

via fax: 011 502 2221 4423
General Otto Fernando Pérez Molina
 President of Guatemala

via fax: 011 502 2411 9210
Lic Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández
 Attorney General of Guatemala

March 15, 2015

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged at the killing of two journalists, **Danilo Zapón López** and **Federico Salazar**, and the wounding of a third, **Marvin Israel Túnchez**, in Mazatenango in Suchitepéquez Department.

On March 10 at approximately 12:35 pm, the three men were sitting in a park when they were shot by two unknown gunmen who fled on a blue motorcycle. Danilo Zapón López was a reporter for more than ten years with the Guatemala City newspaper *Prensa Libre* and Vice-President of the newly established Press Association of Suchitepéquez. His articles and social media regularly highlighted corruption and misuse of public funds by local government officials and politicians in Suchitepéquez Department. The shooting occurred one day after the mayor of San Lorenzo Municipality publicly threatened him in a meeting of local development councils. That same day Danilo Zapón López reported the threat to the Unit on Crimes against Journalists of the Public Ministry, stating that he feared for his life. Local government officials have threatened him in the past. On July 18, 2013, the mayor of San Lorenzo filed a complaint of coercion and blackmail against him ten days after he had denounced threats the mayor made against him.

Federico Salazar was a correspondent for the Guatemala City station *Radio Nuevo Mundo* and Secretary of the Press Association of Suchitepéquez. Marvin Israel Túnchez is a reporter for the cable news television show *Optimo 23*. Both have written several pieces on corruption.

This incident highlights the serious risks that journalists and human rights defenders face in Guatemala. Abuses against media personnel—including harassment, threats, intimidation, physical attacks and murder—increased in 2014 in a climate of almost complete impunity. Since announcing a protection program for journalists last November, the government has not provided any information about its policies. The situation is far from improving.

We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Danilo Zapón López and Federico Salazar, as well as the threats made by the mayor of San Lorenzo Municipality, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- take measures to ensure that government officials and other public figures refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatizing the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human 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: José Julio Alejandro Ligorria Carballido, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908
 Todd Robinson, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011 502 2326 4000
 James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights~ via fax: (202)458-3992
 Caitlyn Kennel, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202 647 2597
 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: