

via fax 011+503-2243-9947 The Honorable Mauricio Funes President of the Republic of El Salvador	via fax 011+503-2279-1942 Lic. Pablo Arcides Ochoa Presidente de ISTA, San Salvador	via fax 011+503-2281-5959 Manuel Melgar Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad Pública, San Salvador
via fax 011+503-2526-3258 Reverendo Santiago Flores Presidente de PREPAZ, San Salvador	via fax 011+503-2325-8200 ext. 8202 Alcalde José Camilo Rodríguez Tonacatepeque, San Salvador	

December 14, 2010

Dear Sirs:

We are concerned for the safety and well-being of the residents of Comunidad Monseñor Romero in Tonacatepeque, a municipality in San Salvador Department. An ongoing land dispute has led to threats and attacks on community members. Community leader **Raul Acevedo** was captured, stripped and tortured by member of the Salvador Armed Forces on December 2.

After years of having been displaced by the 2001 earthquakes, 105 families—the majority women, children and elderly—established the Community Development Association “Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero” (also known as Comunidad Monseñor Romero) in 2005, with legal status published in the Diario Oficial, No 77, Tomo No 371, April 27, 2006. The property was initially owned by the government’s Social Housing Fund and later transferred to the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Transformation (ISTA); both are institutes dedicated to serving the poor through housing and sustainable agriculture. Since 2005, Comunidad Monseñor Romero has taken all the required legal steps and secured financing to purchase the land and to carry out development projects, including installation of a potable water system. Permission to carry out their development projects was reaffirmed in a letter from ISTA President Pablo Ochoa on March 19, 2010. Then, despite years of coordination between the Comunidad and ISTA, the ISTA president stated on August 19, 2010 that all documents issued by ISTA previous to August 19 were invalid.

Comunidad Monseñor Romero has spent thousands of hours and dollars mapping out a potable water system. If they do not initiate construction by December 31, much of the grant money will be cancelled. One major obstacle is a December 2 letter from the ISTA president denying permission to begin construction.

Now there are additional human rights violations:

- The Civilian National Police (PNC) have not permitted members of the community to enter the zone legally promised to them; but at the same time, they allow farmers who are not owners of the land to enter and plant and even rent the land to landless farmers.
- Farmers who have usurped large portions of the government land for decades have made death threats to leaders of Comunidad Monseñor Romero
- Masked members of the Salvadoran Armed Forces captured, stripped and tortured, community leader, Raul Acevedo, for 1 ½ hours on December 2, 2010.

In light of our concern for the human rights (including rights to housing and water) of the residents of Comunidad Monseñor Romero and in view of the information cited above, **we strongly urge that:**

- The Minister of Justice and Public Security and the President of PREPAZ (Prevención Social de la Violencia y Cultura de Paz) guarantee the security of community members in the face of death threats issued by Arnulfo Wilfredo Cornejo Anzora, José Diego Jiménez and Noel Monroy, as well as the human rights violations (capture and torture) by masked members of the Salvadoran Armed Forces against community leader Raul Acevedo on December 2, 2010;
- Mayor José Camilo Rodríguez extend the letter of "interés social," permitting Comunidad Monseñor Romero to implement water, electricity, housing, and all other necessary development projects for the community;
- President Mauricio Funes call on Lic. Pablo Ochoa, President of ISTA, to:
 - Respect due process and agreements previously made by ISTA;
 - Resolve the transfer of the legal title to 11 manzanas of land designated for the Comunidad Monseñor Romero;
 - Grant immediate permission to Comunidad Monseñor Romero for the construction of the water project financed by non-governmental organization SELAVIP and the Salvadoran Foundation for Development and Basic Housing (FUNDASAL); and
 - Resolve separately the land problems of (1) Comunidad Monseñor Romero, (2) Comunidad Paso Puente (a community with similar problems but which has not initiated and legal measures to purchase land), and (3) farmers who have usurped large portions of land in the zone; follow due process and respect the work done by each entity to resolve the three separate problems.

We look forward to your prompt action and your response.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

CC: Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad ~ via email
Mari Carmen Aponte, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ fax: 011-503-2501-2154
Francisco Altshul Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of El Salvador to the US ~ via fax: 1-202-234-3834
Mark Hove, El Salvador Desk at U.S. State Dept. ~ fax: 202-647-2597
Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3992
Maria Silvia Guillén, El Salvador member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3992
US Senators Brown & Voinovich ~ via email
US Representatives Boccieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

CIS_El Salvador

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