

via email: [SMVasquez@mingob.gob.gt](mailto:SMVasquez@mingob.gob.gt) , [FRivas@mingob.gob.gt](mailto:FRivas@mingob.gob.gt)  
**Sr. Francisco Manuel Rivas Lara**  
 Minister of Interior of Guatemala

via email: [TAldana@mp.gob.gt](mailto:TAldana@mp.gob.gt)  
**Lic. Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández**  
 Attorney General of Guatemala

January 26, 2018

Dear Minister of the Interior Rivas and Attorney General Aldana:

We are disturbed by the unjust criminalization of indigenous land rights defender **María Magdalena Cuc Choc**.

María Magdalena Cuc Choc is a school teacher, mother of four children, and translator/interpreter for the Q'eqchi' community at a local court in Puerto Barrios on the Caribbean coast of Izabal Department. Leaving the court on January 17, she was picked up by the National Civil Police (PNC) without an arrest warrant and detained. She was notified that on January 25, 2017, the Criminal Court had issued arrest warrants requested by the Prosecutor's Office for her and community leaders Luis Xol Caal and Antonio Asp Pop, on charges of aggravated trespassing, threats and illegal detention. On January 19 she was ordered released on bail, but she is forbidden to leave Izabal Department and must appear in court once a month over the next six months during the pre-trial investigation.

This unjust criminalization of María Magdalena Cuc Choc involves a land dispute between her local Chabil' Ch'och' indigenous community and the investment company LISBAL, SA, which is claiming ownership of the Isabel Farm in Livingston, a coastal town in Izabal Dept. LISBAL claims that Chabil' Ch'och' members "invaded" the Isabel Farm. Those who have financial interests in the company include former president Otto Pérez Molina, his financier Rodrigo Lainfiesta Rimola, and his former cabinet minister Alejandro Sinibaldi Aparicio, as well as other former government officials of the Partido Patriota (PP).

María Magdalena Cuc Choc is also aligned with the popular movement to protect the environment against contamination from nickel mining, primarily based in El Estor on Lake Izabal. She is the sister of Angélica Choc, whose husband Adolfo Ich Chamán was killed in 2009 by private security guards of Guatemala Nickel Company (CGN). CGN, formerly owned by the Canadian company HudBay Minerals, and now by Cyprus-based Solway Investments, has a long, violent history in the region; in addition to the murder of Adolfo Ich Chaman, there was the gang rape of 11 women (2007), and the killing of Carlos Maaz Coc (2017). In response to false accusations made by CGN executives, prosecutors have placed several criminal charges on environmental defenders and journalists who report on their organizing activities. María Magdalena and Angélica Choc are visible leaders and advocates in the movement to stop CGN's nickel mining operations.

Because of our ongoing concern about the unjust criminalization of indigenous land and environmental defenders, we urge that you

- drop all criminal charges against María Magdalena Cuc Choc
- cancel the arrest warrants for Luis Xol Caal, and Antonio Asp Pop
- allow environmental and human rights defenders to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

Sincerely,



**Brian J. Stefan Szittai**  
 Co-Coordinator



**Christine Stonebraker-Martinez**

copies: Manuel Espina, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ via website and email  
 Luis E. Arreaga, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of human rights officer Rain Bian ~ via email  
 Guatemala Desk, US State Dept: Sarah Rupert ~ via email  
 Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
 Antonia Urrejola, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, 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:**