

via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Sr. Luis Alberto Rubi Attorney General of Hondura	via email Ana Pineda Minister for Justice and Human Rights, Honduras
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March 1, 2012

Dear Sir and Madam:

We are extremely concerned about the death threats to **Wilfredo Paz** and **Juan Chinchilla**, two human rights activists in the Lower Aguán, Colón Department. Wilfredo Paz is spokesperson of the Permanent Observatory of Human Rights in the Aguán and a member of the National Front of Popular Resistance. Juan Chinchilla is an activist with the group Campesino Unified Movement of Aguán (MUCA), campaigning for land rights of peasant farmers amid ongoing disputes over land ownership. Both groups collaborated in the organization of the International Meeting in Solidarity with the Aguán that took place February 17-20 and drew wide media attention to the human rights situation in the Aguán.

On the morning of February 22, Wilfredo Paz received a text message threat directed at Juan Chinchilla, which read: "Can you read well? Juan Chinchilla. Your name is on the list; we're after your head. You're running things you shouldn't do, but we'll look for you in the same way you're looking for socialism." Although Wilfredo Paz was not mentioned, he also feels threatened because the message was sent to his phone, and he has received threats in the past. Neither Wilfredo Paz nor Juan Chinchilla reported the threat because of a deep lack of trust in the authorities, which has escalated in recent months because of forced evictions, arbitrary detention and harassment of human rights defenders by police.

In 2009 Wilfredo Paz was granted Precautionary Measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to ensure that he receive adequate protection in accordance with his wishes. However, the authorities have taken no action to comply. In January 2011 unknown men kidnapped and ill-treated Juan Chinchilla before he escaped. The incident was immediately reported to the authorities, but to date no one has been held accountable.

These threats are part of a pattern of killings, threats and harassment that have been occurring in the Lower Aguán region since 2010 because of unresolved disputes between peasant farming communities and private landowners. Since April 2010, we have sent five letters to Honduran officials regarding this violence being waged against small farmers in the Lower Aguán (cf our most recent letter January 25, 2012).

We **strongly urge** that you

- conduct an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against Wilfredo Paz and Juan Chinchilla, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- take immediate steps to provide appropriate protection to Wilfredo Paz and Juan Chinchilla, in accordance with their wishes.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Permanent Observatory of Human Rights in the Aguán ~ via email
 Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro, Honduran Amabassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
 Lisa Kubiske, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax
 Nathan Anderson, 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, Chair, 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

UA 66/12 Honduras

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