

via fax: 011 503 2207-3586

Sr. Douglas Meléndez

Attorney General of El Salvador

June 24, 2016

Dear Attorney General Meléndez:

We are very concerned about the intimidation and surveillance of human rights lawyers **Pedro José Cruz** and **Bertha de León**. On June 8, the two lawyers were monitored and followed by unidentified men outside the Criminal Court in San Salvador, where they are representing clients in several corruption cases against businessman Enrique Rais López.

This event is the latest in a series of acts of intimidation and harassment against Pedro José Cruz and Bertha de León. For example, on June 2, they were meeting with a journalist when they realized they were being followed and their conversation was being recorded by an unidentified individual.

The human rights defenders represent the couple Mario Calderón and Claudia Herrera in several suits against Enrique Rais López. The couple's previous lawyer, René Medrano, ultimately resigned and left the country after being judicially harassed, detained for three days and having his office ransacked at night by unknown men in 2015.

On June 8, Enrique Rais López's lawyer, Luis Peña, filed a suit against Pedro José Cruz and Bertha de León. The human rights defenders had asked a judge to recuse himself in a case where Luis Peña was the opposing counsel, as the judge and Luis Peña had worked together in the past. The motion was successful and the judge recused himself. Luis Peña is now suggesting that asking the judge to recuse himself is an act of defamation against him personally. The defamation proceedings are an abuse of the judicial system, targeting the human rights defenders and costing them time and resources.

We are concerned about these actions against people who have taken up the defense of ordinary Salvadorans denouncing corruption. We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the intimidating acts against Pedro José Cruz and Bertha de León, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security of Pedro José Cruz and Bertha de León;
- guarantee that all human rights defenders in are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian Stefan Szittai

Co-Coordinator

copies: Aquiles Parada, Deputy Attorney General of El Salvador ~ via email
Jean Manes, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ via fax: 011-503-2501-2775
Francisco Altshul Fuentes, El Salvador Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 1-202-234-3834
Martha Pacheco, El Salvador Desk at US State Dept. ~ via email
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur for El Salvador, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Frontline 6/14/2016_El Salvador

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