

<b>Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano</b> National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras (CONADEH)	<b>Rosa Seaman</b> Vice-Minister for Protection Secretariat for Human Rights (SEDH)
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March 24, 2022

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre and Vice-Minister Seaman:

We are deeply shocked and saddened about the murder of land rights defender **Francisco Ruiz**, who died in the hospital the day after he suffered a gun attack on March 8 in the village of La Brea, in the municipality of Trujillo, Colón Department.


Francisco Ruiz was a campesino leader of the Coordinating Body of Popular Organizations of the Aguán (Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguán, COPA). He was recognized by COPA and by the Regional Agrarian Platform of the Aguán Valley as a human rights defender supporting subsistence economic activities of the El Remolino cooperative. Ruiz had received threats a few days before the attack by employees of a security company in the area for his work in defending human rights and the lands of his community.

There have been several previous attacks on people of the El Remolino cooperative and members of COPA, including forced evictions, unjust criminalization, and assassinations. In late October of 2016, Fernando Aleman Banegas, son of the president of COPA Elsy Banegas, was shot and killed in Atlántida Department, threatening Elsy Banegas' candidacy for the Libre Party at that time. COPA reported back then that Banegas had received death threats several times for his outspokenness against mining companies. And just as recent as December of last year, we wrote a letter to authorities in Honduras expressing our concerns about the illegal evictions of several campesino cooperatives in Colón Department, displacing hundreds of families from those cooperatives (cf our letter of December 15, 2021).

We highly condemn these violent acts of repression against human rights defenders and campesino cooperatives and are concerned about the safety of other members of COPA and the El Remolino cooperative. Therefore, we call upon your humanity and integrity and strongly urge you to take the following actions:

- exhaustingly and transparently investigate the murder of Francisco Ruiz and hold those responsible accountable for their actions
- impose the safety measures necessary to protect COPA members and other human rights defenders in the department of Colón, in strict accordance with their wishes

Sincerely,

  
 Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-Coordinator

  
 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Luis Suazo Barahona, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via email and US mail  
 Carlos Bernal Pulido, 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 and US Representatives Beatty, Brown, 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:**