

Dr. Ramiro Alejandro Contreras Escobar, Executive Director
Comision Presidencial por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos (COPADEH)
Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights
13 calle 15-38, zona 13
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

May 23, 2023

Dear Dr. Contreras:

We write to you with deep concern about the arbitrary arrest and detention of three residents of Laguna Larga, a community that was displaced from El Petén six years and forced to live along the Guatemala-Mexico border.

On April 21, Guatemalan security forces from the Nature Protection Division (DIPRONA), National Civil Police (PNC), National Council for Protected Areas, and the National Army forcefully apprehended **Melvyn Geovanni Pérez Muralles** (age 26), **René Gutiérrez González** (age 31), and one **unnamed boy** with the initials LRGB (age 11) while they were tending to their crops along the Mexican border. Witnesses reported that a PNC agent held the eleven-year-old upside down and shook him violently. The agents transported the three to San Andrés, El Petén Department, to be seen before a judge, but we have not heard any news about the hearing or whether the three remain in detention.


We previously wrote to officials in Guatemala (cf our letter June 21, 2017) about our concern for the hundreds of displaced residents of Laguna Larga, El Petén Department, who became stranded at the Mexico-Guatemala border in temporary shelters and tents. The displacement was the result of a massive eviction carried out by more than 1,000 Guatemalan security forces, following a court order from a judge in San Andrés, El Petén. The eviction order was issued in the context of a long-standing land tenure dispute in the Laguna del Tigre National Park, which was created in 1989-90. The farming families arrived there in the 1970s as part of a state-promoted relocation program; they did not learn that they were living inside a national park until the end of the armed conflict in 1996. Since then, several farmers have been accused of usurpation or land invasions. Oil extraction, which began in 1985 inside what is now the park, complicates the issue. The Perenco company acquired the wells in 2001 and continues drilling.

As a result of international solidarity efforts, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR) ordered protective measures (Medida Cautelar 412-17) for the displaced community of Laguna Larga on September 8, 2017. The National Commission of Human Rights of Mexico (CNDH) also ordered protective measures.

We urge that authorities in Guatemala:

- immediately release the two men and one child who were detained on April 21 and guarantee them due process
- investigate the apprehension and detention that occurred on April 21 with a focus on abuse of authority
- exercise the obligation to uphold the protective measures granted by IACHR and CNDH
- offer a viable relocation to the families of Laguna Larga who were displaced six years ago

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators


Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Licda. María Consuelo Porras Argueta, Attorney General / Fiscal General de la República ~ via email
Lic. José Alejandro Córdoba, Procurador de Derechos Humanos/Human Rights Ombudsman ~ 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 Kanervavuori, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (OACNUDH) ~ via email
US State Department: William Popp, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via email
US State Department: Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC: Doug Choi, Moises Mendoza ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance and 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: