



## InterReligious Task Force on Central America

3606 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44113  
tel: 216.961.0003 fax: 216.961.0002 e-mail: [irtf@irtfcleveland.org](mailto:irtf@irtfcleveland.org)

via fax: 011.503.2243.7857/9930/9947

**Mauricio Funes**  
President of El Salvador

via fax: 011.503.2523.7170

**Romeo Benjamin Barahona Meléndez**  
Attorney General of El Salvador

February 23, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned about the **growing trend of violence against environmental defenders in El Salvador**. Since at least July of 2010, there have been several criminal acts perpetrated against members of the Center for Research in Trade and Investment (CEICOM) in El Salvador and Guatemala. CEICOM has been involved in education and resistance against the Cerro Blanco mining project owned by Goldcorp Inc of Vancouver, Canada. CEICOM is concerned about the risks that this proposed industrial operation, located in Guatemala on the border with El Salvador, could mean for Salvadoran people living downstream from the project. The project site is at the headwaters of the Ostua River that feeds Güija Lake, located on the Guatemala-El Salvador border and listed as an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar Convention. Güija Lake drains into the Lempa River, the principle source of water for more than three million Salvadorans.

From January 8-5, **Nelly Rivera de Silva**, a member of CEICOM, was on a speaking tour in Canada focusing on the impact of Canadian mining corporations in Central America. Since her return to El Salvador, CEICOM has been the victim of two robberies. On January 20, while CEICOM members were stopped for breakfast on their way to La Unión Department, a person dressed in black stepped out of a black truck and stole CEICOM members' belongings from their minivan, including personal documents, a digital recorder, camera, laptops, printed documents, and USB memory sticks containing important organizational information. On January 26, a grey 4x4 pick-up truck with tinted windows was stolen from in front of their offices.

In July and October 2010 there were two incidents of assault and robbery. On July 30, along the highway toward Guatemala City, three environmentalists from CEICOM and members of the Office for Peace and Justice of the Franciscan Order were detained for two hours by unknown persons, robbed of their belongings, left tied up and abandoned on a coffee farm. On October 28, three CEICOM affiliates were intercepted by heavily armed individuals at the same point on the same highway. They were taken to a nearby farm, robbed of personal and organizational belongings, threatened against filing a complaint, and left abandoned on the farm. CEICOM has formally filed complaints about both instances to the appropriate authorities in Guatemala and El Salvador. They believe that these violent events are due to their resistance to Goldcorp's Cerro Blanco project.

In light of the preceding information we **strongly urge** that you quickly carry out an exhaustive investigation regarding the attacks described above, identify the material and intellectual authors, and bring them to justice.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Coordinator

cc: Sigfrido Reyes, President of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, via email: [reyes@asamblea.gob.sv](mailto:reyes@asamblea.gob.sv)  
Francisco Altshul Fuentes, Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of El Salvador to the US ~ via fax: 1-202-234-3834  
Mari Carmen Aponte, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ via fax: 503-2-501-2154  
Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3650  
Maria Silvia Guillén, El Salvador member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3650  
Mark Hove, El Salvador Desk, US State Dept. ~ via fax: (202)447-2597  
Oscar Humberto Luna, Ombudsman for Defense of Human Rights ~ via fax: 503-2222-0655  
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

El Salvador Sister Cities/02/08/11

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