

via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com ngosorto@gmail.com
Oscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas
Attorney General of Honduras

via email: karlacueva144@gmail.com
Lica. Karla Cueva
Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs

April 3, 2020

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are writing to express our outrage over the forced eviction of the campesino cooperative *Cerro Escondido*. Private security guards working for *Empresa Azucarera La Grecia* (La Grecia Sugar Mill), together with personnel of the private security company CRAE's, launched the attack against the campesinos in the Los Chanchos community, Monjarás sector of Marcovía municipality, Choluteca Department, on April 2. Land defender **Iris Argentina Álvarez Chávez**, age 52, was killed.

Witnesses report that the incident started around 4:00am. Several individuals identified as sugar mill personnel, with machetes in hand, threatened campesino residents and set fire to several houses. At around 2:00pm, the security guards used more violent repression: they started shooting gunfire indiscriminately at the residents who were trying to defend themselves with sticks and stones.

Human rights observers were notified and arrived on the scene, discovering that some community members had already been injured. They asked security guards to lower their weapons so that they could talk. The security guards, however, ignored them and again opened fire. This time, one of the bullets hit Iris Argentina Álvarez Chávez; her husband **Jacinto Avila** and two other residents were also wounded.


In a desperate attempt to transport Argentina Álvarez Chávez to a hospital, human rights observers and residents quickly placed her in a pick-up truck. As they tried to drive away, security guards opened gunfire at the vehicle. Inside the vehicle, human rights lawyer Ely Portillo tried to call an ambulance and the *Dirección Policial de Investigaciones* (DPI police), but got no response. A bullet passed near Ely Portillo's ear; another grazed his arm. When they arrived at the *Hospital Regional del Sur*, medical staff pronounced Argentina Álvarez Chávez dead.

Last year the campesino families of *Cerro Escondido* settled on this section of 20 manzanas of state-owned land to raise basic food staples for themselves. *Empresa Azucarera La Grecia* claims the land for itself. The dispute over land rights and ownership is currently in the court system. *Empresa Azucarera La Grecia* had no judicial warrant to evict the campesino families. Despite the lack of a legal warrant, the police cordoned off the nearby highway and stood by, allowing the security guards from CRAE's and *La Grecia* to forcibly evict the campesino families.

We strongly urge you to:

- conduct a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation into the forced eviction of Cerro Escondido that resulted in the killing of Iris Argentina Álvarez Chávez and the wounding of at least three others, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- guarantee that the families of Cerro Escondido be allowed to return to their land and homes while the land dispute is litigated in the courts, and ensure they are compensated for the economic losses they incurred on April 2
- adopt and enforce effective measures against forced evictions, in alignment with international norms

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: María Dolores Agüero, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via website or fax, and US mail
Colleen Hoey, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email
Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer at the 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 and US mail
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
PasosDeAnimalGrande ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, González, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

04/02/20_PasosDeAnimalGrande_Honduras

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