

via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com, gosorto@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

December 29, 2020

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are writing to express our great sadness and outrage over the assassination of Lenca indigenous leader **Félix Vásquez** at his home in the village of Ocotal, in Santiago de Puringla, La Paz Department on December 26. At about 8:30pm, four men in balaclavas entered his home armed with a 9mm pistol and machetes. They shot and killed Félix Vásquez in front of his adult children, whom they beat and threatened.

Félix Vásquez, age 60 and a recent widower, was the Secretary General of the Union of Rural Workers (UTC) in La Paz. He was also a pre-candidate for Congress for the Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE) party. His motivation to enter electoral politics was prompted by the encroachment of big landowners in natural reserve areas.

Félix Vásquez was well-known nationally for his work in defense of indigenous land rights (since the 1980s) and for organizing opposition to environmentally destructive megaprojects such as mines, hydroelectric dams, wind farms and logging, as well as for helping dispossessed communities recover ancestral land titles. He suffered repercussions due to his work; he had been filing complaints with national authorities for the past three years about specific incidents of persecution, including death threats. Nonetheless, he persisted in his activism. On December 16, he was among those who supported a public demonstration demanding the release of indigenous leader Víctor Vásquez, who was jailed for accompanying other indigenous leaders in defense of their territory. In the afternoon of December 26, he participated in a meeting with the coffee growers association *Fondo Cafetero*.

Four years after the high profile assassination of indigenous and environmental defender Berta Cáceres, we are deeply troubled that Honduras remains one of the most dangerous places on Earth for environmental defenders. According to the London-based NGO Global Witness, Honduras was the most dangerous country per capita for land and environmental defenders in 2019. Organized campaigns of intimidation are designed to silence environmental defenders like Félix Vásquez and stop their resistance to projects that exploit and destroy natural resources. We understand that in La Paz Department alone, at least 40 megaprojects have been sanctioned on indigenous territory without consulting local communities.

**We strongly urge you to:**

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination of Félix Vásquez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- pay close attention to complaints filed with authorities by indigenous and environmental defenders, and provide them with protection mechanisms, in strict accordance with their wishes

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

  
Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Blanca Sarai Izaguirre Lozano, 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 García, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
Antonia Urrejola, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 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  
HSN: Honduras Solidarity Network ~ via email  
Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective – Honduras Team ~ via email  
UTC-La Paz: La Unión de Empresas y Organizaciones de Trabajadores del Campo, Regional Indígena y Campesina La Paz ~ via email  
COPINH: Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras ~ via email  
US Embassy in Honduras: Colleen Hoey, Chargé d’Affaires; Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer ~ via email  
Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email  
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
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:**