

via fax: 011 504 239 3298

Excmo Sr. Presidente Porfirio Lobo Sosa
President of the Republic of Honduras

March 4, 2013

Dear President Lobo:

We are outraged at the defamatory allegations that Colonel Germán Antonio Alfaro Escalante, Commander of the Xatruch III Joint Intervention Task Force, made against journalists, human rights defenders and civil society organizations in the Lower Aguán region. The Task Force is a military-police operation that has been effect in the Aguán Valley since 2010.

In a press conference on February 18, Col. Alfaro publicly accused the following of publishing false accusations about Xatruch III through online networks and international human rights organizations: Regional Agricultural Platform of Aguán; **Wilfredo Paz**, spokesman for the Aguán Permanent International Human Rights Monitoring Unit; **Vitalino Alvarez** and **Yoni Rivas**, leaders of the Aguán United Peasant Movement (MUCA) and **Marvín Palacios**, a journalist and member of the Honduran Committee of Families of Disappeared Detainees (COFADEH). The websites Defensoresenlinea.com, an online human rights newspaper run by COFADEH, Voselsoberano.com and Hondurastierralibre.com, communications media providing testimony on human rights, were each accused of publishing material accusing the Task Force of intimidating, threatening and killing people in the department of Colón.

The above accusations stem from urgent alerts issued by local and international human rights organizations calling for the release of Juan Chinchilla, President of the Unified Campesino Movement of the Aguán (MUCA), who was arrested on February 8 because of his work on agrarian reform on behalf of landless peasants. Since the militarization of the Aguán region, more than 60 persons, mainly campesinos and their supporters, have been murdered.

We **strongly urge** you to:

- cease all forms of defamation and intimidation of human rights defenders and civil society organizations by public officials, including members of the military; and
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities free from reprisals and restrictions, including judicial harassment;

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

Copies: Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro, Honduran Amabassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
Lisa Kubiske, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax 011 504 2236 9037
Nathan Anderson, Attache for Human Rights and Labor, US Embassy to Honduras ~ via email
Benjamin Gedan, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax 202.647.2597
Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email
Tracy Robinson, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458.3992
US Senators Brown and Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, ~ via email

FRONTLINE_Honduras

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