

via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com ngosorto@gmail.com <b>Oscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas</b> Attorney General of Honduras	via email: karlacueva144@gmail.com <b>Lica. Karla Cueva</b> Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs
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April 4, 2020

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are writing to express our concern over aggressions inflicted by state actors on three journalists—**Roger David Iraeta, Onán Zaldivar and Edward Azael Fernández**—on April 1, 2020. The three were reporting on a road blockade in Santa Bárbara Department when members of the National Police, the Police Investigations Directorate (DPI) and the Armed Forces physically assaulted and then detained the journalists.

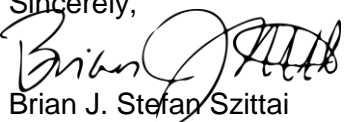
The incident involved a dispute between residents of Santa Bárbara and the National Police. Several days prior, with the objective of slowing the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19, residents had been coordinating with the police to prevent vehicles coming from San Pedro Sula from entering Santa Bárbara. On April 1, however, an officer by the last name Álvarez, stated that he was going to let everyone pass. That prompted a protest by residents who arrived on the highway near the Gualjoco neighborhood with dump trucks of dirt to block the road; they carried out a sit-in blockade as well. The National Police and other public security forces threw tear gas canisters at the demonstrators to break up the blockade.

Roger David Iraeta (Canal 6 y Canal 25), Onán Zaldivar (Canal 22) and Edward Azael Fernández (TvMas y Diario La Prensa) were assaulted by the public forces who confiscated their equipment and erased the footage they had just recorded. Edward Azael Fernández entered a nearby house to protect himself from the tear gas. Police broke down the door to the house and beat him as they took him away. All three were taken to the police station in La Ceibita at about 5:30pm and held for several hours, unaware of what criminal charges were being brought against them. Medical personnel arrived to assess any injuries that resulted from the attacks.

As we wrote to you last month (cf our letters March 25 and March 26, 2020), we have great concern that the police and military are preventing freedom of movement, assembly, expression, and association. Moreover, repression against journalists—especially violence by government security forces—continues to seriously affect the exercise of the right to freedom of expression in Honduras. We therefore **strongly urge you to:**

- investigate the assaults and arrests of Roger David Iraeta, Onán Zaldivar and Edward Azael Fernández, publish the results, and punish any public forces responsible for this action
- drop any criminal charges against the three journalists
- adopt prevention mechanisms that protect media workers from state-sponsored aggression or violence
- provide training of the police and security forces on guidelines for respecting freedom of expression
- hold accountable any police and security forces who unnecessarily or unlawfully restrict the work of journalists who are exercising the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression

Sincerely,

  
 Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-Coordinator

  
 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: OACNUDH: Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Honduras ~ via email  
 María Dolores Agüero, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via website or fax, and US mail  
 Colleen Hoey, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
 Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer at the US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
 David Tagle, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email  
 Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
 Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human ~ via email and US mail  
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
 US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, González, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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