

URGENT ACTION

WATER DEFENDER KILLED

On Saturday, 14th September, environmental defender and coordinator of the Municipal Committee for the Defence of Common and Public Assets Juan López was murdered as he was leaving his work as a community and religious leader in the parish of San Isidro Labrador in the municipality of Tocoa, department of Colón, northern Honduras. According to public reports, Juan López was shot by an unidentified person on a motorcycle. We demand the Honduran authorities to ensure a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Juan López, as well as other killings and attacks against the defenders of the Guapinol river, to refrain from using the justice system to harass them and to ensure their integral protection.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Attorney General

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Dear Attorney General,

I am writing to express my deep dismay and concern about the security situation of the defenders of the Guapinol river in Tocoa. Human rights defenders Juan López was killed in the municipality of Tocoa on 14th September 2024. This is not the first killing of defenders of the Guapinol river. On 7th January 2023, Aly Magdaleno Domínguez Ramos and Jairo Bonilla Ayala were also killed. The authorities have yet to identify all responsible for the murder.

Few days later, on 19th September, a local court notified the lawyers of the Guapinol defenders that has admitted an appeal filed by the Public Prosecutor's Office against the final dismissal in favour of five Guapinol defenders, including Juan López, issued 2022. Therefore, they could face criminal prosecution for peacefully challenging the legality of a mining project in the Carlos Escaleras National Park.

The people of Guapinol and other communities of Tocoa have faced continued attacks because they peacefully challenge 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".

The authorities responsible for the investigation of the killing of Juan López must guarantee the right of the human rights defender's families to justice, truth and reparation. According to international human rights standards, authorities must consider the victim's human rights work as a hypothesis for these crimes. Therefore, I urge you to immediately to conduct a prompt, independent, impartial and exhaustive investigation to identify all suspected responsible for the murder of the defender. I also urge you to 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.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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 1 August 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 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 Domínguez, 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.

On 7 January 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.

One month later, on 7 February, lawyers of the Guapinol defenders were notified that the prosecutor's office in Tocoa had appealed in December 2022 a favorable resolution of the Supreme Court of Justice that annulled unfounded criminal proceedings against five Guapinol defenders Juan López, Leonel George, Reynaldo Domínguez (brother of Aly Domínguez), Marco Tulio Ramos and Adaly Cedillo. A sixth defenders Eugenio Esquivel appears in the appeal although he is not part of the case in question denounced the Guapinol resistance.

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. Honduras still one of the deadliest countries in the world for land and environmental defenders. 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 22 April 2021

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 November 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Juan López (he/his).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: NA