

via fax: 011 503 2523 7000/2528 6000

Romeo Benjamin Barahona
Attorney General of El Salvador

via fax: 011 503 2281 5959

David Munguía Payés
Minister of Justice and Public Security of El Salvador

February 15, 2013

Dear Sirs:

We are concerned about the unjust treatment by the criminal justice system of seven young men who are community organizers but have been falsely accused of being gang members. They are members of the Movement of Popular Resistance-October 12 (MPR 12) in the El Progreso 3 and Santa Cecilia neighborhoods of San Salvador. They were arrested December 12, 2012 and released from prison on February 1. We are extremely concerned that their release is only conditional and that the legal case against them continues. They had a hearing on February 6; another will be held in March. The youth are fearful that they could be jailed again.

Because the young men are charged with being tied to gangs or organized crime, their cases are part of a specialized court system, the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), made up of police judges who need very little or no evidence to charge illicit association. In their first hearing in December, neither the youths nor their lawyers were able to present evidence in their defense. During their time in an overcrowded jail they experienced inhumane physical conditions and abuse by prison guards.

MPR-12, founded on October 12, 2002, is an alliance of community organizations, unions and youth groups promoting life and dignity for the Salvadoran people. On December 12, police from the Anti-Gang Unit stormed the El Progreso 3 community in the middle of the night, went from home to home, trampled down doors and pulled young people from a community center. They claimed that the goal of the raid was to arrest suspected gang members. But the youth who were arrested are not gang members. They work to improve their community by organizing popular education schools, soccer tournaments, health campaigns and assisting their neighbors on infrastructure projects in marginalized communities that are not funded by the municipal government. Although this is the kind of work that can reduce violence and discourage youth from joining gangs, the police cite the youth's organizing work as evidence against them.

We strongly urge that you

- drop the fraudulent charges against the young leaders from El Progreso 3 and Santa Cecilia;
- stop the repression of young organizers in urban marginalized communities; and
- investigate the links between the young men's political and community organizing and their targeted persecution by the police.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

copies: Mari Carmen Aponte, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ via fax: 011-503-2501-2775
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Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email
Rosa Maria Ortiz, Rapporteur for El Salvador, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Jan 28_CISPES & Sister Cities El Salvador

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