

<p>via email: diseloalpresidente@presidencia.gob.hn, info@presidencia.gob.hn Sr. Juan Orlando Hernández President of Honduras</p>	<p>via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com oscarfernando@protonmail.ch Sr. Óscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas Attorney General of Honduras</p>
<p>via email observatorio@sdhjpgd.gob.hn Sr. Héctor Leonel Ayala Secretary of State of Honduras for the Offices of Justice, Human Rights, Governance and Decentralization</p>	<p>via email: consultorinternacionalhn1@gmail.com Sr. Roberto Herrera Cáceres National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras</p>

March 22, 2018

Dear Sirs:

We are horrified at the brutal murder by unknown persons of environmental defender **Luis Fernando Ayala**, age 16, in the municipality of Concepción del Sur in Santa Bárbara Department. He was reported missing on February 19. His mutilated body was found on February 20 with his hands missing and multiple signs of torture.

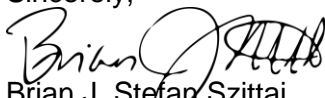
Luis Fernando Ayala was a member of the Environmental Movement of Santa Bárbara (*MAS, Movimiento Ambientalista Santabarbarenses*), in the municipality of Gualala, Department of Santa Bárbara. Through his involvement with MAS, Luis Fernando struggled against the installation of megaprojects by mining and hydroelectric companies. Several communities in Gualala have been struggling for more than three years against a concession granted to a gypsum mining company for an indefinite period in the village of Arenales; Luis Fernando Ayala was active in this struggle. He was also active in the wave of pro-democracy demonstrations that have taken hold across the country since the disputed presidential election in November 2017. He and many other young people have been unjustly criminalized by the Military Police of the Public Order (PMOP) for their participation in several peaceful protests.

Luis Fernando's horrific murder highlights the systematic campaign of public, verbal and physical attacks against human rights defenders in Honduras, which has been exacerbated in the current context of social and political crisis since the November 2017 election. In the first two months following the election, there were 30 killings of human rights defenders (21 at the hands of the PMOP), and at least 232 people injured and 1085 people arrested.

Environmental and human rights defenders are currently at great risk. Therefore, we **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, independent, exhaustive, effective and impartial investigation into the murder of Luis Fernando Ayala, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- end all types of harassment and criminalization against all human rights defenders in Honduras and take immediate measures to ensure their safety and physical and psychological integrity;
- ensure the application of the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998.

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Jorge Alberto Rivera Avilés, President of the Supreme Court of Justice ~ via email
Marlon R. Tábora Muñoz, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via website or fax, and US mail
Heide B. Fulton, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email
Jason Smith, Human Rights and Labor Representative, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email
Olivia Franken, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, 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

HRDefenders 3/13/2018_Honduras

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