

via fax: 011 504 2232 1666/2239 3298

Excmo. Sr. Porfirio Lobo Sosa

President of the Republica of Honduras

via fax: 011 504 2235 8379

Sr. Ana Pineda

Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Honduras

April 2, 2013

Dear Sir and Madam:

We are very concerned for the safety of **Yoni Rivas** and **Vitalino Alvarez**, leaders of the Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán (MUCA), which campaigns for the land rights of peasant farmers amid ongoing disputes over land ownership in the Bajo Aguán region of Colón and Yoro Departments.

On March 11 Yoni Rivas and Vitalino Alvarez, accompanied by another MUCA member Juan Chinchilla and a driver Leonel Cruz, were driving past La Masica, Atlántida Department. They were stopped by police officers who asked them to open the windows of their vehicle while one of the officers checked the interior of the vehicle. Later that day, as they drove past the community of San Juan Pueblo, their vehicle was stopped at a police roadblock, where they were asked to park on the side of the road while police extensively searched the vehicle and their personal belongings.

After staying at a hotel that night, Yoni Rivas, Vitalino Alvarez and Juan Chinchilla took a bus to a meeting in Siguatepeque while the driver Leonel Cruz remained at the hotel. At 3:30 am on March 12 heavily armed men driving a pick-up truck came to the hotel asking for the three leaders. When the receptionist informed them that they had just departed, the armed men left, heading in the same direction, but they did not find them.

The three peasant leaders believe this incident was an attempt to kill them as a result of their defense of the rights of peasant farmers in the region. On March 20 the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) reported the incident to the Attorney General's Special Office for Human Rights.

We strongly urge you to

- immediately take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological safety of Yoni Rivas, Vitalino Alvarez, Juan Chinchilla and all members of MUCA; and
- guarantee that human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities in all circumstances without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro, Honduran Ambassador 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 & Portman ~ via email
 US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Frontline 3/22/13_Honduras

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