

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America

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via fax: 011 503 2523-7170 / 7409
Sr. Romeo Benjamín Barahona
Attorney General of El Salvador

via fax: 011 502 2526 3105
Sr. David Munguía Payés
Minister of Justice and Security

March 5, 2012

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply concerned about the robbery, threats and intimidation of **Father Neftalí Ruiz**, a priest with the Salvadoran Apostolic Catholic Church, Secretary of the Environmental Committee of Cabañas (CAC) and member of the National Roundtable against Metallic Mining (the Mesa). Community organizing efforts have successfully blocked attempts by Pacific Rim, a Canadian corporation, to acquire gold mining permits, but the company has filed a lawsuit against the Salvadoran government under US-CAFTA for hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. The case is to be decided by a tribunal at the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), associated with the World Bank. Because of this ongoing controversy, the climate in Cabañas remains volatile.

On January 20 Father Neftalí opened his home to two young men claiming to be university students expressing interest in his work. They tied him up at gunpoint and stole his personal computer, cell phone and external hard drives. Father Neftalí stated that the assailants did not ask for money and that during the robbery they were in constant communication with someone who seemed to be organizing it from a distance.

Father Neftalí has been harassed and intimidated since 2008. Last year, following a series of text message death threats, the Attorney General's Office took his phone as evidence. However, he has not yet heard anything from the authorities regarding that case.

This is our ninth letter to officials in El Salvador regarding abuses against those opposed to gold mining in Cabañas since the murder of environmental activist Gustavo Marcelo Rivera in June 2009. Indeed, four environmentalists opposed to mining in Cabañas have been murdered since 2009. Numerous other community organizers, leaders, priests, and local radio station staff have received threats, been attacked and intimidated during this time.

In light of these facts, we **strongly urge** that you

- conduct a thorough investigation of this case and all the prior cases of threats and violence towards Father Neftalí and bring the material and intellectual authors to trial;
- provide protection for the environmentalists who have received threats or who have been targets of attacks, including Father Neftalí and the communities in Cabañas where mining companies have created conflict;
- investigate the intellectual authors of all crimes of violence, murder, attacks, and threats that have occurred in Cabañas since 2009 as a result of the conflict related to mining operations.

Concrete actions from government institutions are extremely necessary; leaving these cases in impunity will likely lead to further violence.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Sean Murphy, Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy in El Salvador ~ via fax: 011-503-2501-2154
Francisco Altshul Charge d'Affaires, El Salvador Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 1-202-234-3834
Melanie Bonner, El Salvador Desk at US State Dept. ~ via fax: 202-647-2597
Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email
Dinah Shelton, Chair, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

SisterCities_1/27/12_ElSalvador

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: