

via fax: 011 502 238 1734 or 2221 4445

**Sr. Jimmy Morales**  
President of Guatemala

via fax: 011 502 2411 8168 or 2411 9210

**Lic. Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández**  
Attorney General of Guatemala

June 25, 2016

Dear President Morales and Attorney General Aldana:

We are angered and saddened at the assassination of human rights defender **Diego Choc Pop** on the afternoon of June 8 by unknown individuals who repeatedly shot him. He was an indigenous and campesino human rights defender from the community of San Juan Tres Ríos in Cobán Department which he represented at the General Assembly of the Highlands Campesino Committee (CCDA). The CCDA is a national organization committed to defending local sources of water used by indigenous communities and supporting the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Law. The CCDA Committee in San Juan Tres Ríos has petitioned the Land Fund to grant them legal ownership of land disputed with the owner of the Rancho Alegre estate.

On March 30, a group of men armed with firearms and machetes went to San Juan Tres Ríos where they threatened leaders of the community with kidnapping and murder. The owner of Rancho Alegre, Germán Sierra Sorio, had authorized them to forcefully displace the community from the disputed land. The armed men said they had been told to kidnap and kill the community leaders if necessary. On leaving the community, they threatened to come back to kill all the residents. The following day, several residents of San Juan Tres Ríos filed a complaint with the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman in Alta Verapaz requesting an investigation into the threats.

The murder of Diego Choc Pop follows that on March 16 of human rights defender Walter Méndez Barrios, who was shot and killed outside his home in Las Cruces, in Petén Department (cf our letter of Mar 25). At least six human rights defenders working on indigenous peoples' rights, land and environment were killed in Guatemala last year (cf our letters of May 2, Oct 12, Oct 13, Nov 22 2015).

Because of our deep concern about the murder of Diego Choc Pop and the grave threats made to the rest of the community and the CCDA leadership in San Juan Tres Ríos, we **strongly urge** that you

- conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into the murder of Diego Choc Pop and the threats issued against other community leaders, and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary efforts to protect the family of Diego Choc Pop, as well as leaders and members of CCDA in San Juan Tres Ríos, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- ensure that all human rights defenders in Guatemala are able to conduct their peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of harassment, threats or retaliation.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

copies: Gladys Maritza Ruiz de Vielman, Guatemalan Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 745 1908  
 Todd Robinson, US Ambassador to Guatemala ~ via fax: 011 502 2331 2348  
 Thomas Lee, Guatemala Desk, US State Dept ~ via email LeeT2@state.gov  
 Enrique Gil Botero, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3992  
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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