

via email <b>Sr. José Adrian López Monterroso</b> Governor of Department of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala	Via Fax: 011 502 2411 9124 <b>Licda. Maria Encarnación Mejía García de Contreras</b> Acting Attorney General & Head of Public Prosecutor's Office
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September 13, 2010

Dear Madam and Sir:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of hundreds of **Maya Q'eqchi peasants in the community Saquimo Setaño**, Department of Alta Verapaz, and for **Palmer Legare** of the Guatemala Solidarity Project, which is accompanying the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC). The following events greatly disturb us:

- On August 31, armed members of the wealthy family of Maria Elena García Ical began burning houses of the Q'eqchi Maya;
- While recording the attack, Palmer Legare was threatened, beaten with a pistol and his camera was stolen;
- Seven hours later, Guatemalan police and army arrived, but refused to disarm Sra. García Ical's family;
- On September 1, when Legare and five members of the community traveled to Coban to file a complaint with public prosecutor Sebastian Cucul, Maria Elena García Ical was seen meeting with the public prosecutor. Shortly after, he sent word that he would not meet with community members or with Legare;
- When the group went to file the complaint with the police, a police officer threatened some of them and said the police planned to back to the community, destroy the houses and evict the residents. This action contradicts a judge's recent order that the police are not to execute such an eviction.
- On September 2, at 6:30 am, armed members of Sra. García Ical's family prevented community members from going to their fields and threatened them with death if they informed anyone of this. Family members and their supporters then used horses and pistols to attack community members.

This extrajudicial eviction is the result of a long conflict stemming between the community and Maria Elena García Ical. A group of peasants have documentation showing their purchase of the land 23 years ago. Eight years later, Maria Elena García Ical arrived and claimed that she owned the land, although she has no documents to prove it. To avoid violence, the community abandoned their cardamom cultivation and moved across the river. When the cardamom was no longer productive, Ms. García Ical cut down the plants, clear-cut the small forest the community had protected, and began to use the land to graze cattle. Then in April 2010, she once again began trying to force the community from their land across the river they have been inhabiting and cultivating since 1995.

Maria Elena García Ical has convinced the police to falsely charge various community members with stealing land. Three members were arrested; two were released after paying over \$6,000 and renouncing their claim to the land. The third has now entered his sixth month in jail. A dialogue was initiated with governmental offices when Ms. Garcia Ical tried to have the community legally evicted. In August, the government put the eviction on hold.

**Based on the facts presented above, we urge you to**

- carry out a thorough investigation of these incidents, make the results public, and bring those responsible to justice;
- use all tools available to find a solution to the land conflict that is injuring the Q'eqchi community of Cobán;
- guarantee the safety of members of the community of Saquimo Setana, Palmer Legare, and CUC members.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

CC: Guatemala Solidarity Project ~ via email: [solidaridadguatemala@yahoo.com](mailto:solidaridadguatemala@yahoo.com)  
 Sr. Alvaro Colom Caballeros, President of Guatemala ~ via fax 011 502 2239 0090  
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 Brett Hamsak, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597  
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Boccieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

AFGJ 9/2/2010\_Guatemala

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