

Estimada Fiscal Claudia Paz y Paz
Attorney General of Guatemala
via fax: 011 502 2411 8168

April 13, 2014

Dear Attorney General Paz y Paz:

We are writing to strongly express our displeasure at the Guatemalan government's crackdown on the Comité de Desarrollo Campesino (CODECA, Committee for Peasant Farmer Development). There have been beatings, threats and accusatory statements made by public officials. In addition, nine CODECA leaders were arrested between March 10 and 15.

We are certain that the harassment of CODECA members is due to the fact that the movement promotes human and agricultural labor rights, the rights of rural communities to basic services, gender equality and the collective rights of indigenous communities. CODECA, which is legally permitted to organize freely in any community of Guatemala, organized a public demonstration on March 6 in opposition to governmental decree 145-2013, which would expand the privatization of electric energy. As you know, this decree contradicts the rights and autonomy of indigenous communities and peoples, who have not given their prior consent to plans for expansion of rural electrification by private companies. Because the privatization of electricity since 1996 has increased prices (by one hundredfold!) lower quality service, CODECA is calling for the nationalization of electric energy.

The recent pattern of harassment and accusatory statements against CODECA members is disturbing.

March 6: after the demonstration referred to above, the Minister of the Interior publicly threatened to issue orders for the capture of the leadership of CODECA.

March 10: in the Damos community of Morales, Izabal Department, those attending a community meeting were beaten and threatened with firearms. The national police, instead of arresting those who had threatened the community members, detained four leaders of CODECA.

March 13: two leaders from Santa Cruz, Alta Verapaz Department (a woman and an elderly man) were imprisoned

March 15: three leaders from Cubulco, Baja Verapaz Department, were imprisoned.

March 17: President Pérez Molina publicly accused CODECA of robbing electric energy and money laundering; he said he would order the capture of the leadership of the organization.

In view of the information cited above, we strongly urge that you

- release all CODECA leaders from detention;
- call for an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into the attacks on community leaders and members of CODECA who have every right to organize freely in any community of Guatemala;
- take immediate steps to provide appropriate protection for members of CODECA.

Thank you for your work in promoting the rights of all people in Guatemala. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Co-Coordinator

copies: Francisco Villagran de Leon, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
Bruce Williamson, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Guatemala ~ via fax: 011-502-2331-2348
James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ via fax: (202)458-3992
Caitlin Kennel, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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