



Open Letter to the distinguished members of the international diplomatic corps and international organizations with a presence in or focus on Honduras.

Friday, 22 June 2012

Subject: Concerns about threats received by international accompaniers of PROAH and the recent increase in attacks on human rights defenders in Honduras.

We, the undersigned organizations, wish to express to the international diplomatic corps and to institutions of the international community our deep concern about the death threats recently received by accompaniers with PROAH (*Proyecto de Acompañamiento Internacional en Honduras* - Honduras Accompaniment Project).

PROAH is a project of the US NGO Friendship Office of the Americas, and has been providing international accompaniment to human rights defenders since 2010. Its volunteers from Europe and North America offer accompaniment to organizations and individuals that find themselves under threat or at risk because of their human rights work, with the aim of deterring violence and increasing respect for human rights. In addition, its volunteers bear witness to and support the documentation of the human rights situation in Honduras, circulate reliable information to the international community and communicate with international solidarity networks.

Towards the end of April 2012, two members of PROAH received death threats via text messages on their cell phones, sent from phone company web sites. The first message, on 22 April, referred to three persons who were accompanied by PROAH:

*"From CAM¹ 14/88 whoever we start with. Pedro, Elena, Alan²...The end result will be the same**".³* The second message, on 26 April, contained the following text: *"CAM> Shits, once we put a bullet in your head you're going to keep quiet"⁴*. The same messages were received by

¹ CAM is the acronym for the Álvarez Martínez commando group, a paramilitary group that has threatened, harassed and intimidated human rights defenders since the 2009 coup d'état. The name refers to General Gustavo Álvarez Martínez, who was head of the Honduran armed forces and is considered to be responsible for serious human rights violations under the National Security Doctrine of the 1980s.

²The names have been changed in order to protect the identity of the people concerned.

³ Original Spanish text *"De CAM 14/88 por quien empezamos. Pedro, Elena, Alan ...El fin no altera el producto."*

⁴ Original Spanish text *"CAM> Mierdas hasta que les metamos un plomazo en la cabeza se van a quedar quietos"*.

people accompanied by PROAH, indicating that the threats were directly related to PROAH's work defending human rights.

The fact that international accompaniers are now the targets of such threats is yet another indication of the deteriorating situation for human rights defenders in the country, who have suffered a worrying increase in attacks in the last few months, physical as well as verbal and psychological.

In March and April, several members of COFADEH (Committee of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras) were the targets of persecution, including physical and verbal attacks. One of them was the journalist Dina Meza, who has received a series of threats of sexual violence, two of which also came through messages left on her cell phone and were signed by "CAM". Furthermore, members of COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras) have been victims of various threats and acts of harassment since March, the most extreme case being the murder of one of its members, Santos Alberto Dominguez, by the police, on 1 May. Only six days later, the body of Erick Martínez, a journalist and gay activist, was found with signs of strangulation.

According to Margaret Sekaggaya, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the victims in the cases mentioned above belong to categories of defenders – journalists and defenders of indigenous and gay rights – among those at the greatest risk in Honduras. In February 2012, in her preliminary report, at the end of her official visit to Honduras, she described a situation of *"pervasive impunity"*, and in her declarations said *"The 2009 coup d'état aggravated institutional weaknesses, increas[ing] the vulnerability of human rights defenders" who "[d]ue to the exposed nature of their activities...continue to suffer extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, death threats, attacks, harassment and stigmatisation"*.

Within this context, international accompaniment through projects such as PROAH for people under threat or risk is extremely important for the defense of the rights and the protections guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration on human rights defenders.

We wish to thank the diplomatic corps of the European Union for their public declaration on 15 May expressing their concern about the persecution suffered by human rights defenders in Honduras. We regard such pronouncements directed to the Honduran state to be vital, and we urge other diplomatic missions to make similar declarations. In addition, we ask members of the diplomatic community to express to the Honduran authorities the importance of the role of international accompaniment in defense of human rights and urge them to:

--Take the necessary measures to stop the harassment and threats against international accompaniers of PROAH in particular, and against the community of human rights defenders in general.

--Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the reported attacks, threats and murders of human rights defenders, requesting that the results of the investigation be made public and those responsible brought to justice.

--Take urgent and concrete measures to implement the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998. We also encourage the international community to actively engage with human rights defenders in Honduras with the aim of offering them support and protection within the framework of the European Union Guidelines for the protection of human rights defenders and other international instruments and mechanisms that exist for this purpose.

Sincerely,

ACOGUATE (Coordination of International Accompaniment in Guatemala), which is composed of the following committees:

- Guatemala Solidarität Österreich (Austria)
- CAREA (Cadena para un Retorno Acompañado) (Germany)
- Collectif Guatemala (France)
- El Comité Danés de Solidaridad con Centroamérica (CDSC) (Denmark)
- Guatemala Solidarity Network (GSN) (UK)
- Project Accompagnement Québec-Guatemala (PAQG) (Canada)
- The Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR) (Sweden)
- Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) (USA)
- Peacewatch Switzerland
- La Plataforma de Solidaridad con Chiapas, Oaxaca y Guatemala de Madrid (Spain)
- Breaking the Silence (Canada)

Front Line Defenders,

Peace Brigades International,

Friendship Office of the Americas.