Guatemala: Violent eviction of peasant families in Tecún Umán, San Marcos

On May 5th, 2007, 50 peasant families were violently evicted from the San Antonio Las Pilas farm, in the Tecún Umán municipality, Department of San Marcos. A heavily armed group of National policemen stormed the farm, leaving behind one peasant dead, Wilson Ramírez López, one severely injured, one taken prisoner and the total destruction of the families’ possessions who had to run for their lives.

In view of this violent aggression by the police force acting on orders of the Public Ministry, please ask the Government of Guatemala to investigate and prosecute the forced eviction, the killing of Mr. Wilson Ramírez López, the illegal imprisonment and the looting. Please also ask the government to protect the peasant families and to solve all agrarian conflicts in a peaceful manner. Please send a letter to the Vice-President of Guatemala, with copy to the Human Rights Ombudsman and to CODECA (Committee for Peasant Development).

Background:
Since August 2006, 50 peasant families have been living and cultivating the San Antonio Las Pilas farm, situated in the Tecún Umán municipality, Department of San Marcos, which they recovered and claimed for themselves as they consider it to be State property. Since that moment when they peacefully started to occupy the land, a landholding family of the region also started to claim property rights to this land and initiated threats and legal demands against some of the occupants, who due to lack of financial resources have not been able to legally defend themselves properly. Two of the peasants are detained under false accusations of various offences. The peasants are organized in CODECA (Committee for Peasant Development) which is giving legal support.

On May 5th, 2007, on behalf of the district attorney of the Public Ministry, and without consulting the Human Rights Ombudsman in order to achieve a peaceful mediation, about 15 heavily armed police agents of the National Police stormed the place suddenly, leaving the peasant Mr. Wilson Ramírez López dead, one peasant detained and causing the sacking of the peasant families’ possessions, who had to
flee to save their lives. This violent act is just one of many and shows the suffering of peasants women and men inflicted by security forces. Furthermore, the Public Ministry has demonstrated to side openly with the interests of the landholding family, abusing its authority when turning against the peasant families affected in this violent way.

CODECA demands the investigation, capture and punishment of those responsible for the death of Mr. Wilson Ramírez López and the looting suffered by the peasant families of the San Antonio Las Pilas farm. The peasants detained should be immediately released. Furthermore, they ask the Government of Guatemala to stop the violent evictions.

**Mandate of the Emergency Network:**

Guatemala is State Party to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Therefore, all State authorities have to respect, protect and fulfil the rights recognized in these treaties, particularly the Right to Food, the Right to Life and Personal Integrity.

**End of the action:** June 30, 2007

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<tr>
<th>Adresses:</th>
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<th>CODECA</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Lic. Mariel Aguilar</td>
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**Please inform FIAN about any reply you might get.**

**Translation of the letter**

I greet you sincerely and with this letter I wish to express my deep concern about what happened on the San Antonio Las Pilas farm, situated in the Tecún Umán municipality, Department of San Marcos.

On May 5th, 2007, about 15 heavily armed agents of the National Police, suddenly stormed the above mentioned farm, where 50 peasant families have been living since August 2006. They claim this farm, because they consider it to be State property. The action had been carried out on behalf of the district attorney of the Public Ministry who did not involve the Human Rights Ombudsman in order to search a peaceful solution, thus causing the death of the peasant Mr. Wilson Ramírez López, leaving one person severely injured and causing the complete destruction of the peasant families’ possessions who had to flee to save their lives.
Guatemala is State Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and has therefore the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil these rights, particularly the Right to Life, Personal Integrity and the Right to Food.

Therefore, I ask you, Mr. Vice-President, to take the appropriate and immediate measures in order to achieve:

- The protection of the community and the prompt solution of the agrarian conflict in favor of the peasant community so that their livelihood is ensured;
- An compensation for the looting of the peasant families who lost their possessions;
- The investigation, capture and punishment of those responsible for the death of Mr. Wilson Ramírez López;
- The immediate release of the detained peasants;
- The investigation and punishment of those responsible for the violent storming ordered on May 5th, 2007.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Eduardo Stein
Vicepresidente de la República
Casa Presidencial
6ª avenida 4-19, zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala
Guatemala

Estimado Sr. Vicepresidente,

Le saludo atentamente y con la presente quiero expresarle mi profunda preocupación por los hechos ocurridos en la finca San Antonio de Pilas, ubicada en el municipio de Tecún Umán, departamento de San Marcos.

El pasado sábado, 5 de mayo de 2007, aprox. 15 elementos de la Policía Nacional altamente armados, irrumpieron sorpresivamente en la finca arriba mencionada, donde 50 familias campesinas están viviendo desde agosto de 2006. Ellas reclaman esta finca, porque la consideran propiedad de la nación. El desalojo ejecutado bajo el amparo del fiscal del Ministerio Público, quien no buscó la participación de la Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos para encontrar una mediación pacífica, causó la muerte del campesino Wilson Ramírez López, y que dejó una persona gravemente herida y conllevó al despojo total de las pertenencias de las familias campesinas ocupantes quienes tuvieron que huir para salvar sus vidas.

Guatemala es Estado Parte del Pacto Internacional de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales como también del Pacto Internacional de Derechos Civiles y Políticos, por lo que ha asumido la obligación de respetar, proteger y garantizar los derechos consagrados en estos dos tratados, en particular el derecho a la vida, a la integridad de la persona y el derecho a la alimentación.

En este sentido, le solicito, Sr. Vicepresidente, adoptar las medidas apropiadas e inmediatas para lograr:
- La protección de la comunidad y la pronta resolución del conflicto agrario a favor de la comunidad campesina para asegurar su sobrevivencia.
- Una indemnización de las familias campesinas despojadas de sus pertenencias;
- La investigación, captura y el castigo de los responsables de la muerte del Sr. Wilson Ramírez López;
- La condena de la captura ilegal de los presos y su liberación inmediata;
- La investigación y la condena de los responsables de la incursión violenta ocurrida el 5 de mayo de 2007.

Atentamente,