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Attacks Against Guatemalan Human Rights Defenders Denounced

- Communities and organizations appealed to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, urging the State of Guatemala, private businesses, and investors to guarantee the human rights of people and communities affected by large hydroelectric projects.
- They presented a report, outlining 10 different cases, which documents 273 incidents of threats, criminalization, and attacks against defenders, traditional authorities, journalists, and communities.
- Criminalization included 103 arrest warrants, imprisonment of 36 defenders, and the murder of 11.

Washington, DC, United States. A coalition of communities and organizations denounced human rights violations against traditional and indigenous communities in Guatemala, at a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Because of their opposition to large hydroelectric projects, the human rights defenders have been threatened, assaulted, treated as criminals, and assassinated.

A report filed before the Commission, featuring 10 different cases, notes that various communities confronting these projects have faced rights abuses including violations of their rights to free, prior, informed, and culturally appropriate consultation; self-determination; due process; and life.

The report also outlines how those who defend affected people and communities have been victims of threats and aggressions. The most common attacks include arrest warrants (103), assaults resulting in injuries (56), imprisonment (36), detention (25), criminalization (16), and threats (15). There have been 11 documented murders and three conflict-related deaths in communities that oppose these hydroelectric projects.

At least 19 companies are linked to hydroelectric projects in Guatemala, of which 55 percent are national, 40 percent are transnational, and five percent are State-owned.

The complaints emphasized that it is the duty of the State to guarantee the rights of communities, and of the people who defend them. The obligation to respect human rights also extends to operating companies and project funders.

Therefore, the organizations and communities ask the Guatemalan State to:

- Comprehensively respect the rights of indigenous people, including the rights to self-determination; consultation; and free, prior, informed, and culturally appropriate consent.
- Ensure the safety of human rights defenders.
- Include the participation of indigenous communities in the design and implementation of their energy-development policies.

They also request the companies involved to:

- Comply with due diligence in matters of business and human rights.
- Refrain from taking actions, such as filing lawsuits, that result in criminalization of and attacks on human rights defenders.
- Publicly recognize the positive and fundamental role of human rights defenders in democracy.

The complete report (in Spanish) is available here: <http://bit.ly/2nUfiqp>

Authors Include:

Acompañamiento de Austria (ADA); Asamblea Departamental de Pueblos de Huehuetenango (ADH); Asociación de Abogados Mayas de Guatemala; Asociación Indígena Ch`Orti` Nuevo Día; Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA); Business and Human Rights Resource Center; Consejo del Pueblo Maya (CPO) Consejo Mam; Guatemala Human Rights Commission, USA (GHRC); Guatemala Solidarity Network; Microregión de Ixquisis, San Mateo Ixtatán; The Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR); PAYXAIL YAJAW KONOB (Gobierno Ancestral Plurinacional) AKATEKA, CHUJ, POPTI', Q'ANJOB'AL; International Platform Against Impunity; Protection International; Proyecto Acompañamiento Quebec Guatemala Montréal, Canadá; Resistencia Río Dolores y la Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos (UDEFEQUA)

Press Contacts:

Karen Hudlet, Business and Human Rights Resource Center,
hudlet@business-humanrights.org

Rodrigo da Costa Sales, AIDA, rsales@aida-americas.org