



PUBLIC STATEMENT

AMR Index 34/6738/2017

Guatemala: Business associations must refrain from stigmatizing human rights defenders or discrediting their work

Following a series of statements from different business associations challenging the legitimate work of the Guatemalan Center for Legal, Environmental and Social Action (CALAS) in legally challenging the licenses granted to the San Rafael mining company in San Rafael Las Flores municipality, Guatemala, Amnesty International urgently calls upon Guatemala's business associations and businesses to refrain from making statements aimed at discrediting or stigmatizing people who are defending indigenous rights and the right to a clean environment.

On 5 July last, the Supreme Court of Justice provisionally suspended two licenses granted to the San Rafael mining company in San Rafael las Flores following an appeal submitted by CALAS. In the days leading up to this decision, business associations took out advertisements in Guatemala's press stigmatizing CALAS and its members and questioning their efforts to defend human rights by lodging legal appeals in environmental cases. One advertisement, for example, published on 29 June by people calling themselves suppliers of the San Rafael mine and aimed at the judges of the Supreme Court of Justice read: *"CALAS is acting irresponsibly by not consulting the community that it is endangering and which it claims to represent, nor the families of workers in San Rafael las Flores. There is growing resentment the residents [sic] of Casillas who are falsely accusing the San Rafael Mine for causing tremors and earthquakes, phenomena which the authorities have explained are natural [...] We call on them [the judges] to search their consciences and prevent social destabilization, avoid affecting our companies, our employees and their families and promote harmony by setting aside this irresponsible appeal submitted by the environmental institution"*.

On 5 July, the day on which the Supreme Court of Justice notified its decision to suspend the licenses, the Guatemalan Chamber of Industry published another advertisement in the national press stating that *"Various groups, associations and individuals who neither belong to nor represent Guatemala's indigenous or tribal peoples have submitted a constitutional appeal with the sole aim of suspending investment projects and national development [...] This has had the result of a growing and manipulated level of conflict, particularly in rural areas [...]"*.

Both Guatemala's business associations and its individual businesses must act in accordance with the due diligence principles set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Business associations and businesses must, in this context, prevent and not encourage the stigmatization of human rights defenders or the discrediting of their work. Far from being of little consequence, such stigmatization fosters an environment that is hostile to human rights defence, causes defenders to become the targets of attack, and promotes and facilitates the perpetuation of attacks that could place the lives and integrity of human rights defenders at risk.