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| 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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October 12, 2021

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre and Secretary Cueva:

We are saddened and outraged to learn of the assassination of **Óscar Javier Pérez**, a former member of the campesino organization Empresa Asociativa Campesina “El Chile.” He was riddled with bullets on October 10 at 8pm at his home in the community of Quebradas de la Arena, Tocoa, Colón Department.

In October 2016, Óscar Javier Pérez was an eyewitness to the assassinations of José Ángel Flores, president of MUCA (Unified Campesino Movement of the Aguán Valley) and Silmer Dionisio George, also a leader of MUCA (cf our letter October 25, 2016). On September 20, 2020, one of the murderers of José Ángel Flores and Silmer Dionisio George was captured. A motivation for the killing of Óscar Javier Pérez could be to silence him from giving testimony at an upcoming court trial.

Although Óscar Javier Pérez had been a member of Empresa Asociativa Campesina “El Chile” since its founding in 2009, he was forced to leave in 2016 because of threats he received in retaliation for testifying against those responsible for the assassinations. When he returned to Quebradas de la Arena in 2018, he did not rejoin Empresa Asociativa Campesina “El Chile” because of the threats against him. Instead, he worked as a bricklayer and had a small business with his wife selling food.

For the past decade, campesino rights organizations in the Aguán Valley have denounced the assassinations of their leaders and members. They point to the presence of armed paramilitary groups created to sow terror in the area. These groups are protected by the police and the army who are aware of their existence and allow them to operate unrestricted. Because of the number of killings, disappearances, kidnappings, instances of torture, threats, forced evictions, persecution and stigmatization against members of land rights organizations in the Aguán Valley, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted precautionary measures on May 8, 2014 to 123 land rights defenders in the Aguán Valley, including members of MUCA. The beneficiaries of this measure (MEDIDA CAUTELAR No. 50-14) complain about the lack of adequate implementation and the risk they run because it is implemented by the National Police, which has been denounced for colluding with landowners who try to forcibly expel campesinos off their farmlands.

We condemn the killing of Óscar Javier Pérez and **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation into the killing of Óscar Javier Pérez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the security of land rights defenders in the Aguán Valley, complying with MEDIDA CAUTELAR No. 50-14 prescribed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai and
 Co-Coordinator


 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Oscar Chinchilla Banegas, Attorney General of Honduras ~ 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
 Isabel Albaladejo Escribano, Representative to Honduras of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) ~ via email
 Alice Shackelford, UN Resident Coordinator in Honduras, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
 US Embassy in Honduras: Colleen Hoey, Chargé d’Affaires; Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer; Ariel Jahner, Human Rights Officer ~ via email
 US State Department: Molly Runyon, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
 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: