

via email: SMVasquez@mingob.gob.gt and FRivas@mingob.gob.gt
Sr. Francisco Manuel Rivas Lara
 Minister of Interior of Guatemala

via email: TAldana@mp.gob.gt
Lic. Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández
 Attorney General of Guatemala

July 15, 2017

Dear Attorney General Aldana and Interior Minister Rivas:

We are deeply troubled at the killing, on June 23, of labor rights defender **Eugenio López y López** as he participated in a peaceful protest of former workers of the San Gregorio Piedra Parada estate on the road to Pacayá village in Coatepeque in Quetzaltenango Department. One unidentified man, with part of his face covered, came from the estate and fired four gunshots, instantly killing Eugenio López y López. **Israel Méndez Vásquez** and **Berta López Escobar** were severely injured. It is believed that the attacker was a member of the estate's private security.

The San Gregorio Piedra Parada estate currently belongs to the wealthy Quintanal Paiz family, whose investments revolve around the production of sugar cane, ethanol, electricity, real estate, banks, with investments in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. For 30 years, the San Gregorio Piedra Parada estate cheated workers; it deducted monthly Social Security contributions for 260 workers but failed to transfer them to the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS). Workers, between the ages of 70 and 95, learned of the estate's cheating when they tried to retire and could not receive their Social Security benefits.

For nine years, the former workers' movement has appealed to various government institutions, such as the Ministry of Labor, to ensure that their demands are met and their Social Security paid. Because state institutions and the San Gregorio Piedra Parada estate have refused to engage in negotiations, the former workers organized protests at the entrance of the property. The authorities have reacted with violence and attempts of criminalization, which is a well-established pattern of judicial harassment against land, environmental and indigenous rights defenders in Guatemala. About 19 of the workers are currently facing unjust criminal charges, including trespassing and instigation to commit crimes. Arrest warrants have been issued against four of the labor rights defenders: **Elmar Danilo Pérez Escobar**, **Digna Dalila Mérida Escobar**, **Ricardo Alberto Pérez Castillo**, and **Francisco Vásquez Oxlej**.

We believe the acts perpetrated against the persons mentioned above are solely motivated by their legitimate work in defense of labor rights. We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Eugenio López y López, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- drop all criminal charges against former workers of San Gregorio Piedra Parada estate
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of all the members of San Gregorio Piedra Parada estate former workers' movement
- refrain from using the justice system to intimidate, harass, and discredit human rights defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Gladys Maritza Ruiz de Veilman, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ via fax 202 745 1908
 Todd D. Robinson, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via human rights officer Rain Bian , via email
 Guatemala Desk, US State Dept: Thomas Lee ~ via email
 James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 Jose de Jesus Orozco Hernandez, Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 Paulo Vannuchi, Commissioner for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 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 Defenders_6/30/2017_Guatemala

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