

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras	Lica. Karla Eugenia Cueva Aguilar Secretary for Human Rights of Honduras
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August 1, 2021

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre and Secretary Cueva:

We are deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of environmental defender **Olga Velázquez**. At approximately 8:00pm on July 28, five men dressed in Preventive Police uniforms arrived at her house in Cedros municipality, Francisco Morazán Department. They did not arrive in a police patrol car; instead, they were riding in a Hilux car, gray color, with license plate 04919. (Olga Velázquez had noticed a similar car parked in front of her house a few days prior.) Without confirming identification or justification, three of the men entered her house. She was puzzled when the men asked her where the local Catholic Church was located.

Olga Velázquez has been an environmental defender for many years. As a member of the Environmental Committee of the Siria Valley, she helped to lead the historic fight against gold mining at the San Martín mine. Mining exploitation, which was in operation 2000-2008, contaminated the sources of drinking water that originate in the highlands of Cedros. Blood samples from Siria Valley residents revealed concentrations of harmful heavy metals: cyanide, lead, mercury, and arsenic. Then owned by the Canadian mining company Goldcorp, the company has since merged with Newmont, the world's largest mining company, based in Greenwood Village, Colorado, United States.

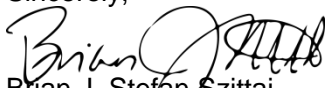
The Environmental Committee of the Siria Valley has participated in international forums of environmental defenders to exchange documented information on the damages caused by Goldcorp's mining operations in Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. The Committee has also provided leadership to local organized resistance movements against mining throughout Honduras. They have denounced the granting of mining permits to national and foreign investors who profit at the expense of natural resources and health of local communities. In Cedros municipality, where Olga Velázquez resides, environmental defense is being re-ignited due to the reactivation of a barite mine in Montañita village. (Barite is used to make plastics, as poison to kill rodents, and as an additive for making paints.)

Members of the Environmental Committee of the Siria Valley live with constant threat. Two years ago, Olga Velázquez gave testimony to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), that she was being subjected to intimidation and surveillance by strange men at night. Around the same time, in June 2019, Santos Isidro Cruz, the spokesperson for the Environmental Committee of the Siria Valley, was shot three times and killed; he, too, was from Cedros municipality.

We urge that you:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the invasion of the home of Olga Velázquez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- provide any protection measures requested by Olga Velázquez and other members of the Environmental Committee of the Siria Valley, in strict accordance with their wishes

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator


 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Oscar Chinchilla Banegas, Attorney General ~ via email
 Luis Fernando 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
 Isabel Albaladejo Escibano, Representative to Honduras of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) ~ via email
 US Embassy in Honduras: Colleen Hoey, Chargé d'Affaires; Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer ~ via email
 US State Dept: Honduras Desk ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, 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: