

March 22, 2005

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush,

We are deeply disturbed by the recent reports of ongoing violence and human rights violations committed by Guatemalan security forces against a large number of peaceful protesters protesting the recent ratification of the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in Guatemala.

We believe the actions of the Guatemalan security forces and the lack of any response by Guatemalan President Oscar Berger to stop these abuses contradict universal principles of human rights and democracy. We urge you to communicate to President Berger that these human rights violations are unacceptable to the United States, that any abuses should be halted, and that those responsible for these acts should be brought to justice.

According to reports we have received from Guatemalan organizations and Amnesty International, after CAFTA was ratified by the Guatemalan Congress on March 14, tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets. Police used tear gas and a water cannon to disperse them. Nineteen people were injured and 16 were detained. The next day, State security forces fired on protesters in Colotenango, Huehuetenango, killing Juan López and injuring many more, some seriously. The civil-society organizations representing the protesters have called for additional demonstrations against the ratification of CAFTA after a period of reflection this week, and for due process and the rule of law to be respected. We are deeply concerned that there will be further violations of their rights to express their opinions on this agreement. We are also dismayed by statements made by representatives of the Guatemalan government blaming the protesters for the violence against them, and are concerned about the impartiality of any investigations that may be undertaken.

We call on you to contact President Berger and demand that he take actions to prevent further violence against protesters and that he conduct an immediate, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the killing of Juan López, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice. We also echo the concerns of numerous Guatemalan and international organizations about the deplorable human rights situation in that country and the serious need for due process and the rule of law as preconditions for economic integration.

President Bush, in your inaugural address, you stated that "[t]he survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." Clearly, liberty was called into question in Guatemala this week. It is high time that narrow commercial

interests take a back seat to universally agreed upon values of human rights and liberty. We urge you to insist that the Guatemalan government protect rather than violate the democratic rights of its citizens to oppose the free trade agreement. You stated in your address that, "America's influence is considerable, and we will use it confidently in freedom's cause." Today, we call upon you to use that influence in the cause of freedom in Guatemala.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
California Coalition for Fair Trade and Human Rights
Campaign for Labor Rights
Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America CITCA
Center of Concern
Chiapas Support Committee
Chicago Metropolitan Sanctuary Alliance
Citizens Trade Campaign
Committee in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala CISPEs
Community Alliance for Global Justice, Seattle, WA
Cross-border Labor Organizing Coalition (CBLOC-Portland, OR).
Development GAP
Friends of the Earth- U.S.
Global Response
Guatemala Education Action Project (GEAP)
Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC)
Guatemala News and Information Bureau
Hispanic Ministries of Tuscarawas County, Inc.
IDEX
Institut de Relations Economiques Internationales, Switzerland
Institute For Global Education (IGE)
Institute for Policy Studies, Global Economy Project
Institute of Latin American Studies Students Association (ILASSA),
University of Texas at Austin
Interfaith Council, Inland Northwest
International Labor Rights Fund
International Rivers Network
Moriah Fund
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
Nicaragua Center for Community Action, Berkeley, CA
Nicaragua Network
Ohio Conference on Fair Trade
Peninsula Peace and Justice Center
Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (PCASC)
Presbyterian Church, (USA), Washington Office
Quixote Center-Quest for Peace
Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico

Resource Center of the Americas
Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights
Rochester Committee on Latin America
STITCH
Unitarian Universalist Central America Network, Board of Directors
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community - Northwest
United for a Fair Economy
United Steelworkers of America
U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project

And the following individuals:

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cc: Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick