

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

August 24, 2018

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

We are extremely disturbed at the beating, arrest, and arbitrary detention on August 14 of **Edwin Choc** and **Martín Chub**, local leaders of the Farmer's Committee of the Highlands (CCDA). Police detained them in Cobán, Alta Verapaz Department, after they attended a meeting with government authorities that was part of the Permanent Dialogue between authorities, campesino and indigenous communities.

Founded in 1982, CCDA promotes access to land and the labor rights of Mayan campesinos and their participation in social, economic, cultural, and political processes. They have advocated against the land-grabbing efforts of landowners on indigenous territories and demanded better policies in favor of rural development.

The Presidential Commission of the Permanent Dialogue convened a meeting on August 14 with farmers from the Secopur community in the Laguna de Lachúa micro-region, CCDA leaders, and national authorities to discuss the rise in the number of killings and instances of criminalization, threats, and evictions of indigenous and campesino communities. When the meeting ended, several police officers outside the building cornered a small group of CCDA members and, without presenting any arrest warrants, beat and violently arrested them. A few of them were able to escape. Edwin Choc and Martín Chub were detained. They are being accused of usurpation of protected lands.

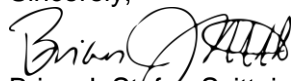
This is another example of ongoing efforts to hinder the work of CCDA. On September 14, 2017, CDA members **Juan Bautista Riveiro** and **José Manuel Coc Saquil**, who actively participated in meetings of the Permanent Dialogue, were detained in Alta Verapaz and unjustly accused of murder and attempted murder. They remain in pre-trial detention at Cobán's prison. Local organizations accompanying the case have documented irregularities in the trial and a lack of evidence to substantiate the charges.

We are gravely concerned that members of CCDA are not only being unjustly criminalized by are also under physical attack. In June 2016, indigenous leader Daniel Choc Pop was killed (cf our letter of June 25 2016). In May of this year, José Can Xol and Mateo Chamám Paau were killed (cf our letter of May 23, 2018). All three of these assassinations were in Cobán.

We strongly urge that you

- unconditionally release from detention Edwin Choc, Martín Chub, Juan Bautista Riveiro and José Manuel Coc Saquil;
- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the arrests, death threats, and attacks being reported by CCDA members, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- cease targeting all human rights defenders and guarantee that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-coordinators


 Christine Stonebraker Martínez

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

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