

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

February 13, 2024

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We urge that the State of Honduras end the persecution of land, environmental, and human rights defenders in the Aguán Valley of northern Honduras.

On January 28, the police of Tocoa, Colón Department, illegally detained defender **Carlos Leonel George**, while he was filing a complaint about an attack that had occurred at the office of the Coordinator of Popular Organizations of Aguán (COPA). Although human rights organizations showed the DPI (Police Investigative Directorate) that there had been a definitive dismissal of the false charge on which DPI was arresting him, the agents insisted on detaining him. As we stated in our letter to you on February 12, 2024, it appears that there are arrest warrants for persons like Carlos Leonel George who have already had their charges dismissed.


Carlos Leonel George was previously falsely criminalized and imprisoned in 2019 for his active participation in the organized environmental defense movement led by the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Goods of Tocoa (CMDBCPT). This recent illegal arrest signals a reactivated campaign against environmental defenders. On December 9, 2023, the CMDBCPT called a popular assembly (cf our letter 27 JAN 2024) at which more than 2,000 local residents flatly rejected projects that are threatening the environment by three companies that have interlocking ownership: Emco Holdings (thermal electric generation), Inversiones Los Pinares (iron oxide mine), and Ecotek (pelletizing plant).

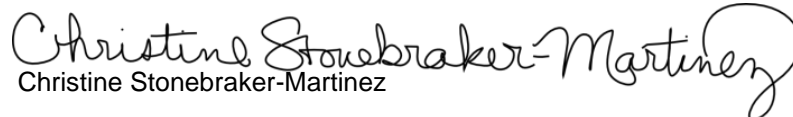
This is a key moment in the controversy because the mining concession (called "ASP") held by Inversiones Los Pinares was set to expire on January 28, 2024; the company announced its intent to renew the concession for another 30 years. On January 19, our organization joined more than 100 others in signing an open letter calling for the "immediate and unconditional cancellation" of the ASP mining concession along with other components of the megaproject.

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

- the immediate and unconditional cancellation of the the ASP and ASP2 mining concessions of Inversiones Los Pinares
- comprehensive protection of CMDBCPT members, 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 related to the mining project and the threats and stigmatization campaigns against CMDBCPT members
- the independent investigation, prosecution and punishment of those materially and intellectually responsible for the murders (in 2023) of CMDBCPT defenders Jairo Bonilla, Aly Domínguez and Oqueli Domínguez
- the reparation of damages, both to the victims of the persecution by the companies 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) ~ 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

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