



human rights *first*

30th
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José Amílcar Velásquez Zárata
Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office
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Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

cc

Sr. Francisco Jimenez
Ministro de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Dear Mr Velasquez,

We, the below-signed 1,404 individuals, join Human Rights First in writing to express our concern about the apparent attempt to murder Yuri Melini, the Director of the Center for Environmental, Social and Legal Actions (CALAS). We understand that on September 4, 2008 at approximately 7:30 a.m. Melini was shot in Colonia Castillo Lara, Guatemala City. Before shooting Melini the perpetrator apparently ensured Melini's identity by calling his name. Melini was shot three times but fortunately survived the incident. It appears that the assailant was waiting for Melini in a parked car with other men also waiting in another car.

We share the Guatemalan government's concern that the attempt to murder Melini was connected to his advocacy at CALAS. CALAS is an environmental organization that engages in investigations, education and community support. It seeks to protect the environment, strengthen political participation in environmental decision making and improve respect for the collective environmental rights of indigenous peoples. More specifically, CALAS has worked within the Guatemalan legal framework to demonstrate the environmental impact of mining and petroleum projects as well as to campaign against contamination of drinking water and occupation of nature reserves. Most recently CALAS successfully petitioned the Constitutional Court to strike down aspects of the Mining Law.

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We fear that Melini's advocacy may have motivated those opposed to the work of CALAS to attempt to kill him. On the same day that Melini was shot, the Foundation for Conservation and Eco-development reported that 50 environmental activists had received threats related to their work.

We are encouraged by the Colom government's press release condemning the attempted murder and supporting the work of CALAS. We also applaud the police and the Public Prosecutor's office for reportedly beginning to investigate the incident.

2008 marks the 10th anniversary of the UN Human Rights Defenders Declaration, article 9(5) of which states, "the State shall conduct a prompt and impartial investigation ... whenever there is reasonable ground to believe that a violation of human rights ... has occurred."

We therefore urge you to:

- Guarantee a prompt, impartial, and comprehensive investigation into the attack and prosecute those who ordered and carried out the attack. It is important not just to establish who ordered the killing but also the motive.
- Cooperate with the human rights unit of the Criminal Investigation Division (DINC) in the prosecution of the perpetrators and intellectual authors of this crime.
- Investigate and apprehend those responsible for the recent threats and acts of intimidation against other environmental organizations.

We urge the Interior Minister to continue to consult with Melini, his family and other CALAS colleagues to implement adequate protective measures to guard against future attacks.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

The names of the 1,404 signatories have been hidden for privacy reasons.