

## INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT

### **In solidarity with the indigenous and peasant organizations of Guatemala due to the alarming weakening of the democratic institutions established by the Peace Agreement**

The organisations, which have signed this declaration, express their concern about the serious situation of criminalisation and violation of human rights of peasant and indigenous organisations in Guatemala in the practice of their role as peaceful defenders of their lands and territories. So far this year, four defenders of organisations that are part of the ILC have been murdered and one of them is missing. These are the cases of the murders of **Misael López** (11/8/2020), **Fidel López** (23/06/2020) and **Dominga Ramos** (05/03/2020) of the Committee for Peasant Development (CODECA); and **Medardo Alonzo Lucero** (15/06/2020) of the New Day Central of Indigenous Peasant Organizations. **Carlos Enrique Coy**, defender of the Verapacense Union of Peasant Organisations - UVOC, is missing (03/08/2020). In addition, Benoit Amedee Maria (10/08/2020), a French human rights defender and director of Agronomists and Veterinarians without Borders who worked for the indigenous Mayan Ixil communities, was murdered. In addition, there have been five attempts at extra-judicial eviction of indigenous communities in the departments of Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz and Izabal, which show the insecurity of land tenure experienced by peasants and indigenous people in the country. We join these organisations' request for justice to clarify the facts, punish the guilty parties and provide comprehensive reparation for the defenders.

In 2018, the ILC, Front Line Defenders and Civicus carried out an international mission to Guatemala in response to the escalation of violence (criminalisation, arbitrary arrests, murders, among others) against women defenders of land and the environment, which revealed a worrying pattern of systematic violence that continues to exist. According to the latest report by Global Witness (2019), Latin America continues to be the most lethal region for these defenders, with Guatemala being one of the countries with the most deaths per capita. This year alone, UDEFEGUA reports 677 attacks on human rights defenders in the country

Today, indigenous and peasant organisations in Guatemala face a context of violence aggravated by the weakening of agrarian and human rights institutions. The latest measures taken by the government to eliminate the Secretariat of Agrarian Affairs (SAA), the Presidential Commission on Human Rights (COPREDEH) and the Secretariat for Peace (SEPAZ) are a step backwards in the construction of a more democratic state that respects human rights. The elimination of these institutions, created to comply with the Peace Accords and with a fundamental role for dialogue between the State and indigenous and peasant organisations, makes it even more difficult to resolve peacefully the acute agrarian and territorial problems, as well as to address peasant demands for comprehensive rural development.

#### **In view of the critical situation:**

- **We reiterate our support for the indigenous and peasant organisations that are fighting to defend human rights in Guatemala, and we recognise the legitimate work that they are doing from the Platform for the Defence of Land and Territory, as well as from other spaces.**
- **We urge the Guatemalan authorities to find a solution to the existing conflicts through democratic means and with respect for human rights, and we stress that**

- **The State must recognise the legitimate right to land and territory of peasants and indigenous peoples, and ensure compliance with international conventions and treaties concerning their rights.**
  - **It is necessary to resolve agrarian conflicts and put an end to the policy of evictions. To this end, it is necessary to decentralise land ownership through re-distributive public policies, recover indigenous territories and guarantee both access to land by peasant and indigenous communities and their legal security, so that migration is controlled and the right to food is guaranteed.**
  - **The right to defend human rights and to organise in a safe and secure environment, without processes of criminalisation and dissemination of hate speech, must be recognised and publicly dignified.**
  - **It is urgent that the State approve and implement a public policy to protect human rights defenders, and ensure that it has the appropriate institutions and mechanisms to guarantee access to justice and an end to impunity.**
  - **The State must guarantee the adequate functioning of institutions specialized in agrarian matters and indigenous rights, which meet the demands of the rural indigenous and peasant population, and enable dialogue between them and the government, thus contributing to the resolution of the agrarian conflict that persists in the country.**
- **We call on the international community to pay attention to what is happening in Guatemala and to support the efforts being made by indigenous, peasant and human rights organisations to build a more just, democratic and violence-free country.**

**Signing organisations:**

**International Land Coalition**

**August 26, 2020**