

<p>via fax 011+503-2243-9947  <b>The Honorable Mauricio Funes</b>          President of El Salvador</p>	<p>via fax 011+503-2526-3258  <b>Reverendo Santiago Flores</b>          Presidente de PREPAZ, San Salvador</p>	<p>via fax 011+503-2281-5959  <b>Sr. General David Munguía Payes</b>          Minister of Justice and Public Security</p>
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December 15, 2012

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force on Central America, are outraged by the disappearance, torture, and violent murder of **Marco Antonio Sarmiento Martínez**, a 16-year old resident of Comunidad Monseñor Romero in Tonacatepeque. We are deeply concerned for the safety of the residents of that community. The assassination is part of a long-standing land dispute.

After years of having been displaced by the 2001 earthquakes, 105 families—the majority women, children and elderly—legally registered the Community Development Association “Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero” (also known as Comunidad Monseñor Romero) in 2005. The property was initially owned by the government’s Social Housing Fund and later transferred to the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Transformation (ISTA). A local group of farmers from the Cooperativa la Hondonada continue to threaten the community residents over the disputed 8.5 manzana (approximately 14 acres) tract of land. It is urgent that the government through ISTA facilitate transfer of land title that has already been adjudicated in favor of the Comunidad Monseñor Romero.

On November 10 **Marco Antonio Sarmiento Martínez** was helping a group of women bring in the corn harvest when four men came down the hill yelling that they were going to kill Marcos and the women. They chased Marcos, but he made it home safely. On November 16, **Marco** disappeared after going to collect firewood and coconuts from an abandoned mountain. On November 17 his body was found on the bank of the Las Cañas River at the south end of Distrito Italia Number Three in Tonacatepeque. He had been blindfolded and his hands tied behind his back with barbed wire. His face, hands, ears, and other extremities had been cut by a machete. His head had also been crushed. Since November 16 community leader Raúl Acevedo and another young man have received threats that “they will be next.” (We previously wrote to Salvadoran officials on December 14, 2010 after **Raul Acevedo** was captured, stripped and tortured by members of the Salvador Armed Forces.)

We strongly urged that you:

- call for a complete investigation into the disappearance, torture, and murder of **Marco Antonio Sarmiento Martínez**, make the results public and bring those responsible justice;
- consult with residents of the Comunidad Monseñor Romero to provide them with appropriate safety measures; and
- facilitate the transfer of land title to the Comunidad Monseñor Romero.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan-Szittai  
 Coordinator

copies: Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad ~ via email  
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 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

CIS\_El Salvador

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