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First UA: 85/24 Index: AMR 37/8553/2024 Honduras of September 20, 2024

HONDURAS DEMAND JUSTICE FOR MURDERED WATER DEFENDER

On Saturday, September 14th, Juan López, an environmental defender and coordinator of the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Assets, was killed. He was leaving his duties as a community and religious leader at the San Isidro Labrador parish in Tocoa, Colón, northern Honduras. According to reports, an unidentified person on a motorcycle shot López. We call on Honduran authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation into his murder. This investigation must also address other killings and attacks on defenders of the Guapinol River. Additionally, authorities must stop using the justice system to harass them and ensure their full protection.

Write to the Attorney General of Honduras urging the authorities to:

- Guarantee the right of Juan López's family to justice, truth, and reparation. Authorities must ensure that the family's rights are respected throughout the investigation process.
- Consider Juan López's human rights work as a possible motive for his murder, in accordance with international human rights standards. This angle must be fully explored as part of the investigation.
- Immediately conduct a prompt, independent, impartial, and thorough investigation to identify all individuals responsible for the killing of Juan López. Justice must be delivered swiftly and fairly.
- Ensure that the justice system is not used to harass defenders of the Guapinol River and take immediate steps to provide appropriate protection for these environmental activists.

Write to:

Joel Antonio Zelaya Álvarez
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:

Mr. Aldo Federico ROSALES ESPINOZA
Minister-Counsellor & Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
Embassy of the Republic of Honduras
130 Albert Street, Suite 504
Ottawa, ON K1P 5G4
Tel: (613) 233-8900
Email: assistant@embassyhonduras.hn

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since 2015, communities in Tocoa, Colón, led by the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Assets (CMDBCP), have opposed the operating license granted to the mining company Inversiones Los Pinares. The license allows mining in the Carlos Escalera National Park (formerly Montaña de Botaderos), a protected area that supplies vital water sources. In response, local residents set up the "Guapinol Camp" on August 1, 2018, to peacefully protest against the license and the mining exploitation. They have also filed multiple criminal complaints in local courts, which remain unresolved.

Members of the CMDBCP have faced at least two criminal cases since 2018 for defending the Guapinol and San Pedro Rivers from the mining project. Activists including Juan López, Leonel George, Marco Tulio Ramos, Eugenio Esquivel, Adaly Cedillo, and brothers Aly and Reynaldo Domínguez were imprisoned in 2019. In a widely condemned case, eight Guapinol River defenders were unjustly detained for more than two years for peacefully defending their right to clean water. Amnesty International declared them prisoners of conscience, identifying multiple flaws in the investigation. Following a Supreme Court ruling, the eight defenders were released in February 2021, citing violations of their right to due process.

On January 7, 2023, armed assailants intercepted and killed Aly Magdaleno Domínguez Ramos and Jairo Bonilla Ayala as they returned home from work. Aly, the brother of Reynaldo Domínguez, had been criminalized along with 32 other activists, including Juan López, for defending the Carlos Escalera National Park. Just one month later, on February 7, 2023, lawyers of the Guapinol defenders were notified that the prosecutor's office in Tocoa had appealed a Supreme Court ruling that annulled the baseless criminal charges against five Guapinol defenders, including Juan López and Reynaldo Domínguez. Despite a favorable court decision, the legal harassment against these defenders persists.

Over the past five years, Amnesty International has raised alarms about numerous deaths and attacks on activists in Honduras, one of the most dangerous countries for human rights defenders. Environmental defenders are particularly at risk. Despite the ongoing violence, Honduras has not signed the Escazú Agreement, a treaty aimed at protecting environmental defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean. This agreement, which entered into force on April 22, 2021, holds signatory states accountable for safeguarding the rights of environmental activists.

Please take action as soon as possible until November 14, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.