

# IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America  
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Sr. Ministro Erick Tejada Carbajal  
Secretaría de Energía de Honduras (SEN)  
Colonia Tepeyac, calle Yoro, bloque Q S1  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

March 22, 2023

Dear Minister Tejada:

We are writing to you in deep anger and distress over the assassination of yet another environmental rights defender, **Benigno Maldonado**, in the Pajuiles sector of Tela, Atlántida Department. On February 18, he became the eighth environmental defender killed in Honduras this year.

Since 2017, we have written letters to your government about the controversial construction of a hydroelectric dam near Pajuiles by HIDROCEP (Empresa Hidroeléctrica Centrales El Progreso), which is owned by Honduran businessman Jason Hawit. Construction has contaminated the Mezapa River, the primary source of drinking water for Pajuiles and surrounding communities. Local residents have been suffering from illness and skin rashes. Once construction is completed, HIDROCEP will deprive 30,000 people of clean water.

As a member of the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ), Benigno Maldonado was involved in the organization of the Dignified Camp for the Defense of Water and Life (*Campamento Digno por el Agua y la Vida*) in efforts to defend his community's access to clean drinking water. Over the last six years, we have observed, with concern, the violent repression against the Pajuiles community by Military Police, special command squads, and the hydroelectric company itself—all in response to the community's nonviolent resistance to the dam project. Dozens of peaceful land and water defenders have been criminalized, and some killed.

This continued violence against environmental defenders in Honduras is unacceptable. We highly condemn these crimes and strongly urge you to:

- thoroughly investigate the murder of Benigno Maldonado in an impartial and independent manner, and hold accountable those responsible for his assassination
- employ protection measures for water defenders in Atlántida, in strict accordance with their wishes
- immediately prohibit any further construction work by HIDROCEP in Pajuiles, until a mutual agreement between the company and the local community has been reached
- review the conditions under which the hydroelectric company is operating and renegotiate the dam project in accordance with the rights and demands of the local community
- ensure that the Honduran energy model is reformed so that it respects popular sovereignty and the State itself above any private interests

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinators



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Blanca Sarai Izaguirre Lozano, National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH: Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos) ~ via email  
Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC c/o Alejandra Sandoval Taixes ~ via email and US mail  
Carlos Pulido, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ 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: Ambassador Laura F. Dogu and Human Rights Officer ~ via email  
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email  
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email  
US Representatives Balderson, Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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