

via fax: 011 502.238.17.34

Don Jorge Eduardo De León Duque
Prosecutor for Human Rights
Guatemala City, Guatemala

October 12, 2015

Dear Sir:

We are outraged at the assassination of environmental human rights defender Professor **Rigoberto Lima Choc** on September 18 in Sayaxché, El Petén Department. We are also concerned about the related kidnapping of and threats to **Hermelindo Asij, Lorenzo Pérez** and **Manuel Mendoza**, members of the Commission for the Defense of Life and Nature, who were subsequently released. The Commission works with the local community to inform them about their economic and social rights.

Rigoberto Lima Choc was the first person to document the environmental damage occurring in the Río de la Pasión due to the activities of the Empresa Reforestadora de Palma de Petén SA (REPSA). The local community is no longer able to use the river for fishing and drinking. Lima Choc presented a complaint to authorities and appeared as a witness in a case against REPSA.

Early on September 18 workers at REPSA organized a demonstration to protest a judge's decision to suspend the activities of the company while the river's contamination is investigated. While driving from Cobán to Sayaxché at approximately 6am, Hermelindo Asij, Lorenzo Pérez and Manuel Mendoza were stopped, forced to get out of their vehicle and surrounded by REPSA workers. They were briefly allowed to contact their families and colleagues and informed them that they were being held because of their supposed involvement in the company's closure. At mid-morning, 600 REPSA workers took over the Center for the Administration of Justice of San Benito Petén (CAJ) and held hostage 100 workers, lawyers and service users.

At approximately 12:30pm, Judge Karla Hernández and an assistant were on their way to call for the release of those being held at CAJ. They were warned that they would be kidnapped if they continued. At this moment, Rigoberto Lima Choc was shot dead opposite the Courthouse of Peace of Sayaxché, where he and others had been seeking the intervention of the authorities. At 5:30pm, the three kidnapped men and those in the CAJ were released. The human rights defenders reported receiving threats that they would be burned alive.

We strongly condemn this murder and kidnapping and are seriously concerned about the tense situation in El Petén. Therefore we **strongly urge** that you

- take measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security of all human rights defenders working on the case against REPSA
- carry out an investigation into the killing of Rigoberto Lima Choc and the kidnappings of Hermelindo Asij, Lorenzo Pérez and Manuel Mendoza, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice
- ensure that REPSA is held accountable for its actions in the midst of the violence

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 2331 2348
Thomas Lee, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via email LeeT2@state.gov
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 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

9/25/15_Frontline_Guatemala

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