



15 March 2013

## Voices of the living and the dead cry out for justice in Guatemala

Another Guatemalan labour and land rights leader has been murdered. Carlos Hernández Mendoza, a union leader with the National Health Workers' Union of Guatemala (Sindicato Nacional Trabajadores de la Salud de Guatemala – SNTSG) was driving in his pick-up truck in the municipality of Camotán, Chiquimula department, when he was intercepted by two men on a motorcycle and shot dead at 8:30 am on 8 March 2013.

SNTSG is an affiliate of Public Services International (PSI), the global union organization which brings together more than 20 million public sector workers in 150 countries worldwide. PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli urges all members of civil society to join the call for justice in the cases of Hernández and other SNTSG leaders who have been brutally murdered over the past year.

In a letter of protest to Guatemala's current President (and former army chief), Pavanelli says, "PSI condemns the murder of Hernández and any other act that violates the right of workers to freedom of association or otherwise hurts union comrades and their families in Guatemala. We demand that the Guatemalan authorities make immediate investigations in order to arrest and convict those responsible for this murder and related threats to other activists."

Hernández was an inspiring trade union leader and human rights activist, involved in a wide range of social organizations. Hernández was on the executive of the SNTSG, and the National Front for the Struggle (Frente Nacional de Lucha – FNL). He was a leading member of several civil society groups, including Camotán Peasant Farmers Association (Asociación Campesina Camoteca), the New Day Peasant Farmer Coordination (Coordinación Campesina Nuevo Día), and Coordination of Popular, Indigenous, Church, Trade Union and Peasant Organizations of the East (Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares, Indígenas, Iglesias, Sindicales y Campesinas de Oriente – COPISCO).

On 21 February, Hernández received a death threat by phone, following a meeting where he had spoken out against deforestation in the region. Two members of the New Day Peasant Farmer Coordination, who also received threats, today fear for their lives. PSI has asked the government of Guatemala to government ensure their safety.

Pavanelli says, "PSI affirms our support for the initiative of our affiliate SNTSG to create an observatory to track the violation of human and labour rights in Guatemala. We will continue to denounce these crimes at the international level, and demand effective action against impunity.

"We believe the shocking violations of human rights and international labour conventions in Guatemala provide grounds for suspension of the European Union Central American Association Agreement (EU-CAAA), particularly in regard to the EU's General System of Preferences and special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance, known as GSP+."

SNTSG members have been targets of a murderous campaign over the past year. The union has exposed

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mismanagement of the country's public health facilities and filed an official complaint against the previous Minister of Health, accusing him of corruption. On 24 March 2012, four trade unionists were massacred, including SNTSG executive member Luis Ovidio Ortiz Cajas. On 7 August 2012, Ricardo Morataya Lemus, labour advisor for SNTSG, was assassinated and Melvy Lizeth Camey Rojas, Secretary General of the Department of Santa Rosa, was shot twice.

Pavanelli says, "We ask – how many more trade unionists will die before serious action is taken? We demand that Guatemalan and European leaders take immediate steps to stop all violence towards trade unions and their members in Guatemala, and to ensure their rights under international law are upheld. There can be no more trade without justice for workers and their communities in Guatemala."

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