

via fax: 011 504 2239 7398 Lic. Cesar David Adolfo Ham Pena Director of the National Agrarian Institute of Honduras	via US mail Ana Piñeda Minister for Justice and Human Rights of Honduras
via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Sr. Luis Alberto Rubí, Attorney General of Honduras	

August 3, 2011

Dear Sirs and Madam:

We are extremely concerned for the safety and well being of 114 families, including young children, who were forcibly evicted by police from their homes in Rigores (Tocoa municipality), in Colon department, on June 24. Approximately 80 people are now living in a community center in unsanitary conditions that pose a health risk.

An eviction order had been issued by a local judge on May 23, but the community was not informed. The police arrived in Rigores at 10am on June 24 and told community members that they had two hours to pack up and leave. Police then arrived with tractors and destroyed houses, classrooms at the local school, and two churches. Some 493 people were made homeless. Nobody was offered alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, or compensation, either in advance of or since the eviction. Nor was anyone guaranteed safe access to tend their crops, many of which were destroyed during the eviction.

This eviction is typical of land disputes in Honduras: peasant farmers work the land for years undisturbed until a powerful economic interest covets their land. The production of palm oil from African palm trees has expanded in this area of northern Honduras, making it an attractive investment property for palm oil producers. In this case, the families had been living and working on the land for eleven years.

Some residents testified that the palm oil private security forces are being trained as paramilitaries on the 15th Military Battalion in Rio Claro, Tocoa, and have been seen wearing police or military uniforms during violent evictions. It is also reported that that US Army Rangers conduct joint operations with the 15th Battalion and that US Army Chinook helicopters pass through the 15th Battalion.

A human rights delegation arrived on July 1 to investigate the evictions. While the group was hearing testimonies, a group of approximately 50 security forces, principally the police special forces COBRA unit, but also including a military special forces sharp shooter, moved into the community from a side street, in the style of a military assault, burning houses. The police approached the community members and human rights delegation with their guns drawn.

We strongly urge you to:

- do everything necessary to guarantee the physical and psychological well-being of the evicted families;
- uphold these people's right to adequate housing, and provide them with suitable and safe accommodation until the land dispute is resolved, as well as food, water, access to medical attention and education;
- ensure that no further evictions take place without due process, adequate notice and consultation, and without the provision of adequate compensation;
- investigate fully the actions of those who carried out and ordered the forced eviction on June 24, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

copies: Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
 Hugo Llorens, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax
 Jeremy Spector, Attache for Human Rights and Labor, US Embassy to Honduras ~ via email
 Benjamin Gadan, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax 202-647-2597
 Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email
 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458-3992
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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