

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America

3606 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44113

tel: 216.961.0003 fax: 216.961.0002 e-mail: irtf@irtfcleveland.org

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

June 25, 2026

Dear Ambassador Beteta:

We are writing to express our deep concern over the arrest on June 17 of Indigenous human rights defender and community leader **José Acté**. The arrest was carried out when he was returning from work in the village of El Rancho, municipality San Agustín Acasaguastlán, Guatemala Department. He was accused of alleged usurpation, theft, and aggravated robbery and put into detention. His detention has been prolonged because the prosecutors did not appear at a scheduled judicial hearing today.

Working at Campesino Unity Committee (CUC), José Acté has been an important leader and defender of Indigenous rights. The current government signed the Agrarian Agreement (Acuerdo Agrario) on February 7, 2024 with CUC and several other campesino and Indigenous rights organizations. That agreement should guarantee more protections for land defenders like José Acté. His arrest, however, exposes an underlying issue where the government continues to persecute and displace Indigenous communities.

With the signing of that Agreement, the government should not be filing unfounded criminal charges of usurpation against Indigenous campesinos. It has been reported that the government filed more than 8,429 cases of usurpation against Indigenous people in the last six years with only 1% ultimately resulting in any form of conviction, showing that most of them do not have any basis. Disputes over rights to Indigenous lands also result in deadly violence; 15-25 people are being killed every year.

In light of the legal persecution of Indigenous campesino communities (and continued violence), we urge that authorities in Guatemala:

- release José Acté from detention and drop the criminal charges against him
- respect the Agrarian Agreement of 2024 and stop filing criminal usurpation charges against Indigenous campesinos who are cultivating farm lands
- meet with Indigenous rights organizations to review the principles of the Acuerdo Agrario and create mechanisms to end assaults on their communities

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinator

copies: 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 and US mail
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
Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) ~ 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: