

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

May 5, 2025

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are writing to express our dismay over the lack of justice in the case of environmental and land defender **Juan Antonio López**, who was assassinated while walking home from church on September 14, 2024 (cf our letter of 21 SEP 2024). We call for urgent and concrete action from the State of Honduras to protect those defending their land, water, and communities from illegal resource extraction.

Juan Antonio López, a respected leader of the Guapinol Environmental Defense Committee (affiliated with the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Goods of Tocoa, or CMDBCPT) in Colón Department, was a tireless advocate for the protection of the Guapinol and San Pedro rivers and the Montaña de Botaderos “Carlos Escaleras” National Park from the destructive impacts of the Los Pinares/Ecotek mining megaproject. For years, López courageously denounced the environmental and human rights abuses committed by the mining company and its government allies. His assassination, carried out by hired gunmen in broad daylight outside a church, is a horrific manifestation of the escalating violence faced by environmental defenders in Honduras.

According to the Honduran Public Ministry, 13 individuals—including company employees and public officials—are now under investigation for environmental crimes and abuse of authority related to the very complaints López filed since 2021. Yet, it was only after his death that authorities began to take meaningful investigative steps, including the September 2024 filing of injunctions against the mining operations.


Despite a 2024 presidential decree (Decree 18/2024) designating the park as a protected zone, reports persist that the mining company continues to operate illegally in restricted areas, protected by armed groups and with impunity. This shows not only a failure to enforce environmental law but also a troubling erosion of state sovereignty and rule of law in the region.

The murder of Juan López follows a well-documented pattern of threats, criminalization, and killings of defenders. Since 2012, Honduras has recorded at least 149 murders of environmental activists, with one of the highest per capita rates in the world. The similarities between the López case and that of murdered Indigenous Lenca environmental defender **Berta Cáceres** (March 2, 2016) are striking and deeply troubling: obstruction of justice, denial of state responsibility, and failure to dismantle the networks of corruption and violence that enable these crimes.

We stand with the people of Guapinol, Tocoa, and all defenders of ancestral lands and life. We urge your office and all relevant Honduran institutions to take the following immediate actions:

- conduct a thorough, transparent, and impartial investigation that not only holds the direct perpetrators accountable but also identifies and prosecutes the intellectual authors and political actors who facilitated the assassination of Juan Antonio López, including those with ties to Inversiones Los Pinares, Ecotek, and relevant government agencies.
- fully implement Decree 18/2024, including the immediate cessation of all mining operations in the Montaña de Botaderos National Park, the removal of all illegal infrastructure, and the restoration of environmental damage.
- establish permanent protective measures for members of the Tocoa Municipal Committee and all environmental defenders in Honduras, in line with international human rights standards

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Sztai
Co-coordinators


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): Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Honduras) ~ via email
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH): Isabel Albaladejo Escribano (Representative to Honduras), Alice Shackelford (UN Resident Coordinator in Honduras) ~ via email
US State Department: Honduras Desk Officer (Washington, DC) and US Embassy in Tegucigalpa: Roy Perrin (Chargé d’Affaires ad interim) and Human Rights Officer ~ via email
US Congress: Senators from Ohio (Husted and Moreno), US Representatives from Ohio (Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Rulli, Sykes) ~ via email

07 APR 2025_Mongabay_Honduras

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