

NOV 2021: Rapid Response Network

Please see below a summary of the letters we sent to heads of state and other high-level officials in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras, urging their swift action in response to human rights abuses occurring in their countries. We join with civil society groups in Latin America to:

- protect people living under threat
- demand investigations into human rights crimes
- bring human rights criminals to justice

IRTF's Rapid Response Network (RRN) volunteers write six letters in response to urgent human rights cases each month. We send copies of these letters to US ambassadors, embassy human rights officers, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, regional representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and desk officers at the US State Department. To read the letters, see <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rrn> , or ask us to mail you hard copies.

Rapid Response Network (RRN) letters this month

NOV 21 2021

GUATEMALA

Repressed by military: community resistance to nickel mine in El Estor, Izabal

In our letter to the attorney general of Guatemala, we denounced the state of siege declared by the government of Guatemala and repression carried out by security forces against the local indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' community in El Estor, Izabal Department. Since October 4, residents have been organizing a highway blockade to prevent the passage of machinery on its way to the El Fénix nickel mine, which has been operating illegally since 2005. Police have implemented tactics of intimidation and repression over the past several weeks. Local residents—along with journalists reporting on the protests—have been tear-gassed, beaten, and threatened by the excessive number of agents of the National Police and military deployed to the area.

Police are enforcing a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Roads in and out of El Estor are controlled by military roadblocks. Lake Izabal is patrolled by naval boats. Drones are flown to monitor neighborhoods and movement of local residents. Tear gas is fired not only at demonstrators but into people's homes. Some indigenous leaders and journalists have been arrested. Security agents have also

been confiscating cellular phones of the residents and journalists to prevent documentation of the events.

Both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have denounced the state of siege, but the violence continues.

You can read the full letter at <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rnn/2021-11-21-000000>

NOV 22 2021

GUATEMALA

forced eviction: 96 Maya Q'eqchi' families

We wrote to the attorney general of Guatemala for the second day in a row about more state violence in El Estor. On November 16 the Guatemalan National Police (PNC) forcibly evicted 96 Maya Q'eqchi' families from Chinebal, in the southern region of El Estor municipality, Izabal Department, which has been under a government-declared state of siege since October 23. The Maya Q'eqchi' families of Chinebal have resided and farmed on this land at the foot of the Sierra de las Minas mountain range since the 1940s.

The eviction (police bulldozing homes, burning families' personal belongings) stemmed from a longstanding land dispute over rightful ownership of the Palestina Chinebal farm. Businessman Juan Maegeli leases portions of the land to the NaturAceites company to grow African palm trees for palm oil production. Palm plantations are now covering 9% of arable land in Izabal.

You can read the full letter at <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rnn/2021-11-22-000000>

NOV 23 2021

HONDURAS

assassinated: campesino leaders Celenia Bonilla and Nelson García

Two campesino leaders, **Celenia Bonilla** and her husband **Nelson García**, were assassinated on November 21. They were attacked while gardening on the patio of their home in the Cañada de Flores sector of Guaimaca municipality, Francisco Morazán Department. Their three children (the youngest one-year-old) are now left orphaned.

Nelson García was president of the campesino association Hombres y Mujeres de Fé (Men and Women of Faith). Together with another campesino association, 44 families have been farming the land in Cañada de Flores for ten years against a backdrop of persecution. Although the municipality of Guaimaca has the land registered as an ejido (common land), an individual has been claiming private ownership. The CNTC (National Center of Rural Workers) has previously denounced threats and harassment of members of these two campesino associations.

We demand that the government investigate these killings and bring the perpetrators to justice. We also urge the government to develop public policies on access to and tenure of land to address the structural issues of land conflicts.

You can read the full letter at <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rrn/2021-11-23-000000>

NOV 24 2021

HONDURAS

police and military attack: two youths in San José, La Paz

We wrote to officials in Honduras to protest the police and military attack on two young adults in the community of Llano Largo in San José municipality, La Paz Department, on November 10. Ronald Alexander Gutiérrez Molina and Saúl Ramos were injured by the security agents.

Ronald, age 24, is a community leader who organizes a youth soccer team and participates in a dance team. The security agents approached him on the street at 10:30pm and demanded that he direct them to gang members in the area. When he denied knowing anything about gang members, they grabbed, detained, beat, and shot him. (He has a gunshot wound on his right ankle.) They sprayed a toxic gas on his face and threatened to kill him.

You can read the full letter at <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rrn/2021-11-24-000000>

NOV 25 2021

COLOMBIA

killed: oil pipeline protester Michelsen Varagas

We wrote to officials in Colombia about the attack on oil pipeline protesters that resulted in the shooting death of 31-year-old farmer **Michelsen Vargas Velasco** by ESMAD anti-riot police on November 13.

Residents of La Hermosura (Bolívar municipality, Santander Dept) had been protesting against an ECOPEPETROL oil pipeline for the past 50 days because of water contamination and destruction to their roads. On November 13, they blocked access to a road in Puerto de los Cerros. ESMAD arrived and attacked the community, firing tear gas and rubber bullets. They shot Michelsen Vargas Velasco in the head at close range.

You can read the full letter at <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rrn/2021-11-25-000000>

NOV 26 2021

COLOMBIA

threatened: Adriana Lizarazo, coordinator of CSPP

Human rights defender **Adriana Lizarazo**, the coordinator of the Santander chapter of the Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP), is receiving death threats from paramilitaries.

The text messages sent to Adriana Lizarazo on November 13 indicated that the sender was with the Gaitanistas/Gulf Clan paramilitary organization and that they had private information about her. The sender insisted on meeting with her. CSPP was also singled out as a military target. The sender included photos of firearms and someone dressed in military gear with a military rope and a bracelet with the initials AGC.

The threats to Adriana Lizarazo, her family, and members of CSPP-Santander are of great concern. INDEPAZ (Institute for the Study of Development and Peace) reports that from January 1 through November 15 of this year, there have been 152 documented acts of aggression against social leaders in Colombia.

You can read the full letter at <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rrn/2021-11-26-000000>