

via email: aberger@mingob.gob.gt  
**Sr. Enrique Antonio Degenhart Asturias**  
Minister of the Interior of Guatemala

via email: fiscalgeneral@pm.lex.gob.gt  
**Lic. María Consuelo Porras Argueta**  
Attorney General of Guatemala

July 23, 2018

Dear Minister of the Interior Degenhart and Attorney General Porras Argueta:

We are extremely concerned about the recent smear campaign, threats, and police violence against environmental defenders with the Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis, San Mateo Ixtatán municipality, Huehuetenango Department.

According to the Peaceful Resistance, the hydroelectric company Energía y Renovación, S.A. (formerly known as PDH, S.A.) has planned to build three hydroelectric projects (with seven dams) and has already diverted rivers from their original paths, severely affecting the livelihood of indigenous peoples' communities and restricting their access to water resources. In 2014 the company reinstated a military garrison at their facilities which had been located there during the civil war. Since then, the garrison has functioned as a station for the military and the National Civil Police (PNC). Officers there have participated in threats against the local community and the forcible repression of protests, including the following:

July 14: 400 people marched to the PNC station with a letter requesting closure of the police station and military garrison, the cessation of Energía y Renovación' activities in their region, and departure in two days of the company and PNC from Ixquisis. When the officers refused to accept the letter, stating that they were not authorized to take it, the community leaders read the document aloud in front of the garrison and then peacefully returned to their homes.

July 15: the web page Actualidad Huehuetenango published an article titled, "New armed attacks against community members in San Mateo Ixtatán," accusing some Ixquisis protesters of firing shots and burning down a convenience store after the demonstration. They used pictures taken the day before by police and military officers, but these do not substantiate the allegations. Energía y Renovación also published on their Facebook page a press release which matches the article on Actualidad Huehuetenango.


July 16: when the community leaders organized another peaceful protest outside the PNC station to demand compliance with their letter, PNC officials and riot police closed the bridge on the road to the station to block them.

July 18: 50 community residents, including women and children, came together to organize for a visit from the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH). When they led a march to the PNC station, officials had already closed the road. When the community leaders tried to dialogue with the police forces, they were fired on with tear gas canisters. A group of PNC officials shouted at community leader **Natanael Gómez**, "We know you. You will fall down." Others said to another leader, **Lucas Jorge**, that they were going to pay a visit to take him from his house at night.

We are concerned that the attacks and smear campaigns may lead to further violence against the Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis and to human rights defenders in Guatemala in general. Therefore, we strongly urge that you:

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the police violence, threats, acts of intimidation and smear campaigns against peaceful protesters in Ixquisis publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the members the Peaceful Resistance of Ixquisis Microregion and residents of the Ixquisis community, in consultation with them;
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including their right to peaceful protest.

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
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copies: Manuel Espina, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ via website and email  
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Stefanie Fabrico, Guatemala Desk, US State Department ~ via email  
Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
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US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

FrontlineDefenders\_07/26/18

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