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Second UA: 003/2023 Index: AMR 37/6468/2023 Honduras of February 21, 2023

HONDURAS

GUAPINOL WATER DEFENDERS UNDER CONTINUOUS ATTACKS

Attacks on water defenders in the Honduran community of Guapinol persist a month after the murder of activists, Aly Magdalena Domínguez Ramos, 38 and Jairo Bonilla Ayala, 28. Recently, six defenders of the Guapinol river found out that they could face criminal prosecution for peacefully challenging the legality of a mining project in the Carlos Escaleras National Park. According to residents, this project threatens the safety of the water source that inhabitants of Guapinol and surrounding communities depend on. The Honduran authorities must ensure a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation of the attacks against the defenders of the Guapinol river. They should refrain from using the justice system to harass activists. The authorities should also make sure that the water defenders are protected.

Write to the Attorney General of Honduras:

- Urging him to, as a matter of urgency, conduct a prompt, independent, impartial, and exhaustive investigation to identify all responsible for the murders of both defenders.
- Asking that authorities refrain from using the justice system to harass the defenders of the Guapinol river and take immediate steps to fully provide appropriate protection.

Write to:

Mr. Oscar Fernando Chinchilla
Attorney General
Posta Edificio Lomas Plaza II,
Col. Lomas del Guijarro,
Tegucigalpa,
Honduras
Email: fiscaliageneralhnd@gmail.com
Twitter: @MP_Honduras / @ofchb
Salutation: *Dear Attorney General,*

And copy:

Miss Tania Vanessa Maria A. CASCO RUBI
First Counsellor & Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
Embassy of the Republic of Honduras
130 Albert Street, Suite 805
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On January 7, 2023, Aly Magdaleno Domínguez Ramos and Jairo Bonilla Ayala were intercepted by armed assailants as they were returning home on a moped, after coming home from work, shot and killed on the spot, according to their relatives. Aly is the brother of Reynaldo Domínguez. Both, as well as Juan López, Leonel George, Marco Tulio Ramos, Eugenio Esquivel and Adaly Cedillo are among the 32 people criminalized by the mining company Inversiones Los Pinares and the State of Honduras for defending the Carlos Escaleras National Park.

Several communities, campesino groups, parishes and local organizations in the municipality of Tocoa (department of Colón), North of Honduras, led by the Municipal Committee for the Defence of Common and Public Assets (Comité Municipal por la Defensa de los Bienes Comunes y Públicos, CMDBCP) oppose the operating license issued to the mining company Inversiones Los Pinares in the Carlos Escalera National Park, formerly known as Montaña de Botaderos, since 2015.

On August 1, 2018, residents set up the “Guapinol camp” to peacefully protest against the license and mining exploitation in the core zone of a protected area of the water sources on which they depend for their survival. They have filled several criminal complaints before local Courts, still pending. Members of the CMDBCP have faced at least two criminal proceedings since 2018 for defending the Guapinol and San Pedro Rivers of the impacts mining project. Aly and his brother Reynaldo Dominguez, as well as Juan López, Leonel George, Marco Tulio Ramos, Eugenio Esquivel and Adaly Cedillo spent some time in prison in 2019 along with other Guapinol River defenders for these proceedings.

The same proceedings led to the unjust detention of eight defenders of the Guapinol river for more than two years solely for peacefully defending the right to clean water that provoked international outcry. After rigorous analysis, Amnesty International determined that the case file shows multiple flaws in the investigation and declared them prisoners of conscience. Following a Supreme Court ruling citing violations of the right to due process, the eight defenders of the Guapinol river were released in February 2021.

In a separate decision, in June 2022, this court annulled similarly unfounded criminal proceedings against Juan López, Leonel George, Reynaldo Domínguez, Marco Tulio Ramos y Adaly Cedillo. Since then, the CMBDCP has denounced attacks against their members, including stigmatization and surveillance. The Committee continues demanding the termination of the mining project.

Over the last five years Amnesty International has alerted on numerous death and other types of attacks against activists in Honduras, which is one of the deadliest countries in the world to be a human rights defender. In 2022, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 11 killings of human rights defenders in the country, 6 of them defending the land and the environment.

In 2023, these figures have dramatically increased: the OHCHR has reported at least 8 cases of killings of land and environmental defenders in less than two months. Despite the seriousness of the attacks on these defenders, Honduras has not yet signed the Escazú Agreement, the first environmental human rights treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean, which obliges signatory states to protect environmental defenders and entered into force on April 22, 2021.

Please take action at your earliest convenience!