

## **Statement on the double assassination, physical aggression, and the dangerous situation faced by communities in the Ixquisis region**

*We, the signatory organizations, express our deep concern about the situation of risk faced by the communities and human rights defenders of the Ixquisis region, San Mateo Ixtatán, Huehuetenango, Guatemala.*

Since 2009, land and environmental defenders in the Ixquisis region have faced human rights violations in the context of their opposition to the hydroelectric projects San Andrés, Pojom I, and Pojom II. The three projects are promoted by the company Energía y Renovación S.A. (formerly known as PDH S.A.) and are financed by the private arm of the Inter-American Development Bank, BID Invest, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE) and Cordiant Cap, a Canadian financial intermediary, which manages funds from the German bank KfW, among others.

Since May of this year the Peaceful Resistance of Ixquisis has carried out a series of public actions, demonstrations and marches to reiterate their opposition to hydroelectric projects in their territory. Currently, there are three injunctions against the operating licenses of the Pojom II hydroelectric plant, which are awaiting resolution in national courts. In June, the communities of Ixquisis received the Front Line Defenders award in recognition of their collective efforts and peaceful struggle. In August, the affected communities filed a formal complaint with the IDB's Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism (MECI), requesting the investigation and withdrawal of their investment due to non-compliance with the bank's own operations policies.

In this context, human rights organizations that accompany the case have observed a significant increase in defamation and aggression against the Peaceful Resistance and the local population, culminating in the murders of two Peaceful Resistance members, brothers Neri Esteban Pedro and Domingo Esteban Pedro, on December 16th. Their bodies were found on the edge of the Northern Transversal Strip with bullet wounds to the head. This incident brings to mind the murder of Sebastián Alonso Juan, who died as a result of a shooting during a peaceful demonstration in January 2017; to date, this murder still that has not been clarified.

In addition to this double murder, the following recent incidents deserve mention:

- July and October: Violation of the right to peaceful demonstration and the right to free movement by the PNC, as well as excessive use of force against protesters, resulting in six injured, three of whom required hospitalization.
- October 12: On this day, two members of the Peaceful Resistance suffered armed attacks; Alfonso Miguel Francisco Pedro, from the town of Pojom required hospitalization for seven days.
- October 20 and November 7: harassment and use of tear gas against community members, causing tear gas intoxication in children and a pregnant woman.
- December 9: physical aggression against Lucas Jorge García, president of the Second Level Development Council of the Ixquisis Region. Two men attacked this Peaceful Resistance members at his home, hitting him on the head with sticks and stones. When his daughter and daughter-in-law, seven months pregnant, tried to defend him, they were also beaten.

The constant campaign to defame and discredit the Peaceful Resistance, which has gone on for more than a year, has increased in intensity, also impacting allied organizations like the Plurinational Government of the Akateko, Chuj, Popti, Q'anjob'al, and Mestizo peoples, with a particular focus on one of its coordinators, Rigoberto Juárez.

At the beginning of November, the media announced the signing of an alleged "Agreement for Peace and Development" in the municipality of San Mateo Ixtatán, an agreement that concludes a dialogue process held only between actors in favor of the hydroelectric power plants and with direct links to the

company. The representativeness of this agreement has been questioned repeatedly by the Peaceful Resistance, which has seen an increase in attacks since the dialogue process began.

In view of this gravely dangerous situation, the undersigned organizations express our solidarity with the defenders of the Ixquisis region, and call on:

- The Attorney General's Office to investigate and prosecute the material and intellectual authors responsible for all the attacks committed against the Peaceful Resistance of Ixquisis, including the murders of Neri Pedro Esteban, Domingo Pedro Esteban and Sebastián Alonso Juan.
- The State of Guatemala to take all necessary measures to guarantee Ixquisis community members' life and integrity, as well as their right to demand and defend rights.
- The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior to comply with the withdrawal of state security forces, namely the National Civil Police and the Guatemalan Army, from the private facilities of the hydroelectric company, in order to guarantee the independence of the public forces stationed in the Ixquisis region.
- The international community in Guatemala to closely observe human rights defenders' situation through visits to the territory.
- The international financial institutions involved to adopt measures that ensure that their investments are going towards projects that fully respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.