

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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April 12, 2018

Dear Minister of the Interior Degenhart and Attorney General Aldana:

We are extremely disturbed by the assassination of **Héctor Manuel Choc Cuz** in El Estor, Izabal Department. He was a member of the local Mayan Q'eqchi' community, which for many years has been protesting displacement from their ancestral land and environmental degradation caused by the Fenix nickel mining.

During the late evening of March 30 and early hours of March 31, several people brought Héctor Choc to the outskirts of the El Estor community and beat him to death with rocks and other objects. Héctor died while being rushed to the Puerto Barrios hospital. Witnesses (speaking anonymously because of fear) explained that one of the assassins said: "It's not Ich, let's go." "Ich" is the name in El Estor for José Manuel Ich Choc, Héctor's cousin and son of Angélica Choc and Adolfo Ich, who was assassinated in 2009. This indicates that the murderers probably intended to kill José Ich.

José Ich is a witness in the civil lawsuits against Hudbay Minerals/CGN (Compañía Guatemalteca de Níquel, or Guatemalan Nickel Company) before Canadian courts for his father's murder on September 27, 2009, which was committed by Mynor Padilla, a former lieutenant colonel in the Guatemalan army who worked as head of security of Hudbay Minerals/CGN. José is also a witness in the criminal case against Mynor Padilla in Guatemala.

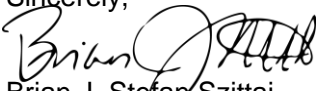
This murder is the latest of many attacks and aggressions since 2008 against the Choc and Ich families:

- In 2008, Ramiro Choc, Angélica Choc's brother, became a political prisoner for almost six years for his work in defense of the rights and lands of the Maya Q'eqchi' peoples;
- In 2009, Mynor Padilla, then head of security of Hudbay Minerals/CGN along with security agents under his control, murdered Adolfo Ich (cf our letter of November 1, 2009);
- In 2016, men fired their weapons against Angélica's home while she was inside sleeping with her two younger children (cf our letter of September 25, 2016);
- In 2018, María Choc, sister of Angélica and Ramiro Choc, was arbitrarily detained ("criminalized") by the Guatemalan state for her work in defense of the rights and lands of the Q'eqchi' peoples (cf our letter of January 26, 2018).

Because of the continuing pain and suffering of this family and our concern for the safety of José Ich, we **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the murder of Hector Choc, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety and security of José Manuel Ich Choc and that of his family, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- guarantee that in all circumstances all human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals.

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
 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

Rights Action_4/12/2018_Guatemala

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