

Blanca Saraí Izaguirre Lozano
National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH)
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

January 27, 2024

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We urge that the State of Honduras respect the decision of the people of Tocoa (Colón Department) validly expressed at an assembly of more than 2,000 people on December 9, 2023. At the public gathering called by the Municipal Committee in Defense of the Common and Public Goods of Tocoa (CMDBCPT), residents flatly rejected projects that are threatening the environment, particularly their drinking water, by the companies Emco Holdings, Inversiones Los Pinares, and Ecotek (all three have interlocking ownership). The process was supervised by municipal councilors and the minutes were notarized.


Emco Holdings is proposing to burn petroleum coke, which is highly polluting to human health and the environment, for thermal electric generation. It is of deep concern that, according to an opinion issued on April 23, 2023 by SERNA's Center for Contaminant Studies and Control (CESCO), the burning of petroleum coke is not currently regulated in Honduras. While local and state authorities are promoting the project as a way to alleviate the electricity problem in Tocoa, it appears that most of the electrical generation is destined to the company's plant to pelletize the iron oxide it extracts from the Carlos Escaleras National Park, according to an environmental impact assessment that Ecotek submitted to the Secretariat of Natural Resources (SERNA/MiAmbiente).

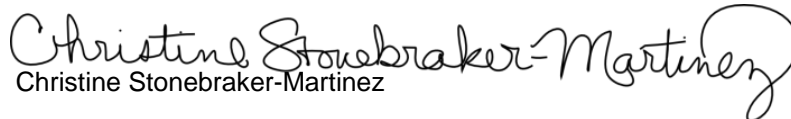
For more than seven years, the CMDBCPT has publicly denounced the illegalities, human rights violations and environmental contamination related to the mega-projects being proposed and constructed by Emco, Ecotek and Inversiones Los Pinares. Several members of the CMDBCPT have been victims of arbitrary detentions, assassinations, threats, forced displacements and smear campaigns aimed at silencing their dignified struggle for life and the protection of the forests and rivers of the Montaña de Botaderos "Carlos Escaleras" National Park. Residents are worried. Last year, there was a blood bath of assassinations of land and water defenders in the Aguán Valley.

We urge that the government of Honduras respect and implement the demands of the popular assembly:

- the immediate and unconditional cancellation of the Emco Holdings megaproject, including the ASP and ASP2 mining concessions of Inversiones Los Pinares; the petroleum coke thermoelectric plant and the Ecotek pelletizing plant concession; the concessions for the use of water from the Guapinol, San Pedro and La Ceibita rivers.
- the immediate and comprehensive protection of the members of the CMDBCPT, their legal teams and their families through measures adopted by the State in consensus with the defenders
- the investigation of the criminal and administrative complaints filed by the CMDBCPT in order to bring to trial and sanction those responsible for the illegalities related to the extractive project and the threats and stigmatization campaigns against the defenders of the CMDBCPT
- the independent investigation, prosecution and punishment of those materially and intellectually responsible for the murders of Jairo Bonilla, Aly Domínguez and Oqueli Domínguez
- the reparation of damages, both to the victims of the persecution by Emco and the State of Honduras, as well as to the core zone of the Carlos Escaleras National Park

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ via email and US mail
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Rapporteurs Andrea Pochak (for Honduras), Pedro Vaca Villarreal (Freedom of Expression) ~ 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 Tegucigalpa: Laura F. Dogu (ambassador) and Joe Duran, Human Rights Officer ~ via email
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer (Washington, DC)
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

19 JAN 2024_Guapinol/Resiste_Honduras

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