

via email: [mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com](mailto:mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com),  
**Sr. Óscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas**  
 Attorney General of Honduras

via email: [karlacueva144@gmail.com](mailto:karlacueva144@gmail.com)  
**Lica. Karla Cueva**  
 Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs

April 12, 2019

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are outraged at the most recent attack on human rights workers and their families in Honduras. This case is especially shameful as a 90-year-old woman was one of the victims.

**Hedme Castro** is a woman human rights defender and the director of Asociación para una Ciudadanía Participativa (ACI PARTICIPA). The organization promotes citizen participation in decision-making and the exercise of civil and political rights. It also pushes governmental institutions to act in accordance with the principles of social equality and transparency, in particular with reference to the administration of resources.

Around 7pm on the evening of April 6, uniformed members of the National Honduran Police arrived on motorcycles at the door of **Julia Vargas**, the 90-year-old mother of Hedme Castro, in the neighborhood of La Libertad of Choluteca. A police officer wearing a helmet launched a tear gas grenade to an area outside the front door, where Julia Vargas was sitting, in front of a number of witnesses. The elderly woman, who suffers from multiple health issues affecting her mobility and breathing, was almost hit by the grenade. The tear gas severely affected her breathing.

On the same evening, National Police officers appeared at the headquarters of the television channel Metro TV, where associates of ACI PARTICIPA work: Hedme Castro's sister **Elizabeth de López** and ACI PARTICIPA volunteer **Melissa Hernández**. Police threw a tear gas grenade into the building. Later, police fired tear gas at families with children playing at a softball camp in La Libertad; the tear gas released also impacted patients at the nearby Hospital del Sur.

These attacks appear to be in retaliation for the active environmental defense work of ACI PARTICIPA in Choluteca, where residents have been protesting government policies that open up land to extractive activities, such as mining. Demonstrations, which occur on Wednesdays and Saturdays, are sometimes met with police brutality. On April 6, however, instead of attacking the demonstrators, the police attacked Hedme Castro's home.

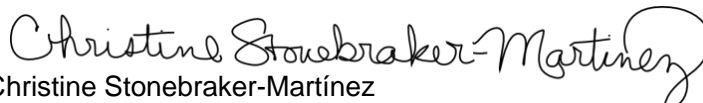
**We strongly urge you to:**

- condemn the reprisals against Hedme Castro and ACI PARTICIPA
- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the human rights violations committed by police against family members of Hedme Castro and persons associated with ACI PARTICIPA in Choluteca, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Hedme Castro, her family members, as well as members of ACI PARTICIPA, in consultation with them;

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-Coordinator



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Marlon R. Tábora Muñoz, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via website or fax, and US mail  
 Heide B. Fulton, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
 Jason Smith, Human Rights and Labor Representative, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
 David Tagle, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email  
 Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
 US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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