

via email: aberger@mingob.gob.gt <b>Sr. Enrique Antonio Degenhart Asturias</b> Minister of the Interior of Guatemala	via email: fiscalgeneralmp@gmail.com carrecis@mp.gob.gt <b>Lic. María Consuelo Porras Argueta</b> Attorney General of Guatemala
--	---

February 23, 2020

Dear Minister of the Interior and Attorney General:

We are deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of indigenous rights defender **Julio Gómez Lucas** whom police detained on January 26 in Chiantla, Huehuetenango Department. Accusations against him include incitement to commit crimes, participation in illegal gatherings of armed persons, protests, assault and attempted murder.

Julio Gómez Lucas, leader of the Maya Chuj community of San Mateo Ixtatán, is a member of Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis, an organization of indigenous communities formed in response to human rights violations by the hydroelectric company Energía y Renovación, S.A. (formerly known as PDH). The company's mining and hydroelectric projects are endangering the indigenous communities' access to land, water and freedom of movement. Members of the Peaceful Resistance often organize responses to human rights violations committed in the name of economic development.


On January 26, following gunshots heard in the area, Specialized Criminal Investigation Division (DEIC) agents of the National Police wanted to search Julio Gómez's vehicle. They detained Julio Gómez without showing an arrest warrant. The police presented him before a judge in Chiantla, who informed him that an arrest warrant had already been issued against him on June 19, 2018 by Judge Alberto Calmo Ramírez in Santa Eulalia municipality, Huehuetenango Department. At 4am, Julio Gómez Lucas was transferred to the Center for the Administration of Justice in Santa Eulalia. He was transferred back to the local prison in Huehuetenango on January 27.

Julio Gómez Lucas has previously been subjected to attacks as a result of his peaceful activities in defense of land, water, and indigenous communities. In February 2019, residents of the neighboring Tz'ununkab indigenous community kidnapped and tortured Julio Gómez and six members of his family in retaliation for his opposition to a local hydroelectric project. We believe that attacks on, detention of, and charges against Julio Gómez Lucas are in retaliation for his work in defense of indigenous rights and the environment.

Criminalizing the legitimate activities of indigenous environmental defenders must end. We **strongly urge** that you

- drop the charges against Julio Gómez Lucas and immediately release him from detention
- initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the false allegations made against Julio Gómez Lucas, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the protection of the members of the Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis, in strict accordance with their wishes
- ensure that all human rights defenders are able to conduct their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities without restrictions and free from harassment, threats, and retaliation.

Sincerely,

  
 Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-coordinators

  
 Christine Stonebraker Martinez

copies: Manuel Alfredo Espina Pinto, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ via website, email, US mail  
 Luis E. Arreaga Rodas, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of human rights officer Rain Bian ~ via email  
 Steven Kenoyer, 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  
 NISGUA ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
 US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

01/28/20\_FrontlineDefenders\_Guatemala

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