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| via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com , ngosorto@gmail.com Oscar 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 23, 2020

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are outraged at the assassination of environmental defender **Arnold Joaquin Morazán Erazo** in the municipality of Tocoa, Colón Department. The night of October 13 two unidentified men on motorcycles entered Arnold Morazán's home and shot him several times. He later died of his injuries.

Arnold Morazán was one of 32 environmental defenders in Tocoa who have been criminalized for their involvement in a community camp set up to defend the Guapinol River from the mining industry. He actively participated in the Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Goods (CMDBCP), which include several organizations defending land and environmental rights. This Committee is part of the resistance movement against the iron ore mining project owned by Inversiones los Pinares Companies (cf our letters of Aug 25, 2020, and Oct 23, Nov 11, Nov 23, and Nov 26, 2018).


A few days before Arnold Morazán's death, the CMDBCP of Tocoa publicly denounced an intimidating increase in military and police surveillance in Guapinol. After his murder, the CMDBCP was subjected to defamation campaigns and numerous false rumors that were posted on social media blaming them for the killing and insecurity in the area. The smear campaigns are intended to undermine the CMDBCP's legitimate resistance against mining in the Carlos Escaleras National Park, sowing fear and distrust and seeking to break the social fabric of the community.

Since September 2019, eight Guapinol defenders have been arbitrarily detained in the Olanchito and La Ceiba Penal Centers for the crimes of "aggravated arson" and "unjust deprivation of liberty." The use of preventive detention against them is a reflection of the misuse of criminal law which aims to inhibit and criminalize the work of human rights defenders who exercise their right to defend their territory in Honduras. The murder of Arnold Joaquín Morazán occurred at a decisive moment in the ongoing trial of Guapinol human rights defenders and reveals the systematic threats faced by the Guapinol community, where violence is employed to punish their work in defense of water and the environment. Threats and killings of members of the CMDBCP, such as the killing of Roberto Antonio Argueta in August 2019, have not been properly investigated by the authorities, leaving the perpetrators to enjoy impunity.

We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an exhaustive and impartial investigation into the murder of Arnold Joaquín Morazán, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice
- take all the measures necessary to guarantee the integrity and safety of the members of the Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Goods (CMDBCP), in accordance with their wishes
- cancel the concession to the mining company Los Inversiones Los Pinares because its operations are contaminating the Guapinol and San Pedro Rivers, which supply drinking water to fourteen surrounding communities, and because the mine is creating social division in the local communities

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator


 Christine 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
 Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
 Isabel Albaladejo Escribano, Representative to Honduras of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) ~ via email
 COFADEH: Committee of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras ~ via email
 HSN: Honduras Solidarity Network ~ via email
 Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective – Honduras Team ~ 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

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