



Joint Press Release: OBSERVATORY / UDEFEGUA

“Más pequeños que David”: the struggle of human rights defenders in Guatemala

Publication of Fact-Finding Report and Documentary Film

Geneva-Paris-Guatemala-City, February 23, 2015: In its report and documentary published today, the Observatory denounces the extreme vulnerability of human rights defenders and their constant targeting via criminalization campaigns, threats, and physical assaults. The publication of the report and documentary coincides with the start of a 5-day mission in the country.

The report reveals 657 cases of attacks against human rights defenders in 2013 and that in 2014 figures rose to 810 cases - the highest number since UDEFEGUA began keeping official records in 2000. Additionally, last year saw the deaths of 7 defenders, 21 attempted murders, and the saddening figure of 30 cases of ill, cruel or inhuman treatment against human rights defenders.

“The conclusions laid out in this report place the utmost urgency on the Guatemalan authorities to truly commit to protecting human rights defenders and to dealing with the structural sources of social conflict. What is more, the international community must deliver a more effective support strategy for those who attempt to defend human rights in hostile environments lacking adequate State protection”, stated Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of the OMCT.

The report published today places the spotlight on the situation of land rights defenders and the violence they experience when they raise their voices against the negative impacts of natural resource extraction companies. Most notably, the communities that have taken action in protecting human rights, such as those of *Santa Cruz Barillas, La Puya* or *San Rafael de Las Flores* and *Mataquescuintla*, have become the targets of repressive political policies that have employed unjustifiable states of siege and violent evictions. The most commonly witnessed attacks include: harassment and threats, physical attacks including assassinations, criminal prosecution and defamation.

“Despite a comprehensive legal and institutional framework and some progresses regarding the fight against the impunity of attacks against defenders, they continue to act under extremely vulnerable conditions. This demonstrates the State’s lack of willingness and capacity when it comes to ensuring of the respect of their rights, including their physical security”, said Karim Lahidji, FIDH President.

Land rights defenders face a critical situation, aggravated by structural issues resulting in conflicts throughout the country, such as the lack of agrarian reform as set forth in the Peace Agreements; the re-militarization and the mishandling of social conflicts via the application of laws that criminalize protesters such as the *“Túmulos Law”*; the structural discrimination of indigenous peoples; inequality and poverty; and the systematic violation of the right to prior consultation, which is considered to be legally non-binding by the Constitutional Court.

“As stated by the International Labour Organization, it is important to remember that a lack of consultation mechanisms regarding hydroelectric, extraction or monoculture



projects that exploit natural resources is in large part the source of said social conflicts”, stated Claudia Samayoa, Director of UDEFEGUA.

The Observatory and UDEFEGUA have sent an international mission to Guatemala from February 23 – 27, 2015 to launch the Report and the Documentary Film, during which meetings will be held with local and international authorities, civil society and the media. The objective of the mission is to establish a dialogue on the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report that was jointly drafted by the Observatory and the UDEFEGUA.

The Report is available for download on the OMCT website:

in Spanish (<http://www.omct.org/es/human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/2015/02/d23002/>)

in English (<http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/2015/02/d23002/>)

and on the FIDH website:

in Spanish (<http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/obsreportgtm2015es.pdf>)

in English (<http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/obsreportgtm2015eng.pdf>)

The Documentary “Más pequeños que david” is available here:

(http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2hwem4_obs-gtm-mas-pequen-os-que-david-espan-ol_news).

You can participate via social networking sites using the hashtag #MasPequeñosQueDavid.

For more information on the Report or Documentary, please contact:

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