

via fax: 011 504 2239 3298 Sr. Juan Orlando Hernández President of the Republic of Honduras	via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Sr. Oscar Chinchilla Banegas Attorney General of Honduras
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January 21, 2015

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged at the murder of environmental rights and indigenous rights defender **Juan Francisco Martinez**, a member of the Independent Indigenous Lenca Movement of La Paz (MILPAH). He was found assassinated on January 4 in the community of Tapuyman in the municipality of Santa Elena in the Department of La Paz. His body showed signs of torture and several stab wounds to his chest. His wrists were tied with laces from military boots.

Juan Francisco Martinez had worked with MILPAH and the National Network of Environmental Organizations (CONROA) to protect the area's natural biodiversity and the health of the community against the environmental threats presented by hydroelectric dam projects in the area. One dam is owned by Gladys Aurora López, Vice-President of the National Congress.

Indigenous communities across Honduras are defending their rivers, lands and way of life against construction of hydroelectric projects. Massive infrastructure projects are being funded and constructed on their lands in violation of international law, i.e., ILO Convention 169, which requires free, prior and informed consultation and consent of affected indigenous communities. Indigenous communities assert that these dam projects are crimes against humanity because they cause immeasurable environmental destruction and forced displacement of their communities. Nonetheless, these detrimental effects are minimized in international treaties and accords in order to facilitate multinational business deals that further marginalize the poor.

The death of Juan Francisco Martinez is the latest in a series of instances of repression against and attempts to criminalize indigenous communities who work peacefully for the defense of land and natural resources (cf our letter of Nov 12, 2014 about another MILPAH member in Santa Elena). Elected officials, such as the mayor of Santa Elena, create a hostile environment by publicly opposing and denouncing MILPAH. Other members of the indigenous environmental resistance movement have been killed, including the son of Juan Francisco Martinez, who was murdered in July 2014. Although the suspects in his son's murder have been detained, it is believed that their affiliates continue to threaten MILPAH members, perhaps even being involved in the Juan Martinez's torture and assassination.

Because the cycle of violence against indigenous peoples continues with impunity, we **strongly urge** you to

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assassination of environmental rights defender Juan Francisco Martinez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety and security of all members of MILPAH;
- guarantee in all circumstances that all environmental rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
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 Tracy Robinson, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458.3992
 Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3650
 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: