

via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com, ngosorto@gmail.com Óscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas Attorney General of Honduras	via email: karlacueva144@gmail.com, karen.lagos@sedh.gob.hn Lica. Karla Eugenia Cueva Aguilar Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs
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October 1, 2020

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are outraged at the assassination of journalist **Luis Almendares**, age 35, on September 27 in the city of Comayagua in Comayagua Department. He was getting out of his car to go into a store for groceries when two men, wearing hoods, drove up on a motorcycle, shot him repeatedly, and fled. Luis Almendares began taping the scene of the attack with his cellphone. He died the next day at a hospital in Tegucigalpa.

Luis Almendares was an independent journalist who had previously worked for Radio Globo and TV Azteca before starting his own social media channel, called Periodista504, which has more than 25,000 followers on Facebook. On Periodista504 he published information about corruption by local elected officials in Comayagua and violence committed by the police. Recently, several members of the Comayagua Chamber of Commerce were pressuring him to reveal his sources for an article he published revealing compromising information about the Chamber. Three days before he was assassinated, he had released a video in which a police vehicle can be seen opening fire in the middle of the night against the facade of a building, then fleeing.

The Honduran Press Association (APH, Asociación de Prensa Hondureña) has affirmed that "the problems of the press in Honduras begin with reports of journalistic investigations into corruption of officials or the political class." Journalists are intimidated, harassed, threatened, and killed because of their work. World Press Freedom Index 2020 (published by Reporters Without Borders, RSF) ranks Honduras 148th out of 180 countries. Luis Almendares had been filing complaints about receiving death threats with the police and the National Protection System (SNP, Sistema Nacional de Protección).

Currently 44 journalists receive protection from the SNP, which was set up in 2015 in response to concerns expressed by the Organization of American States and the UN over the high number of killings involving human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists. The Honduran Association of Journalists (CPH, Colegio de Periodistas de Honduras), however, is withdrawing its participation in the SNP because "the government has let this system go off course by giving it neither logistical nor financial means," said Dagoberto Rodríguez, president of the CPH.

Luis Almendares is at least the third journalist to be assassinated in Honduras in 2020, and at least the 85th since 2001. The National Human Rights Commission of Honduras (CONADEH) reports an impunity rate of 91% for the murders of journalists. This impunity encourages more aggression, such as police beatings of journalists and destruction of the equipment (cf our letter April 4, 2020). We, therefore, strongly urge that you

- conduct an independent, prompt, effective and impartial investigation into the killing of Luis Almendares, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- provide all necessary support, including financial, to the National Protection System (SNP) so as to ensure adequate protection and freedom of all Honduran journalists in carrying out their work.

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator


 Christine L. Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Dr. Roberto Herrera Cáceres, National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras (CONADEH) ~ via email
 Luis Suazo Barahona, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via email and US mail
 Isabel Albaladejo Escribano, Representante de País a la Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Honduras ~ via email
 Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
 Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
 Carlos Rubén Ortiz, President of APH (Asociación de Prensa Hondureña) ~ via email
 Dagoberto Rodríguez, President of CPH (Colegio de Periodistas de Honduras) ~ via email
 RSF: Reporteros Sin Fronteras ~ via email
 C-Libre: Comité por la Libre Expresión ~ via email
 Natalie Southwick, Committee to Protect Journalists, Central & South America Program Coordinator ~ via email
 US Embassy in Honduras: Colleen Hoey, Chargé d'Affaires; Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer ~ via email
 David Tagle, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, González, 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: