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| via email: aberegr@mingob.gob.gt Sr. Enrique Antonio Degenhart Asturias Minister of the Interior of Guatemala | via email: TAldana@mp.gob.gt Lic. Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández Attorney General of Guatemala |
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February 14, 2018

Dear Minister of the Interior Degenhart and Attorney General Aldana:

We are outraged at the murders of journalists **Laurent Ángel Castillo Cifuentes**, age 28, and **Luis Alfredo de León Miranda**, age 30. On February 1 sugarcane field workers found their bodies in a field outside the town of Santo Domingo in Mazatenango municipality, Suchitepéquez Department. Both had their hands and feet tied and had gunshot wounds to the head.

Laurent Ángel Castillo Cifuentes covered sports and culture for the newspaper *Nuestro Diario*, and was based out of the city of Coatepeque, in Quetzaltenango Department. He left his home on January 28 to cover a local carnival in Mazatenango in neighboring Suchitepéquez Department, but he never returned. Castillo's father said he last spoke with his son the morning of February 1. Castillo had recently changed his phone number after receiving threatening phone calls from people attempting to extort him.


Luis Alfredo de León, a publicist for *Radio Coatepec*, accompanied his friend to Mazatenango to cover the carnival celebration.

These two murders further chill the climate for press freedom in Guatemala, where journalists work with constant fear of intimidation and violence. Journalists in the region of Suchitepéquez and Quetzaltenango Departments engage in self-censorship and are often afraid to report on local issues because they fear retaliation and violence. According to the Association of Journalists of Guatemala, 11 Guatemalan journalists were murdered in 2017, bringing the total killed since 2000 to 36.

Therefore, we **strongly urge** that you

- conduct a swift and credible investigation into the murders described above, establish motives, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice
- take immediate steps to create a federal protection plan for journalists, as former president Pérez Molina promised in 2013 but has not yet been implemented.

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
 Stefanie Fabrico, Guatemala Desk, US State Department ~ via email
 Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 Edison Lanza, Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman
 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: