

via fax: 011 502 2411 8168 <b>Estimada Físcal Thelma Aldana Hernández</b> Attorney General of Guatemala	via fax: 011 502 2413 8658 <b>Mauricio López Bonilla</b> Minister of the Interior
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October 25, 2014

Dear Attorney General and Minister of the Interior:

We are extremely concerned about police repression against the Mayan Q'eqchi indigenous communities in three municipalities (Coban, Chisec and Raxruha) in Alta Verapaz Department and the shooting deaths by police of **Sebastian Rax Caal**, **Luciano Can Cujub** and **Oscar Chen Quej**.

The Mayan Q'eqchi communities have been resisting the local construction of hydroelectric projects and expansion of oil palm plantations in Alta Verapaz. Forced evictions from farms in Santa Rita and Xalahá Cangüinic began in mid-August. In Monte Olivio, Cobán, three community leaders of the peaceful movement against hydroelectric projects, **Carmen Hun**, **Isabel Choc** and **Obdulia Regina Ical Hun** were arrested. On August 15, 1,600 Civilian National Police officers detained **Rafael Chen** and **Carmen del Cid**, two community leaders of the Mayan Q'eqchi in Raxruha. In reaction to these detentions people started protesting on the streets and blocked the roads.

The Civilian National Police used excessive force against the protesters, raiding homes and physically assaulting demonstrators. People were forced to leave their homes and remain displaced. Forty people were detained, many others were injured and three people lost their lives: **Sebastian Rax Caal**, **Luciano Can Cujub** and **Oscar Chen Quej** were shot by the Civilian National Police.

But the Mayan Q'eqchi communities are not the only ones suffering repression. Organizations like CODECA (Committee for Peasant Farmer Development) and their members who support and fight for the interests of indigenous people and campesinos are also facing threats, harassment, intimidation and arbitrary actions by the police. Eighteen regional leaders of CODECA are currently in prison. **Mauro Vay Gonón** (co-founder and current coordinator of CODECA), **Mariano García Carillo** (local leader of CODECA) and **Blanca Julia Aytum Mejía** (CODECA vice-president) have been held in detention as well.

We therefore **strongly urge** that you:

- ensure the rights of the indigenous communities (Articles 6, 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
- take action to stop arbitrary arrests and detentions (Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and police violence against peaceful protesters (Article 3, 5, 19, 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
- start investigations against Civilian National Police officers who committed crimes during the protests on August 15
- release detained members of CODECA and the Mayan Q'eqchi communities (Article 10, 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
- ensure that members of CODECA and other human rights organizations can do their work undisturbed and without fear of harassment, as set out in the 1998 UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-Coordinator

copies: Francisco Villagran de Leon, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908  
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 Caitlin Kennel, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via email  
 Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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