

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 15, 2021

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre and Secretary Cueva:

We are writing with great concern about the level of violence against (and criminalization of) land defenders in the Bajo Aguán Valley of Colón Department. Assassinated in recent weeks were: **Santos Marcelo Torres**, former member of the campesino organization *Movimiento Campesino Fundación Gregorio Chávez* (MCRCG, also known as “Gregorio Chávez”) (June 26, 2021) and **Juan Manuel Moncada**, a recent leader of “Gregorio Chávez” (July 6, 2021). Falsely criminalized are: **Jaime Adali Cabrera del Cid** and **Hipólito Rivas**; both are current leaders of “Gregorio Chávez.”


The Coordinator of Popular Organizations of Aguán (COPA) has recently spoken out against the wave of criminalization and prosecution of land defenders in the Bajo Aguán Valley. We join COPA in denouncing the Technical Agency for Criminal Investigations (ATIC) for using bribes to get witnesses to present and sustain false criminal accusations against Jaime Cabrera and Hipólito Rivas. The Bajo Aguán Violent Death Unit (UMVIBA) and the ATIC continually harass human rights defenders under the guise of investigative proceedings. For example, they have seized telephones and conducted interrogations without presenting the necessary court orders.

Long-standing land conflicts between campesinos and businesspersons in the Bajo Aguán have placed campesino leaders at serious risk for many years. In May 2014, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted Precautionary Measure 50-14 to 123 campesino leaders in the area, including members of “Gregorio Chávez.” According to a network of national and international organizations monitoring the situation, more than 100 campesinos had already been killed in the Bajo Aguán in the four years leading up to the issuing of these Precautionary Measures by the IACHR.

We strongly urge you to:

- carry out thorough and transparent investigations into the killings of Santos Marcelo Torres and Juan Manuel Moncada, publish the results, and bring the perpetrators to justice
- effectively implement the IACHR Precautionary Measures for Jaime Cabrera and Hipólito Rivas, in strict accordance with their wishes
- instruct the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP) to stop making statements that stigmatize and falsely accuse the land defenders in the Bajo Aguán
- capture, as soon as possible, members of the paramilitary groups operating in the Bajo Aguán, as denounced by land defenders before the Public Prosecutor of the Republic on June 25, 2019.

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 Escribano, Representative to Honduras of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) ~ via email
 Coalición Contra La Impunidad Honduras ~ via email
 CESPAD: Centro de Estudio para la Democracia ~ 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

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