

Statement

Faith-based organizations concerned over persecution against pastor in Guatemala

We, the undersigned faith-based organizations with offices in Latin America, and with the support of our headquarter offices in Geneva, Switzerland; Berlin, Germany; Norway, United Kingdom, Ireland and Uppsala, Sweden, express our deep concern over the persecution against the President of the Lutheran Church of Guatemala (ILUGUA), Pastor José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera, who is an advocate for the rights of the indigenous peoples to water and other natural resources in Las Granadillas.

Pastor José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera has been subjected to a campaign of intimidation, harassment and criminalization for his work in defense of human rights. An anonymous, defamatory pamphlet was recently disseminated in the Zacapa and Chiquimula regions in Guatemala, causing a new judicial process to be opened against Pastor Álvarez Cabrera before tribunals. There is evidence that this process has been opened due to his work as an environmental defender.

This is not an isolated event. In Guatemala, human rights defenders are criminalized for exercising the right to defend the most vulnerable communities. Like Pastor José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera, other social leaders face judicial processes for their work defending human rights. Their work is often hindered by the improper application of criminal law in the justice system.

According to a recent report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala, during 2018 “there was a sharp escalation of violence against human rights defenders, especially against those who defend rights to land and natural resources.” In this context, as faith-based organizations:

- We believe that all people are made in the image and likeness of God; therefore, living and working for decent conditions and access to the goods of creation is the call of the Gospel as it is the work and commitment of Pastor Joseph Pilar Álvarez Cabrera.
- We request that the right of Pastor José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera to defend the rights of Guatemalan communities and to care for the creation be respected and not criminalized, prosecuted, harassed or intimidated to the point of jeopardizing his physical integrity.
- We ask the Guatemalan State for a prompt, impartial and effective investigation to clarify these actions that threaten Pastor José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera and other defenders of human rights and the environment, and guarantee their right not to be criminalized for defending the communities they represent.
- We ask the international community, churches, and other faith-based organizations to encourage the Guatemalan government and international human rights institutions that guarantee the fulfilment and full enjoyment of human rights to stop any further acts of intimidation against human rights defenders in Guatemala.
- We support the actions of Brother Pastor José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera, for whom we raise our prayers and accompany as part of our global ecumenical communion.

Guatemala, September 2019

ACTuando Juntas JOTAY Joint Program¹
Lutheran World Federation
ACT Alliance

¹ JOTAY is formed by Brot für die Welt, ACT Church of Sweden; Norwegian Church Aid; Christian Aid Lutheran World Federation