

<b>Mstra. Ana Patricia Orantes Thomas</b> Minister of Environment and National Resources (MARN)	<b>Jaime Luis Carrera</b> , Vice-Minister for Water Ministry of Environment and National Resources (MARN)
<b>Ing. Víctor Hugo Ventura Ruiz</b> Minister of Energy and Mines (MEM) of Guatemala	<b>Lic. Oscar Rafael Pérez Ramírez</b> Vice-Minister for Sustainable Development (MEM)

May 26, 2024

Dear Ministers and Vice-Ministers:

We are saddened to learn of a tragic incident that occurred in Chinautla, Guatemala Department, involving the family of Indigenous leader Armando Vásquez Pascual.

On April 18, **Denilson Alberto Vázquez Chacón**, the sixteen-year-old son of Armando Vásquez Pascual, was fatally shot by assassins on a motorcycle. His brother, **Lester Moisés Armando Vázquez Chacón**, who was with him, was also seriously injured in the attack. This devastating event took place amidst the ongoing struggle against sand extraction companies in the region. Tragically, this violence follows a previous incident in February when a clay extraction truck owned by one of the companies (La Primavera) ran over and seriously injured Denilson Alberto Vázquez Chacón.

Armando Vásquez Pascual, along with other community authorities, has been actively protesting against extraction companies, which have been operating without valid licenses for over two years on ancestral Indigenous Paqumam lands. The damage to the environment and human health is significant. Dozens of machines and over 200 daily trucks awaken the children as the sun rises. The constant dust causes respiratory problems. The weight of the trucks has lowered the main road by almost six feet. Homes have lost their floors due to the shift in the land.

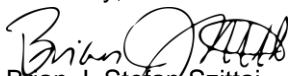
Other environmental contamination has also harmed the community. The Río Las Vacas used to have vegetation along the river's banks, and community residents swam in its waters. With the installation of a trash landfill nearby, mountains of trash now line the river. Contaminated, the water is no longer potable for people, animals, or plants. The smell of waste is pungent and a constant reminder of how much the community has lost. In a community that was once home to more than 150 families, today only 20 families remain.

The community's years of peaceful resistance has received significant backlash, including criminalization, defamation, and death threats. The killing of Denilson Alberto Vázquez Chacón and the injury to his brother underscore the urgent need for attention to the plight of Indigenous communities fighting against environmental exploitation and injustice. Their courage and sacrifice must not be in vain.

We strongly urge that authorities:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination of Denilson Alberto Vázquez Chacón and injury to Lester Moisés Armando Vázquez Chacón, publish the results, and bring the perpetrators to justice swiftly
- consult with Armando Vásquez and other community leaders to implement personal security measures
- consult with community leaders to relocate the landfill and clean up the contamination to the Río Las Vacas
- take regulatory enforcement and legal actions against the extraction companies to prevent further harm

Sincerely,

  
 Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-coordinators

  
 Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Lic. José Alejandro Córdova Herrera, Ombudsman for Human Rights of Guatemala (PDH) ~ via email  
 Hugo Beteta, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ email, US mail  
 IACHR: Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Guatemala) and Arif Bulkan (Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
 OACNUDH: Mika Kanervuori, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (UN) ~ via email  
 US State Department: Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC ~ vial email  
 US State Department: William Popp, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of Angela Melton ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email  
 US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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