

via fax: 011 502 2221 4445
Ing. Alvaro Colom Caballeros
 President of the Republic of Guatemala

via fax: 011 502 2334 0119
Ruth del Valle Cobar
 President of Presidential Commission on Human Rights (COPREDEH)

October 25, 2011

Dear Sir & Madam:

We are incensed to learn that the government has said they will not support or protect the **14 Q'echi indigenous communities** who were forcibly evicted in March from their community lands in the Valle de Polochic, Alta Verapaz Department. At least 800 families are at risk of being attacked and do not have access to adequate food, water, health care, education and housing. Refusal of government support is the latest act of violence they have endured since March when the farms of Miralvalle, Aqua Caliente, Quinich, Rio Frío, Bellaflor, Ocho de Agosto, Los Recuerdos, Paraná, Santa Rosita El Sauce, Las Tinajas and Semau were forcibly evicted by the police and the army. Farm workers Antonio Beb Ac and Óscar Reyes and community leader Maria Margarita Che Chub were killed by security forces; many were injured and homes were set on fire (cf our letters of Apr 3, June 11, July 5, Aug 16).

On June 20, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) noted the precarious conditions of the communities and requested the State to guarantee the life and physical integrity of the community members, provide humanitarian assistance such as food and shelter, and come to an agreement with the beneficiaries on the measures to be adopted. After visiting the communities on August 2, representatives of the Presidential Commission for Human Rights (COPREDEH) claimed that the State was no longer obliged to implement the measures requested by the IACHR. They alleged that community members had reoccupied some of the lands from which they were evicted. The State has also refused to address the core issue in this conflict, namely, a dispute over land ownership, which has been exacerbated by the State's failure to provide adequate alternative housing to the communities.

This lack of governmental action is having deadly consequences. At least one infant has already died due to complications from malnutrition, and hundreds of other children are at risk. Community members continue to suffer threats, intimidation, and physical violence. Individuals, including a 64 year-old woman, have recently been beaten for their opposition to the eviction.

Based on these facts, **we strongly urge** that you

- implement immediately the precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. With no food and nowhere to farm, these families face malnutrition, sickness, starvation, and death;
- act to end the violence and intimidation directed at members of the affected communities;
- investigate fully the deaths of Antonio Beb Ac, Oscar Reyes, and María Margarita Che Chub, and bring those responsible to justice;
- provide land nearby on which the members of the Polochic communities can live and plant their crops;
- cease any further forced land evictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Coordinator

cc: Comisión de Peticionarios de Medidas Cautelares CIDH 121-11 ~ via email
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 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3992
 Siobhan Sheils, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202-647-2597
 US Senators Brown and 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: