

# URGENT ACTION

## LAND DEFENDERS THREATENED AND ATTACKED

**Human rights defender Ramon Choc died following a violent assault, and other defenders have been threatened, as attacks against land and territory defenders in Guatemala increase. Authorities must take action to fully investigate these crimes and ensure that other defenders can carry out their work without fear for their safety.**

In the evening of 30 May, two unidentified men brutally attacked **Ramon Choc Sacrab**, an Indigenous Q'echi' leader of Ixloq San Pedrito, Cobán in central Guatemala. He died on 1 June as a consequence of his injuries. Ramon Choc was a regional leader of the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (Comité Campesino del Altiplano, CCDA). Earlier that day, he had participated in a march for justice for three human rights defenders who were murdered in Guatemala in May. Ramon Choc was involved, on behalf of his community, in the negotiation and dialogue process with the government to find a solution to the land tenure conflict affecting the community and many others in the region. He had reported receiving threats and an arrest warrant had been issued against him in this context. The local police told Amnesty International the attack was not related to his work, but to a fight between drunk men. This version does not match with the information provided by local organizations and witness. Amnesty Internacional reached out to the Prosecutor's office, but was unable to get information from them.

This is the third attack against CCDA leaders in the Cobán region in less than a month, causing concern for the safety of their regional and national leaders. It takes place in a context of recurring violence against defenders working on rights related to land, territory and the environment.

According to information received by Amnesty International, the General Coordinator of 'New Day' Ch'orti' Campesino Central Coordinator (CCCND), **Jacobo Omar Jerónimo**, has reported several security incidents, including death threats and an illegal raid into CCCND's offices. A member of the Peasant Unity Committee (Comité de Unidad Campesina, CUC) also reported receiving death threats related to her work over the last weeks.

### **Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:**

- Calling on the authorities to initiate a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation into the murder of Ramon Choc Sacrab and security incidents against the aforementioned defenders. The investigation should include the theory of the attack being a possible retaliation for their legitimate activities as human rights defenders, as mentioned in the recently adopted General Instruction to investigate against human rights defenders;
- Calling on them to take all appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of CCDA, CCCND and CUC members at risk in accordance with their wishes;
- Urging them to advance in the adoption of a Public Policy to Protect Defenders in accordance with the minimum criteria set out by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case *Human Rights Defender v. Guatemala*.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 JULY 2018 TO:**

Attorney General  
 María Consuelo Porras  
 Fiscal General de la República  
 15 avenida 15-16 zona 1 Edificio Gerona  
 8º Nivel, C.P. 01001 Ciudad de  
 Guatemala, Guatemala  
 Email:  
 mariadelcarmengarciaescobar@gmail.com  
 Twitter: @MPguatemala  
**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/  
 Estimada Señora Fiscal**

Minister of Interior  
 Enrique Antonio Degenhart Asturias  
 6a avenida 13-71 zona 1, C.P. 01001  
 Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala.  
 Email: ministrodegobnacion@mingob.g  
 ob.gt (cc: smvasquez@mingob.gob.gt)  
 Twitter: @Mingobguate  
**Salutation: Dear Mr Minister /  
 Estimado señor Ministro**

**And copies to:**  
COPREDEH's President  
 Jorge Luis Borrayo  
 Comisión Presidencial coordinadora de  
 la Política del Ejecutivo en materia de  
 Derechos Humanos (COPREDEH)  
 Avenida La Reforma 2-18, zona 9,  
 Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala  
 Email: coprekeh@coprekeh.gob.gt

### **Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 97/18. Further information:  
[www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr34/8417/2018/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr34/8417/2018/en/)

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Human rights defenders in Guatemala carry out their activities in an extremely hostile environment, particularly those working on rights related to land, territory and the environment. They face continuous threats, intimidation, attacks, smear campaigns and stigmatization. According to the Guatemalan NGO, Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEFUGA), 10 defenders have been killed since the beginning of 2018. In 2017, UDEFEFUGA registered 496 attacks against human rights defenders.

In May 2018, the Attorney General issued an internal General Instruction containing guidelines to effectively investigate attacks against human rights defenders.

CCDA is a campesino (peasant farmer) organization founded in 1982 that works to promote access to land as well as the labour rights of Mayan campesinos. CCDA has reported already been targeted with attacks and intimidations. In June 2016, Indigenous leader Daniel Choc Pop was killed in San Juan Tres Ríos. Several attacks against their office and against leaders were registered in June 2017. In May 2018 José Can Xol and Mateo Chamám Paau, two CCDA local leaders, were murdered in the communities of Choctún Basilá and San Juan Tres Ríos. Both were involved in protecting and defending their communities in a long-standing land tenure conflict. They had participated in the negotiation and dialogue roundtable to find solutions, together with national authorities, to the multiple land tenure conflicts affecting communities in the region.

In May 2018, Luis Arturo Marroquin, member of the national coordination of the Committee for Campesino Development (Comité de Desarrollo Campesino, CODECA) was fatally shot in San Luis Jilotepeque, in the central eastern part of Guatemala. This incident took place a week after President Jimmy Morales referred to CODECA in a disrespectful way in a public speech on 2 May and discredited their activities.

In 2014, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered Guatemala to adopt and implement a comprehensive public policy for the protection of human rights defenders in the judgement Human Rights Defender vs Guatemala. Despite some progress, the process to create the public policy hasn't concluded yet. Impunity remains the rule in most cases of threats and attacks against Guatemalan defenders.

The justice system is also regularly misused to criminalize human rights defenders, in an attempt to break up movements and organizations, wearing down the defenders and removing them from the public arena. For more information, see the Amnesty International report *"We are defending the land with our blood": Defenders of the land, territory and environment in Honduras and Guatemala* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/4562/2016/en/>) and *Americas: State Protection Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/6211/2017/en/>).

Name: Ramon Choc Sacrab (m), Jacobo Omar Jerónimo (m) and other members of the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (Comité Campesino del Altiplano, CCDA), 'New Day' Ch'orti' Campesino Central Coordinator (CCCND) and the Peasant Unity Committee (Comité de Unidad Campesina).

Gender m/f: all

Further information on UA: 97/18 Index: AMR 34/8515/2018 Issue Date: 1 June 2018