

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America
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Lic. Augusto Jordán Rodas Andrade
Chief Attorney for Human Rights of Guatemala
Via email: denuncias@pdh.org.gt

May 22, 2022

Dear Procurador Rodas Andrade:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are deeply distressed over the kidnapping and death threat against Indigenous Maya environmental defender **Adela Choc Cuz**. At 3:00am on May 16, more than 70 residents of Chichipate in El Estor, Izabal Department, kidnapped Adela Choc. Accusing her of witchcraft, the assailants covered her with gasoline and threatened to burn her alive. They burned down her home while she watched, and held her for hours, threatening to kill her.

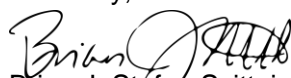
Adela Choc Cuz, a 68 year-old member of the Ancestral Council of Maya Q'eqchi' and well-respected spiritual guide, is active in the organized resistance against the El Fénix nickel mine in El Estor, Izabal Department, whose population is 90% Maya Maya Q'eqchi'. The mining operations are contaminating Lake Izabal and other local water sources, threatening fishers' main source of income. Many of those active in the resistance have been victims of land grabbing, arson, and repression. Although the violence inflicted on Adela Choc on May 16 might appear to be the result of an interpersonal dispute, investigators of the crime must take into account the larger political context. In October 2021, Adela Choc Cuz spoke against the El Fénix mine on the evangelical Christian radio station La Voz de Chichipate, owned by Selvin Pec.

After his daughter recently became ill, Mario Antonio Caal Pec (the brother of Selvin Pec), spread accusations of witchcraft against Adela Choc Cuz. He and his church members are linked to the pro-mining organization Community Councils for Urban and Rural Development's (COCODE). During the attack at her home on May 16, the crowd burned her land deed and five thousand quetzales in cash. She escaped to take refuge in home of her son-in-law José Francisco Caal, but the crowd followed, throwing stones, and eventually kidnapped her and her daughter **Sandra Tec Choc**. Family members of Mario Antonio Caal Pec beat her and then set her house on fire. While holding the mother and daughter in captivity in the Caal Pec home without food or water and demanding a ransom of 27,000 quetzales, the assailants threatened to decapitate Adela Choc. Fifteen members of COCODE were at the house when the women were finally released after 18 hours.

Because we are deeply concerned by the repeated violence and death threats against Adela Choc Cuz and her family and the continued impunity of the members of COCODE and the Caal Pec family, we urge authorities to:

- carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into the violence against Adela Choc Cuz and her family, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice, in accordance with international standards
- consult with Adela Choc Cuz and her family members to implement security measures for them
- protect the rights of Indigenous peoples to follow their ancestral spiritual practices, as guaranteed in article 66 of the Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators


Christine Stonebraker Martinez

copies: Sr. Guillermo Castillo Reyes, Vicepresidente de Guatemala ~ via email
Lica. María Consuelo Porras Argueta, Attorney General of Guatemala ~ via email
Humberto Matheus, Director General of the Guatemalan Nickel Company (Compañía Guatemalteca de Níquel, CGN) ~ via email
Alfonso José Quiñónez Lemus, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ email, US mail
IACHR: Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
OACNUDH: Mika Kanervuori, 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 Embassy: William Popp, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of human rights officer Sarahann Yeh ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Gibbs, Gonzalez, 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: