

via fax: 011 503 2207 3586
Sr. Douglas Arquímides Meléndez Ruíz
Attorney General of El Salvador

July 3, 2017

Dear Attorney General Meléndez:

We are angry and extremely disturbed at the two recent illegal searches of the house of environmental and women's rights defender **Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez**. She is the coordinator of the Women's Movement of Santo Tomás and is active in protecting the El Porvenir forest and drinking water for poor rural dwellers.

On June 7, members of the National Police searched her house without a warrant, claiming their investigation had to do with suspected criminals living in the area. Although there are several other residences in the neighborhood, the police searched only the house of Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez. On June 29, when only the daughter of Sonia Sánchez was at home, members of the National Police again searched the house without a warrant and asked if there were any illicit activities occurring.

Sonia Sánchez has been outspoken in preventing environmental destruction caused by the construction of residential developments for the wealthy in Santo Tomás, San Salvador Department. A project by Grupo de Inversiones Roble, one of the largest companies in El Salvador, cut 28 hectares of the El Porvenir forest to build 426 exclusive homes, despite the disagreement of the local community. She has suffered attacks for her activism.

On September 29, 2015, Grupo Roble filed a complaint accusing Sonia Sánchez of defamation and slander in relation to remarks she had made on three different television stations and on national radio. She had spoken about the environmental damage caused by the housing development and that the company's permit had expired before construction began. The court acquitted Sonia Sánchez on August 23, 2016.

On May 15 2015, the Prosecutor's Office for the Defense of Human Rights granted precautionary measures to Sonia Sánchez. They stated that the threats she constantly receives "refer to serious violations of the right to life and personal integrity...and involve a violation of the right to freedom of expression."

Because we believe the most recent actions by the National Police against Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez are connected to her peaceful and legitimate work in the defense of the environment and of women's rights in El Salvador, we **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the illegal searches of Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez's house, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- take all necessary measures, in consultation with Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez, to guarantee her physical and psychological integrity and security.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: Jean Manes, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ via fax
Claudia Canjura, El Salvador Ambassador to the US ~ via fax and email
Mazin Alfaqih, El Salvador Desk, US State Department ~ via email
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur for El Salvador, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Frontline 7/3/2017_El Salvador

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