

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 26, 2018

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

We are outraged at the attack on **Rolanda de Jesús García Hernández**, an indigenous Mayan K'iche journalist working for *teleSUR*, an international television network, who was reporting on environmental destruction.

On August 21 Rolanda de Jesús García, in the company of members of the local Community Development Council (COCODE), was documenting illegal logging activities on the banks of the Cahabón River in Sactá, Alta Verapaz Department. The logging is connected to the Oxec hydroelectric project owned by Energy Resources Capital Corporation of Panama. In addition to the clear-cutting of old growth forests, construction of the hydroelectric project has destroyed local ecosystems and decimated mountain ridges sacred to the q'eqchi' indigenous communities who live there. The illegal logging has dramatically increased erosion and flooding, but the government is ignoring their plight.


A group of Oxec workers approached the reporting team, yelled at them, tried to take their cameras, and shouted sexually suggestive threats at García. As the group of reporters was leaving, six men armed with machetes followed them, isolated Rolanda de Jesús García, and detained her against her will. While she was being held, the Oxec workers repeated their insults and threats. They threatened to rape and kill here, and throw her body into the river. They grabbed her camera and threw it into the river. After agreeing, under coercion and threats, not to disseminate the material that they had recorded, Rolanda de Jesús García escaped and filed a police complaint.

We have written to you previously about abuses surrounding this project (cf our letter of June 26, 2018). The Oxec and Oxec II dams were built without consulting the local indigenous population, as required by international law. In August 2017, q'eqchi' communities in Santa María Cahabón organized a referendum. Despite threats of repression from the government and large businesses, the turnout of voters was significant: 26,000 people voted against the dams, and only 12 people in favor. The government chose to ignore the referendum and, instead, prosecute q'eqchi' environmental defenders such as Bernardo Caal Xol (cf letter June 26, 2018) who are vocal in their opposition to the hydroelectric project.

Because Rolanda de Jesús García fears for her life, and because the indigenous community of Sactá continues to suffer the negative impacts from illegal logging, we **strongly urge** that you:

- investigate the aggressive acts made against the *teleSUR* reporting team, including the threat of rape and death against journalist Rolanda de Jesús García, publish the results, and bring the perpetrators to justice
- guarantee protection for Rolanda de Jesús García, in strict accordance with her wishes, that will allow her to exercise her profession of journalism without coercion or restraints
- end the illegal logging being carried out by the construction of the Oxec hydroelectric project

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
 Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, 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

08/24/18_WHRD&Telesur_Guatemala

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