



PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Guatemala: The killing of another community leader underscores the urgent need for a policy for the protection of human rights defenders

Ronal David Barillas Díaz, a community leader and human rights defender was killed on the morning of 9 January in Taxisco, Santa Rosa, Guatemala. His attackers got out of a vehicle, walked to the newspaper and food stall where he worked and shot him at least six times, before fleeing the scene.

Amnesty International utterly condemns this attack and urges the Guatemalan authorities to initiate a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the death of the human rights defender and to put in place, without delay, a comprehensive public policy for the protection of human rights defenders in the country.

Ronal David Barillas Díaz, was an Indigenous Xinka leader, a member of the Xinka parliament and a member of the Committee of Communities Affected by the Sugar Industry (Coordinadora Comunitaria de Afectados por la Industria de la Azúcar), an association that brings together more than 70 communities in the departments of Escuintla, Santa Rosa and Jutiapa. He had highlighted the environmental impact of the activities of the sugar agroindustry in his region and had on occasion worked with the Committee for the Defence of Nature (CODIDENA), which opposes the El Escobal mining project (San Rafael Mine), and had denounced the lack of free, prior and informed consultation with communities living near the mine.

His killing leaves his community and the organizations in which he worked in a state of greater uncertainty, fear and danger. The Guatemalan authorities must, in consultation with human rights defenders and civil society organizations, urgently adopt protection measures to ensure the security and physical and psychological integrity of human rights defenders, including those working on the rights to territory and a healthy environment and on rights related to access to land. Amnesty International urges Guatemala to adopt, without delay, a comprehensive policy for the protection of human rights defenders, based on the criteria set out by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case *Human rights defender and other vs Guatemala*.

Finally, Amnesty International calls on the Prosecutor for Human Rights to ensure that the investigation into the killing of Ronal David Barillas Díaz is thorough, independent and impartial in order to identify and bring to justice both those who carried out the killing and intellectual authors behind it.

The investigation must establish whether he was killed as a reprisal for his work defending human rights. If it should fail to do so, the authorities would be sending a message that attacks against human rights defenders are tolerated and those responsible will not face any consequences. The Guatemalan Public Prosecutor's Office must adopt and publish the General Instruction of the Protocol for the Investigation Crimes against Human Rights Defenders, which has been developed in conjunction with civil society organizations in Guatemala.