

I R T F

InterReligious Task Force on Central America

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Ambassador Hugo Eduardo Beteta
Embassy of Guatemala
2220 R St. NW.
Washington, DC 20008

June 24, 2026

Dear Ambassador Beteta:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the ongoing **violation of the rights of the Indigenous Maya Q'anjob'al, Chuj, and Akateko communities in San Mateo Ixtatán**, Huehuetenango, Guatemala, relating to the controversial Pojom I and Pojom II hydroelectric projects operated by the Energía y Renovación S.A. The Inter-American Development Bank withdrew its financing in 2022 after an internal investigation found it had failed to comply with its own environmental and social safeguards. Opponents of the dam have been unjustly criminalized, among them **Rigoberto Juárez and Ermitaño López**, ancestral authorities of the Maya Q'anjob'al people.

Pojom I and Pojom II were authorized (and construction initiated) without the free, prior, and informed consultation of affected Indigenous communities, in violation of Guatemala's constitution and of ILO Convention 169, which Guatemala ratified in 1996. A Supreme Court ruling in August 2025 ordered the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) to complete a consultation process within 12 months while allowing construction to continue. Communities have challenged that ruling before the Constitutional Court, arguing that a consultation while construction continues cannot satisfy the requirement that it be "prior." Impacted communities have also voiced that MEM has excluded Indigenous ancestral authorities from the consultation process, recognizing only community and municipal development councils as valid interlocutors.

Rigoberto Juárez and Ermitaño López were arrested in 2015 for their peaceful role in opposing hydroelectric projects in their territory. After being declared not guilty of serious charges in 2016 and released, an Appeals Court in 2021 reversed the ruling and significantly increased their sentences to 8 and 24 years. The Constitutional Court confirmed these sentences in February 2026. Human rights organizations have documented serious procedural violations, such as the violation of the principle of "reformatio in peius," which prohibits putting the defendant in a worse position than if they had not filed an appeal.

We urge authorities to:

- recognize Indigenous ancestral authorities as legitimate interlocutors
- ensure that any consultation process includes prior environmental, cultural, spiritual, and social impact studies, conducted in Indigenous languages through culturally appropriate ways
- suspend construction of the hydroelectric dams until required consultation conditions are guaranteed
- review the convictions of Rigoberto Juárez and Ermitaño López and address the documented procedural violations that led to their sentencing
- end the systematic use of the justice system to criminalize legitimate Indigenous territorial defenders

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinator

copies: Ing. Víctor Hugo Ventura Ruiz, Ministro de Energía y Minas (MEM) ~ via email
Juan Fernando Castro Martínez, Viceministro de Energía y Minas (MEM), Encargado del Área Energética ~ via email
Lic. José Alejandro Córdova, Ombudsman for Human Rights (PDH) ~ via email
IACHR: Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Guatemala) and Riyad Insanally (Rights of Indigenous Peoples), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
OACNUDH: Viviana de la Peña, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) ~ via email
US Embassy in Guatemala: Jorgan K Andrews, Chargé d'Affaires ~ via email
US State Department: Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC ~ via email
US Senators from Ohio: Husted and Moreno ~ via email
US Representatives from Ohio: Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Rulli, Sykes ~ via email

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