

via fax: 011 505 266 1222
Sr. Presidente Daniel Ortega
President of Nicaragua

via email: agranera@policia.gob.ni
Sra. Aminta Elena Granera Sacasa
Director General of the National Police of Nicaragua

October 22, 2017

Dear President Ortega and Director General Granera Sacasa:

We are very disturbed by the assassination on September 8 of Community Judge and defender of indigenous territories **Celedonia Zalazar Point** and her husband, **Tito José González Bendles**, at their home in the Tunгла community in the Prinzu Awala territory of Prinzapolka municipality of the Autonomous Region of the Northern Atlantic (RAAN) on the Caribbean Coast.

Celedonia Zalazar was a substitute judge in the indigenous territory, which has been experiencing escalating land conflicts with illegal settlers from other regions of Nicaragua since at least 2015. She was apparently shot and killed in a conflict between settlers and indigenous people over territorial property. She is at least the second defender of indigenous territory killed on the Caribbean Coast in the past year. While planting crops on her farm in the Alamikamba community of the Awala Prinsu territory in RAAN, Bernicia Dixon Peralta and two of her family members were brutally assassinated in November 2016 (cf our letter of December 25 2016).

Indigenous communities say that increased settlements by settlers moving in from other regions of Nicaragua have disrupted their ancient way of life and connection to the land. It has caused rivers to dry up and animals to migrate away. For centuries, indigenous peoples have been stewards of this region, one of the most biodiverse areas in the world. RAAN is home to the largest tropical rainforest in the Western Hemisphere, second only to the Amazon rainforest. The region's biodiversity is now threatened by the influx of settlers.

Because of systematic discrimination against indigenous persons in RAAN, the criminal justice system fails to investigate cases in which indigenous peoples are the victims. This environment of impunity concerning land conflicts has resulted in at least 50 deaths, 3 forced disappearances, 80 persons wounded and hundreds displaced.

Because of the increasing violence against indigenous land defenders, we **strongly urge** that you

- conduct an immediate and thorough investigation, free of prejudice, into the deaths of Judge Celedonia Zalazar and her husband, Tito José González, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- ensure protection for the land rights of indigenous peoples and for the human rights defenders working on their behalf.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

and

Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Francisco Obadiah Campbell Hooker, Ambassador of Nicaragua to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
Laura Farnsworth Dogu, US Ambassador to Nicaragua ~ via fax 011-505-266-3861
Sarah Rupert, Nicaragua Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax 202 647 2597
Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Nicaragua, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 939 6542
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458. 3650
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

IM-Defensores_ Sep 9 2017_Nicaragua

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