



Brussels, December 16th, 2024

To the High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP), Ms. Kaja Kallas.

Cc:

To the Attorney General, Mr Johel Antonio Zelaya Álvarez.

To the EU Delegation in Honduras and EU Ambassadors in Honduras, Mr Gonzalo Fournier Conde.

To the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr Eduardo Enrique Reina García.

To the National Human Rights Commissioner of Honduras, Ms. Blanca Saraf Izaguirre Lozano.

Re: Urgent call to advance on Juan López's murder and end reprisals against Guapinol River activists.

Excellencies,

We, the undersigned, Members of different political groups of the European Parliament, would like to draw your attention to the shocking murder of Honduran environmentalist, human rights defender, and Tocoa (Colón) councilor Juan Antonio López, which occurred on September 14th, 2024. His assassination marks a tragic escalation in the violent repression of environmental defenders in Honduras.

Mr. López was part of the “Guapinol activists” movement, which was a finalist for the 2020 Sakharov Prize—the EU’s highest recognition for human rights. Mr. López also served as the coordinator of the Municipal Committee in Defense of Common and Public Goods of Tocoa (CMDBCPT), that has been advocating for the protection of the Guapinol and San Pedro rivers since 2013, that are essential to about tens of thousands of people, and the right of the population to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Mr. Lopez and other members of the CMDBCPT informed the European Parliament on several occasions of the continued threats they faced while defending the Carlos Escaleras Mejía Botaderos Mountain National Park and opposing the extractive activities of Emco Holding and its subsidiaries *Inversiones Los Pinares* and *Ecotek*. Although the operating licenses for extractive activities were not renewed in July 2024, significant environmental damage have already been documented. Moreover, Emco Holding’s megaproject includes the largest pelletising plant in Central America and a petroleum coke-powered thermoelectric plant, both built under still valid operating licenses without obtaining the required environmental permits.

CMDBCPT members, including eight who were criminalised and arbitrarily detained for over 900 days, also reported that state authorities failed to act on their complaints, allowing threats and harassment to continue with impunity. In 2023 and 2024 alone, four defenders associated with the Guapinol river defense were murdered: Oquelí and Aly Domínguez, Jairo Bonilla, and most recently Juan Antonio López, who had been granted Precautionary Measures (MC-137-23) by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in October 2023, along with 29 other members of the CMDBCPT and their legal team. Particularly alarming is the fact that, just days after Mr. López’s brutal murder, the La Ceiba Court of Appeals reopened a 2019 criminalisation case against five defenders, including Juan López and Reynaldo Domínguez Ramos, who visited the European Parliament in November 2022. Severe reprisals and widespread impunity have particularly targeted Reynaldo’s family, including the murder of his brothers, Oquelí and Aly, in 2023, which forced forty of their relatives to flee for their safety. Many other residents and families from affected communities have also been forced to leave. Now, more than a month after the Juan López’s murder, members of the CMDBCPT, his family and their legal team remain in a situation of utmost risk given their demands for justice both for the murder of Mr. López and the water sources he fought to protect.



Both the CMDBCPT and Juan López had repeatedly drawn attention to the connections between politics, business, and organised crime in the Aguán Valley. Days before his death, Mr. López and local members of the ruling LIBRE party, publicly called for the resignation of Tocoa's mayor, Adán Fúnez, after a video surfaced showing him in conversation with prominent drug traffickers. Mr. López and the CMDBCPT have also uncovered instances linking the Municipal Office to document forgery meant to benefit projects led by businessmen Lenir Pérez and Ana Facussé, whose family controls the powerful Dinant Corporation. These projects have had strong backing by Mr. Funez despite the strong local opposition.

The EU, a key partner of Honduras in promoting human rights and the rule of law, has reinforced its commitment through the EU-Central America Association Agreement, which mandates compliance with international standards. Together with Green Deal policies, this agreement offers a chance to renew dialogue on human rights and push for concrete protections for environmental defenders. Therefore, and in light of the documented human rights violations reported by the CMDBPCT and CSOs, the [recent statements](#) from the EU Delegation, the tragic murder of Juan López and the reopening of the 2019 criminalisation case against five Guapinol River defenders, we urge you to take prompt action on the following requests:

1. To publicly address Juan López's murder and express deep concern on the security situation of the Guapinol activists, the CMDBCPT, their families, communities and legal team.
2. To allocate funding to provide legal support, international protection, and accompaniment for the Guapinol activists and their families.
3. To urge the Attorney General of Honduras to ensure that the investigation into Juan López's murder is conducted with the support of international experts to guarantee impartiality, diligence, and independence. It is critical that the request from the CMDBCPT and other organisations be considered: excluding the involvement of the Tocoa Prosecutor's Office, the Violent Deaths Unit in the Lower Aguán, and other local security forces (such as DPI), due to their alleged ties to criminal structures and their role in persecuting CMDBCPT defenders.
4. To request a thorough and impartial investigation into the actions of the La Ceiba Court of Appeals and the prosecutor overseeing the case, particularly following the reversal of the dismissal of charges against Mr. López and defenders Carlos Leonel George, Reynaldo Domínguez Ramos, José Adalí Cedillo Mendoza, and Marco Tulio Ramos. Attention should also be given to the complaints filed by Juan López and his colleagues regarding threats, persecution, murder, and abuses by public officials related to extractive projects owned by Emco Holding.
5. To urge the Honduran government to fully and immediately implement the security measures already agreed to by the CMDBCPT in accordance with IAHRM Precautionary Measures 137-2023, as well as special protection to Juan López's family, witnesses of the crime and Carlos Orellana SJ, parish priest of San Isidro Labrador Catholic Church in Tocoa, who is being persecuted for seeking justice.
6. To encourage the prompt implementation of Decree Law 18-2024, and immediately proceed to restore the Carlos Escaleras Mejía National Park and terminate projects that do not have the consent of locally impacted communities.

We thank you in advance for your response, and we hope that this urgent matter and Juan López's case will retain your greatest attention.

Sincerely,



Sean Kelly, EPP
Jaume Asens, Greens/EFA
Anna Cavazzini, Greens/EFA
David Cormand, Greens/EFA
Cristina Guarda, Greens/EFA
Martin Häusling, Greens/EFA
Vicent Marzà, Greens/EFA
Tilly Metz, Greens/EFA
Ana Miranda Paz, Greens/EFA
Rasmus Nordqvist, Greens/EFA
Maria Ohisalo, Greens/EFA
Leoluca Orlando, Greens/EFA
Diana Riba i Giner, Greens/EFA
Majdouline Sbai, Greens/EFA
Virginijus Sinkevicius, Greens/EFA
Catarina Vieira, Greens/EFA
Pernando Barrena, The Left
Per Clausen, The Left
Estrella Galán, The Left
Hanna Gedin, The Left
Rima Hassan, The Left
Irene Montero, The Left
Carola Rackete, The Left
Isabel Serra, The Left
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Ohiane Agirregoitia Martínez, Renew
Cynthia Ní Mhurchú, Renew