

via email: SMVasquez@mingob.gob.gt , FRivas@mingob.gob.gt <b>Sr. Francisco Manuel Rivas Lara</b> Minister of Interior of Guatemala	via email: TAldana@mp.gob.gt <b>Lic. Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández</b> Attorney General of Guatemala
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October 23, 2017

Dear Attorney General Aldana and Interior Minister Rivas:

We are very troubled by the unjust and arbitrary detention of indigenous and environmental rights defender **Juan Eduardo Caal Suram**, a member of the Artisanal Fishermen's Guild (GPA), which has been calling for government action to resolve the contamination of Lake Izabal in El Estor, Izabal Department, polluted by nickel mining.

On October 11, while he was working in his barbershop in El Estor, he was arbitrarily detained by officers in plain clothes who did not provide any arrest warrant or explanation for his detention. Because he was kept incommunicado, his family, lawyers, and other human rights defenders from the GPA were unaware of his whereabouts until the morning of October 12 when they were informed that he was detained in Puerto Barrios, Izabal.

This latest arrest follows a systematic pattern of harassment of indigenous and land rights defenders in Guatemala. On July 21 human rights defenders and members of GPA, including **Juan Eduardo Caal Suram, Eduardo Bin Poou, Tomas Che Cual, Cristobal Pop Coc, Vicente Rax Pop, Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub, Jerson Antonio Xitumul Morales**, along with journalists reporting on the pollution in El Estor and its surroundings, were informed that a criminal case was being brought against them. On August 11, the Judge of the Criminal, Narco-activity and Environmental Crimes Court of Izabal Department issued warrants for their arrest with these charges: threats, incitement to commit crimes, illicit association, unlawful assembly and demonstrations, damages to private property, and illegal detention of another person.

The charges were levelled following false complaints and accusations made by executives of Guatemalan Nickel Company (CGN), formerly owned by the Canadian company HudBay Minerals, and now by Cyprus-based Solway Investments, whose activities are contributing to the pollution and environmental damage in El Estor (cf our letters of February 24, June 25 and June 26). CGN has a long, violent history in the region, including the gang rape of 11 women (2007), the murder of Adolfo Ich Chaman (2009), and the killing of Carlos Maaz Coc (2017).

We therefore **strongly urge** that you

- immediately and unconditionally release Juan Eduardo Caal Suram;
- ensure that his treatment, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the "Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment," adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173, December 9 1988;
- immediately drop all charges against the GPA members named above, along with charges against the reporting journalists;
- take all necessary measures, in consultation with the defenders, to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Maya-Q'eqchi' communities in El Estor, including members of GPA.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

and Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Gladys Maritza Ruiz de Veilman, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ via fax 202 745 1908  
Todd D. Robinson, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of human rights officer Rain Bian ~ via email  
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James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Guatemala, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Frontline Defenders\_10/13/2017\_Guatemala

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