

<p>Juzgado de Paz de Victoria, Cabañas Calle Nueva No. 21 Ciudad Victoria, Cabañas via email and US mail</p>	<p>José Apolonio Tobar Serrano Procurador para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos Human Rights Ombudsman of El Salvador via email</p>
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Referencia fiscal: 14-UIDCA-2022 y Referencia judicial: 2-2023

January 12, 2023

Dear Justice of the Peace and Human Rights Ombudsman:

We join with civil society organizations of the Salvadoran social movement demanding the immediate release of the five community leaders of Santa Marta, Cabañas Department, who were arrested on January 11.

In the early morning hours of January 11, at the order of the Salvadoran Attorney General, police arrested five prominent water defenders. In Santa Marta, municipality of Victoria: **Miguel Ángel Gámez, Alejandro Laínez García, Pedro Antonio Rivas Laínez**. In a simultaneous operation in the municipality of Guacotecti: **Teodoro Antonio Pacheco** (also known as Chico Montes), who is the director of ADES (Association for Social-Economic Development of El Salvador), and **Saúl Agustín Rivas Ortega**, the legal advisor of ADES.


The arrests appear to be politically motivated. These individuals are active in the National Roundtable on Metallic Mining and were among the leaders of the successful campaign that convinced the Salvadoran legislature to unanimously pass a ban on open-pit mining of metals in 2017 to save the nation's rivers. Now, under enormous pressure to find new sources of revenue, the government is reportedly considering overturning the historic ban on metallic mining.

The five are accused by the attorney general of an alleged murder over 30 years ago during the brutal civil war. We are not opposed to investigating crimes committed during the civil war. In fact, for the past four decades we have advocated for the true application of justice for the victims of human rights abuses and their perpetrators during the war years. The criminalization of these community leaders, however, does not appear to be a genuine attempt at justice. It appears to be an act of political vengeance. For months, the government has led a state offensive against civil society organizations, which, in the case of ADES, could be related to the current administration's intentions to resume mining exploitation projects.

We condemn these arrests and strongly urge you to:

- immediately release the five community leaders named above
- ensure transparent judicial proceedings that are carried out outside the provisions of the current State of Exception
- call for the upholding of the Law for the Prohibition of Metal Mining, a regulation that resulted from a broad national consensus against large-scale, industrial mining

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Rodolfo Delgado, Fiscal General de la República de El Salvador ~ via email and US mail
Sr. Presidente Nayib Bukele, Presidente de la República ~ via email and US mail
Carmen Milena Mayorga de Monterrosa, Ambassador of El Salvador in Washington, DC ~ via email & US mail
Julissa Mantilla Falcón, Rapporteur for El Salvador, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email & US mail
Katherine Duffy Dueholm, Charge d'Affaires ad interim of the United States Embassy in San Salvador ~ via email & US mail
US State Department: Lisa Spink at the El Salvador Desk ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives Balderson, Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

12 JAN 2023_CISPES_El Salvador

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