alfonso de Leon, Secretary for Agrarian Affairs, Guatemala ~ via fax: 011 502 2285 2938
Lic. Juan Luis Florido, Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office, Guatemala ~ via fax: 011 502 2411 9124/9326
Sr. Angel Rodriguez Tello, Acting Minister of the Interior, Guatemala ~ via fax: 011 502 2413 8546
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 Represenatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Regula, Ryan, Sutton, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

RightsAction/Guatemala

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