

via fax: 011 502 238 1734
Estimado Sr. Procurador
Don Jorge Eduardo De León Duque
Attorney for Human Rights of Guatemala

via fax: 011 502 2411 8168/9210
Estimada Sra. Fiscal
Lic. Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández
Attorney General of Guatemala

September 25, 2015

Dear President and Attorney General:

We are concerned for the liberty of human rights defenders **Saúl Méndez** and **Rogelio Velásquez** who have been detained for two years and are facing conviction based on false criminal charges. We believe that they are being targeted unfairly because of their work in opposition to the Hidro Santa Cruz hydroelectric dam project in Santa Cruz Barillas, Huehuetenango Department.

Hidro Santa Cruz, a Guatemalan subsidiary of a Spanish company, is constructing the dam on indigenous Maya-q'anjob'al lands. The company is facing strong opposition from indigenous peoples whose rights to prior consultation, as well as environmental rights, have been violated. In response to the organized opposition, Hidro Santa Cruz has employed security guards with links to the military, paramilitaries and organized crime; it is believed that some guards have committed threats, attacks and killings.

Saúl Méndez and Rogelio Velásquez, who have led their communities in opposition to the dam, were originally detained in August 2013 on unsubstantiated accusations of murder and femicide and sentenced to 33 years in prison in November 2014. In May 2015 their conviction was annulled and a retrial was ordered, but they continued in detention. They are appearing in court again during the current retrial, which is scheduled to run September 1-October 28, 2015.

Community and indigenous groups affirm that these arrests, and several others, were carried out strategically in order to silence protests. In addition to Saúl Méndez and Rogelio Velásquez, the following people are also facing criminal charges: Arturo Pablo Juan, Sotero Adalberto Villatoro Hernández, Francisco Juan Pedro, Bernardo Ermitaño López Reyes, Rigoberto Juárez Mateo, Domingo Baltazar, Fausto Sánchez Roblero, Lorenzo Ramírez Rodríguez, Alfonso Chilil Hernández, José Mauricio López Escobar. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has condemned the jailing of environmental defenders from Santa Cruz Barillas.

Because of our concern for the liberty of these human rights defenders, we strongly urge that you:

- immediately and unconditionally release and cease all legal proceedings against Saúl Méndez and Rogelio Velásquez, and the other aforementioned persons;
- ensure that any trial conducted against the human rights defenders conforms to international standards

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
Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Rapporteur **on the Rights of Afro-Descendants**, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650
Caitlyn Kennel, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via email: ~ KennelCK@state.gov
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:

