

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America

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Lica. María Consuelo Porras Argueta
Attorney General of Guatemala
via email: fiscalgeneralmp@gmail.com

November 22, 2021

Dear Attorney General Porras:

We are outraged that on November 16 the **Guatemalan National Police (PNC) forcibly evicted 96 Maya Q'eqchi' families from Chinebal**, in the southern region of El Estor municipality, Izabal Department, which has been under a government-declared state of siege since October 23. The Maya Q'eqchi' families of Chinebal have resided and farmed on this land at the foot of the Sierra de las Minas mountain range since the 1940s.

The eviction stemmed from a longstanding land dispute over rightful ownership of the Palestina Chinebal farm. Businessman Juan Maegli leases portions of the land to the NaturAceites company to grow African palm trees for palm oil production. Community members have complained for several years that workers of the Naturaceites palm company constantly harass them, accusing them of usurping land.

This is not the first time the government has sided with Juan Maegli. In October 2020, 300 agents of the PNC used tear gas and firearms to evict the families. One resident, **José Choc Chaman**, was killed in the violence. In July 2021, 115 PNC agents surrounded Chinebal again, accompanied by nine army trucks. The human rights ombudsman was present and managed to establish a dialogue between the parties to prevent the eviction. On October 6, hundreds of PNC agents arrived once again with high-caliber weapons, but they left after a standoff with the community. They returned on November 16 with heavy machinery and bulldozed homes, burning families' personal belongings as well. At least one resident, **Irma Yolanda Choc Maquín**, was arrested while trying to defend her home, leaving her five-year-old daughter in police custody.

We urge that the government of Guatemala:

- stop its repressive policies against the Maya Q'eqchi' families of Chinebal
- create a dialogue with community members to ensure their ability to live peacefully on the land they have farmed for the past 80 years
- regulate the expansion of the African palm industry, which now covers 9% of arable land in Izabal

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators



Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Guillermo Castillo Reyes, Vice-President of Guatemala ~ via email
Alfonso José Quiñónez Lemus, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ email, US mail
Augusto Jordán Rodas Andrade, Prosecutor for Human Rights (PDH) ~ via email
IACHR: Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
OACNUDH: Mika Kanervavuori, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (OACNUDH) ~ via email
US State Department: Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC: Bria Mathews, Moises Mendoza ~ via email
US State Department: William Popp, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of human rights officer Sarahann Yeh ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

16 NOV 2021_CHRC-USA_Guatemala

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