

via email: aberger@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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March 25, 2018

Dear Minister of the Interior Degenhart and Attorney General Aldana:

We are greatly concerned about the attack on **Jorge Santos**, the General Coordinator of UDEFEGUA (Protection Unit for Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala). During a human rights march in Guatemala City on March 23, a person wearing a hood hit him on the head, causing wounds that required stitches.

The attack occurred during the demonstration “Huelga de Todos los Dolores del Pueblo de Guatemala” (Strike for all the Pain of the People of Guatemala), a traditional protest during Lent, which this year focused on denouncing human violations related to corruption within the Guatemalan government.

The climate was tense leading up to the annual event. The principal organizers were the Committee of the Huelga de Dolores and the Association of University Students (AEU) at the University of San Carlos. They began receiving death threats on March 20. Then on March 23 at 4am, while students were gathered making final preparations for the march, a group of persons wearing hoods and gowns, and carrying bats and machetes, entered their meeting space and forcibly removed them. Jorge Santos and human rights defender Iduvina Hernández, co-founder of Association for the Study and Promotion of Security in Democracy, arrived. The two human rights defenders intervened to protect a student who was being beaten with bats and machetes by a group of approximately 15 attackers.

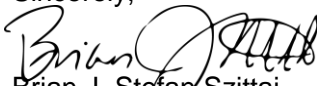
The violent attacks carried over to the march. At 8am, while Jorge Santos was accompanying the peaceful protest, a group of people wearing hoods and gowns approached him; one of them hit Jorge Santos on the head with a baseball bat. Television channel Canal Antigua captured the aggression on camera. The attacker’s hood featured the traditional colors of the Economic Sciences Faculty of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala.

We are deeply concerned about the escalation in attacks against human rights defenders in Guatemala. In 2017, UDEFEGUA reported that 483 human rights defenders were attacked, including 53 assassinations. This is a significant increase from the 263 attacks recorded in 2016.

Therefore, we **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack against Jorge Santos, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice, in accordance with international standards;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Jorge Santos, in consultation with him, and in strict accordance with his wishes;
- guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Guatemala are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, 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: