

Mesoamerica, July 21, 2017

Special Human Rights Prosecutor Soraya Morales

Office of the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights in Honduras

The Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras), made up of 837 defenders from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua, is a regional structure that designs and offers protection alternatives to women defenders who have suffered attacks due to their work and to the effects of gender discrimination.

IM-Defensoras is widely recognized for its solid work in the promotion and defense of human rights, and it is in this capacity that we respectfully write to you to express our deep concern over the constant attacks that we have observed against young men and women studying at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), who have participated in peaceful takeovers of buildings with legitimate social demands since November of 2016.

We are especially troubled by attacks against students that not only go on unabated, but have, in fact, continued to escalate in intensity and gravity, as established by the following facts:

On May 24th of this year, when students peacefully took over the UNAH Administration Building for the defense of public education, masked private security guards attacked them with firearms, poles, stones, machetes and pepper spray in an effort to dislodge them. The attack was so heavy that the students found it necessary to hide on one of the floors in the building, where an hour later, 20 of them were arrested and jailed. They now face criminal prosecution for the offenses of usurpation and damages to public property; furthermore, in an administrative procedure, 19 students were suspended today from the higher education center for five years.

The absence of a political willingness on the part of university authorities to peacefully resolve student demands was obvious on Friday, June 16th, when we learned that more attacks had taken place. This time extreme violence, including beatings and teargas, was used by agents of COBRA, the National Police and ATIC at the Tegucigalpa campus of the UNAH, against students who had peacefully taken over the Department of Chemistry and Pharmaceuticals. The action was carried out in solidarity with 20 students facing charges at the university, who were scheduled to attend a hearing for submitting evidence in their defense that same day.

This violence resulted in new arrests of students including Genesys Araceli Andino, Karen Giselle Reyes, Gloria Sarahi Mejía, Tiffani Nicolle Zúñiga, Any Raquel Blanco and Tony Jossel Barahona, who were taken to the CORE 7 Police Station in handcuffs and leg irons. The following day they

were released on probation with an initial hearing scheduled for July 14, 2017.

Moreover, ever since June 28th, constant harassment by ESPA private security guards has been verified against students on hunger strike and their companions. These acts have been directed by Roger Aguilar (a person linked to a death squad known as Batallion 3-16 that operated in the 1980s). The hunger strikers report that they have been attacked during the night by assailants seeking a direct confrontation in an effort to force them out of the buildings.

And finally, we found that it was necessary to condemn even more acts of violence last July 17th. This time the perpetrators were employees of the "Spartan Security" service, who acted with the permission of university authorities to try to violently clear out students who had peacefully taken over a building as a means of pressure to make their demands heard. We know that several students were wounded by the blows of the security guards of that company.

The facts herein described demonstrate an ongoing escalation of attacks, added to continuous statements by university authorities who identify, stigmatize and scorn the students in resistance and denigrate their demands. All of this foreshadows a lamentable scenario of major violations of the human rights of persons engaged in peaceful resistance.

For these reasons, we respectfully call upon you to **lend your good offices** to help create conditions to ease the tension without failing to resolve student demands and open channels for dialogue:

1. It has come to our attention that human rights organizations have charged university authorities with the crimes of torture and abuse of authority. **We formally request that you inform us of advances made in pursuing these accusations.**
2. The Special Prosecutor's Office over which you preside has the authority to **verify the extent to which the highest level academic authorities of the UNAH are involved in aggression and incitement to aggression by third persons**; in case the Office's consent and collusion should be demonstrated, this would constitute a serious human rights violation
3. The Special Prosecutor's Office over which you preside is also **obliged to grant guarantees to students for carrying out their protests in conditions of security**, and the Office has a mandate to facilitate the process of finding mechanisms for the resolution of their demands.

We await your kind response to the concerns we have raised and to further situations that may arise in the days ahead, with the expectation that your office will be able to generate synergy that limits the deplorable polarization that is arising in this case.

Best regards,



**INICIATIVA MESOAMERICANA
de Mujeres Defensoras
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