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HONDURAS WATER DEFENDERS KILLED

Oquelí Domínguez, brother of defenders Aly and Reynaldo Domínguez was killed in the community of Guapinol (department of Colón, northern Honduras) on June 15, 2023. Five months earlier, defenders Aly Dominguez and Jairo Bonilla Ayala, members of the resistance of Guapinol against an iron ore mine, were also found dead.

In February 2023, six other defenders of the Guapinol river found out that they could face criminal prosecution for peacefully questioning the legality of a mining project in the Carlos Escaleras National Park.

We demand the Honduran authorities to ensure a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation of the attacks against the defenders of the Guapinol river, and to refrain from using the justice system to harass them and to ensure their protection.

Write to the Attorney General urging him to:

- Urgently conduct a prompt, independent, impartial, and exhaustive investigation to identify all responsible for the murders of both defenders.
- Ensure 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
Ottawa, ON K1P 5G4
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The people of Guapinol and other communities of Tocoa have faced continued attacks because they have been peacefully questioning the legality of a mining project in the Carlos Escaleras National Park, including the unjust detention of eight defenders of the Guapinol river, known as the “Guapinol eight”.

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.

The five Guapinol defenders currently facing criminal proceedings after the latest appeal are Juan López, Leonel George, Reynaldo Domínguez, Marco Tulio Ramos and Adaly Cedillo. A sixth defender Eugenio Esquivel appears in the appeal although he is not part of the case in question denounced the Guapinol resistance. All of them 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 Defense 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, local 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 filed 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 of the 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