

via fax: 011 504 2239 3298 Sr. Presidente Juan Orlando Hernández President of Honduras	via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Sr. Fiscal Oscar Chinchilla Banegas Attorney General of Honduras
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February 22, 2016

Dear President Hernández and Attorney General Chinchilla:

We are extremely disturbed by a recent arson attack at the home of indigenous and environmental rights defenders **Ana Miriam Romero** and her husband **Rosalio Vasquez Pineda** in the municipality of Santa Elena in La Paz Department. Both are members of the Lenca Indigenous Movement of La Paz (MILPAH) and the San Isidro Labrador Indigenous Council. The arson attack by unidentified assailants, which occurred on January 29 when the family was away from their home, destroyed most of their belongings.

Since 2010 Ana Romero and Rosalio Vasquez have been fighting for the recognition of the land rights of indigenous communities and have filed a lawsuit for the recognition of their ancestral lands in the municipality. Without prior consultation of the local indigenous community, the municipality issued a concession to the company Los Encinos S. de R.L. to construct a hydroelectric dam on the Chinacla River. Residents have serious concerns about the negative impact of the project on their access to water.

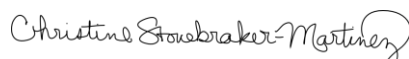
On November 24 2015 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued precautionary protective measures for Romero, Pineda, their family and 12 other members of the Consejo Indígena San Isidro Labrador and MILPAH, following these attacks: October 22 thirty police officers raided the couples' home without a warrant and beat Ana Romero, who was 24 weeks pregnant; November 2, the day Ana Romero returned from the hospital for treatment for the October 22 attack, unidentified men fired over fifteen shots outside their home.

The attacks on Ana Miriam Romero and Rosalio Vasquez Pineda occur in the context of intensifying risks faced by indigenous human rights defenders in La Paz. On December 20, 2015, the body of Javier Vásquez Benítez, the son of prominent indigenous leader Gilberto Vásquez, was found in a ravine in Santa Elena (cf our letter of Jan 21 2016). In May 2015, the body of human rights defender Silvestre Manueles Gómez was found, dismembered, on the bank of the Chinacla River on the border of the Departments of Intibucá and La Paz. In January 2015, MILPAH member Juan Francisco Martinez was killed (cf our letter of Jan 21 2015).

In light of this dangerous climate, we **strongly urge** that you take the following actions:

- carry out an immediate, thorough, and impartial investigation into the arson attack on human rights defenders Romero and Pineda, and bring those responsible to justice;
- immediately take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological wellbeing of Romero, Pineda, and their families;
- guarantee that all human rights defenders in Honduras are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all undue and unlawful restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai and **Christine Stonebraker-Martínez**
Co-Coordinators

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
 James Nealon, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax 011 504 2236 9037
 Olivia Franken, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Rapporteur for Honduras and for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples ~ 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: