

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

September 21, 2024

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are writing to express our profound concern and indignation regarding the assassination of **Juan Antonio López**, age 46, a respected environmental defender and community leader, who was brutally shot dead by several men as he left church Saturday night on September 14 in Tocoa, Colón Department. Juan López, a married father of one daughter, worked tirelessly to protect the Guapinol River as leading member of the Guapinol Environmental Defense Committee, affiliated with the Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Goods of Tocoa (CMDBCPT). His commitment to environmental stewardship was rooted in his Catholic faith. He was deeply involved in the church, serving as coordinator of Social Pastoral Care in the Diocese of Trujillo and co-founding the Integral Ecology Pastoral care in Honduras. Local bishops, the bishops conference of Latin America, and even Pope Francis have publicly decried his assassination and called for justice.


The Honduran people, especially those in vulnerable rural and indigenous communities, deserve to live without fear of violence, intimidation, and displacement. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which granted protective measures to Juan López in October 2023, reports that he had recently received threats from a gang member, a Honduran businessperson and a mining company representative. Since 2018, we have written at least 16 letters to officials in Honduras to denounce the persecution of Guapinol residents who have been organizing against an illegal iron oxide mine owned by Inversiones Los Pinares, located in a carved out slice of the Montaña de Botaderos National Park "Carlos Escaleras." It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that their rights are protected and that those who threaten their safety are held accountable. This situation cannot be tolerated any longer.

We strongly urge you to:

- **Undertake a Full and Impartial Investigation:** Ensure that an independent international commission oversees the investigation into the murder of Juan López. This commission should guarantee that those responsible, including any intellectual authors behind the assassination, are brought to justice.
- **Protect Defenders at Risk:** Strengthen and enforce protective measures for all human rights defenders in the region, particularly those actively opposing extractive projects such as the Guapinol mine. These measures must be implemented with the utmost urgency to prevent further loss of life.
- **End the Culture of Impunity:** Take decisive action to investigate and dismantle the networks of corruption and organized crime that perpetuate violence against environmental defenders. This includes addressing the links between local officials, corporate interests, and criminal organizations that contribute to the targeting of activists like Juan López.

We urge you to act swiftly to bring justice for Juan López, his family, and the entire Guapinol community. The international community is watching closely, and we stand in solidarity with those who are risking their lives to defend human rights and environmental justice in Honduras.

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-coordinators

  
Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ via email and US mail  
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Rapporteur 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 (OACNUDH) ~ 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:**