

via fax: 011 502 2411 8168
Estimada Fiscal Thelma Aldana Hernández
Attorney General of Guatemala

via fax: 011 502 2413 8658
Sr. Mauricio López Bonilla
Minister of the Interior of Guatemala

November 14, 2014

Dear Madam and Sir:

We are writing to express our deep concern for the well-being of human rights and environmental defender **Bárbara Diaz Surin**, who is currently being detained on fabricated charges of murder at the Santa Teresa Pre-detention Center for Women.

Bárbara Diaz Surin is President of the Community Council on Development, which opposes the construction of the San Gabriel cement factory proposed by the Cementos Progresos Company in San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala Department. Since 2006, the twelve Maya Kaqchiquel communities in the area have been protesting construction of the factory because it would lead to forced evictions from ancestral lands, dust pollution, water shortages and widespread deforestation. Their opposition has resulted in numerous cases of intimidation and harassment (cf our letter of February 16, 2013).

In September 2014 the Guatemalan government declared a State of Prevention, which has led to an increased military and police presence to ensure that protesters do not disrupt the planned construction. The State of Prevention allows the government to bring public services under military control, limit or prohibit the rights to strike and protest, limit or prohibit freedom of assembly, disperse gatherings by force, prohibit and control the movement of vehicles, and censor publications.

On October 24 Bárbara Diaz Surin took part, with thousands of other Maya Kaqchiquel women, in a protest to publicly denounce more than one-thousand cases of human rights violations, including sexual abuse and violence, since the government declared the State of Prevention.

On October 29 she was detained early in the morning, in front of her 9-year old daughter, by a group of 40 police officers, only one of whom was a woman. The police did not tell her a reason for her detention. She was held in a cell overnight surrounded by men who verbally harassed her.

On October 30, when she arrived at the court in Mixco, she was informed of the charges against her concerning the unresolved murder of a community worker on April 5 during a jobs fair organized for the proposed cement factory. In a court proceeding, without the presence of a Kaqchiquel interpreter, a judge ordered that Bárbara Diaz Surin would remain in detention until the next hearing scheduled for February 15, 2015. Her defense lawyers are asking for house arrest in lieu of jail; she has seven children at home.

We believe that the detention of Bárbara Diaz Surin is the result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights activities. We therefore **strongly urge** that you

- immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Bárbara Diaz Surin and release her without delay;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee her physical integrity and security;
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Co-coordinator

copies: Francisco Villagran de Leon, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
Todd D. Robinson, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011-502-2331-2348
James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3992
Rose Marie Belle-Antoine, Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax 202 458 3650
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

Frontline 11/13/14_Guatemala

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