

URGENT ACTION

RISK OF EXCESSIVE FORCE AGAINST PROTESTORS

People peacefully protesting against a mining project in Casillas, Guatemala, and bystanders were tear gassed and dispersed by riot police on 22 June. There are concerns of further excessive use of force as police presence continues in the community.

According to a community leader and several international organizations, on 22 June riot police officers, indiscriminately and without warning, shot tear gas at a group of **people protesting against a mining project in Casillas**, San Rafael Las Flores, Guatemala. Many people, including elders and children, were reported to be intoxicated by tear gas. Four protesters were detained during the operation and released later that day without charges.

Since 8 June, people from nearby communities had been peacefully blocking access to vehicles related to the Escobal mining project, in protest to the constant tremors they believe are the result of mining activities. Police had been present since the beginning of the protest, but on 21 June riot police officers arrived in the area. On 22 June around 1p.m., after the protestors asked the driver of a truck transporting materials for the mine to turn back, riot police officers shot tear gas at the protestors and chased them away. Local civil society organizations state that tear gas was also shot into houses and a medical clinic, where some children were intoxicated and had to be evacuated.

Amnesty International contacted an officer at the Vice Ministry of Security who told the organization that they have not yet received any information regarding the events in Casillas on 22 June.

International organizations and protestors have expressed concern that excessive use of police force may continue, as four police patrols were seen in the community on the afternoon of 23 June.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on authorities to respect, protect and guarantee the freedom of assembly and the right to a peaceful manifestation in Casillas;
- Calling on the police to act in accordance to the UN Basic Principles of the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;
- Urging the authorities to promptly investigate the allegations of excessive use of force by police officers carrying out the operation.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 AUGUST 2017 TO:

Minister of the Interior

Francisco Manuel Rivas Lara

Dirección Superior

6a avenida 13-71 zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, 01001

Guatemala

Email: smvasquez@mingob.gob.gt

Salutation: Dear Minister/Estimado Sr. Ministro

General Director of the National Civil

Police

Nery Ramos Ramos

10 Calle 13-92, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala

Guatemala

Email: neryr308@gmail.com

Salutation: Dear Director/Estimado Sr. Director

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR ACISCLO VALLADARES MOLINA, Embassy of Guatemala, 13 Fawcett St SW10 9HN, 020 7351 3042, inglaterra@minex.gob.gt, info@guatemalanembassy.co.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 2 May 2013, the government declared a state of emergency in and around San Rafael Las Flores, a town some 90 kilometres from the capital, following a series of violent incidents around the mining operation of Minera San Rafael, a subsidiary of the Canada and US-based Tahoe Resources Inc. In January 2013, unknown armed men attacked the mine site resulting in the deaths of two security guards and another person, presumed to be part of the group attacking the site. For more information, see: *Mining in Guatemala: Rights at risk* (<http://www.amnesty.ca/sites/amnesty/files/mining-in-guatemala-rights-at-risk-eng.pdf>).

According to the civil society organization UDEFEGUA, environmental and land human rights defenders are the main group of activists attacked in Guatemala. According to Amnesty International research, they have been constantly subjected to smear campaigns aimed at stigmatizing and discrediting them in order to force them to stop their legitimate work. This includes being falsely accused and prosecuted as a way of keeping them silent. Although the State of Guatemala has developed guidelines and protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, these have proven to be ineffective. For more information, see the Amnesty International report "*We are defending the land with our blood*": *Defenders of the land, territory and environment in Honduras and Guatemala* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/4562/2016/en/>) and *Americas: State Protection Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/6211/2017/en/>).