

**We the undersigned 35 organizations from across the U.S. and Canada express our solidarity with and support for the National Roundtable against Metallic Mining in El Salvador and the communities of the Department of Cabañas as they demand justice in the cases of violence towards environmentalists and community journalists.**

On April 13th, the Specialized Sentencing Tribunal in San Salvador sentenced six of the nine people convicted for a string of homicides, including those of anti-mining activist Ramiro Rivera and Dora Sorto, and Sorto's unborn child, to between 30 and 145 years in prison. The murders were carried out over a span of seven months in 2009 in the town of Trinidad, Sensuntepeque, Cabañas, El Salvador.

The sentencing has caused profound frustration and indignation on the part of the civil society organizations and communities that make up the National Roundtable against Metallic Mining (the *Mesa* in Spanish) because of the lack of investigation into the intellectual authors of these murders.

Members of the *Mesa* say that there is no doubt that the crimes committed against anti-mining leaders and activists, like Ramiro Rivera and Dora Sorto, have intellectual authors that need to be investigated and prosecuted. The persecution and threats leading to the murders in 2009, the apparent planning of the crimes, and the use of weapons supposedly only available to the Armed Forces are some of the factors they argue should be considered in the investigations.

However, from the beginning the Attorney General's office, the government institution charged with guaranteeing quick and effective access to justice, has ruled out this hypothesis, cutting off the possibility of thorough investigations and the arrest of the intellectual authors behind the crimes.

Despite the constant demands voiced by civil society and the *Mesa*, the Attorney General's Office and the Attorney General himself have refused to carry out thorough and serious investigations into the intellectual authors of the crimes in Cabañas. This has created a climate of impunity that ensures that politically motivated crimes can be committed in El Salvador without serious risks for the intellectual authors. Based on information from documents that have been publically released in these cases, it seems that the Attorney General's Office never even attempted to thoroughly investigate the intellectual authors. According to Salvadoran law, examining only one hypothesis when other tangible hypotheses exist is illegal.

In addition, the recently released sentences in these cases demonstrate a troubling delay of justice on the part of the Attorney General's Office and Mr. Barahona. These painful and deplorable cases have been surrounded by a wave of similarly deplorable crimes: the disappearance, torture and murder of environmentalist Marcelo Rivera; the death threats against members of Radio Victoria; the kidnapping and assassination attempts of Bishop Luis Alberto Quintanilla and Father Neftali Ruiz; the death threats against Antonio Pacheco, the President of the Association for Social Development Santa Marta (ADES); and the death threats against Hector Berrios and Zenayda Serrano, of the Unified Movement Francisco Sanchez 1932 (MUFRAS 32).

A 2009 letter to the U.S. State Department signed by 68 organizations from across the United States asked the U.S. government to insist on thorough investigations for all of the cases of violence in Cabañas. The sign-on letter stated: **"We believe that the events described [above] are linked and are**

**part of a systematic campaign to intimidate environmental and community organizations in Cabañas.** We vehemently reject the statement by the prosecutor from the Attorney General's Office, Rodolfo Delgado, that in the case of Marcelo Rivera 'there is not evidence of an intellectual author of the assassination.'"

**The undersigned organizations believe that the continued violence in El Salvador is a direct result of this atmosphere of impunity and we support the following demands made by the National Roundtable against Metallic Mining to the Attorney General of the Republic of El Salvador:**

1. An objective, impartial investigation without political bias or personal interests into the structures that support and promote the resurgence of illegal armed groups with political ties in the Department of Cabañas. It is not acceptable that the communities have had to take the initiative to prove the facts in these cases when government institutions are legally responsible for these investigations and not the citizens themselves.
2. An objective and impartial investigation into the causes of the wave of violence in the region, including death threats towards environmentalists and journalists, kidnapping and murder attempts. It is fundamental that the intellectual authors in all of these crimes be investigated and prosecuted.
3. That these cases are all assigned to the same unit within the Attorney General's Office. Also the cases should be given to prosecutors that have not been accused of due process violations or of manipulating investigations for political reasons, as is the case with the head of the Organized Crime Unit of the Attorney General's Office, who has been accused of covering up and instigating serious due process violations in the aforementioned cases.
4. Immediate protection for activists from civil society organizations and journalists who oppose metallic mining projects and have been threatened, in accordance with the recommendations made by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights stating that the Government of El Salvador ensure protective measures for the integrity of the environmentalists who continue to live with serious risks.
5. That the Attorney General of the Republic and officials from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security take seriously the conclusions released by the Joint Group on the Investigation of Illegal Armed Groups with Political Motives in its report from June 28, 1994 which were never adopted by the Salvadoran Government. The report showed the mutation of the prior death squad structures to fragmented cells that are tied to common and organized crime which could potentially participate in political violence. These groups take advantage of the fertile ground presented by delinquency to hire assassins for politically motivated violence.

Signed,

1. U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities
2. The SHARE Foundation
3. The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)
4. Chicago-Cinquera Sister Cities Project
5. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
6. Mining Watch Canada
7. Jamie Moffett Media Design & Production

8. MOFGA El Salvador Sistering Committee
9. Washington Ethical Society
10. Voices on the Border
11. Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
12. Power in Community Alliances (PICA)
13. Bangor-Carasque Sister City Project
14. Institute for Policy Studies, Global Economy Project
15. Massachusetts Jobs with Justice
16. The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
17. Oberlin in Solidarity with El Salvador (OSES)
18. Comité de Apoyo para el Desarrollo Social en El Salvador (CODESES)
19. Latin American Law Students Association (LALSA) at the Faculty of Law- University of Ottawa
20. The Midwest Coalition against Lethal Mining (MCALM)
21. The Center for Alternative Mining Development Policy (La Crosse, WI)
22. Social Justice Committee of Montreal
23. Oberlin Animal Rights
24. Cambridge-San José Las Flores Sister City Project
25. Iniciativa Salvadoreña para la Educación y la Cultura (ISEDUC)
26. United for a Fair Economy (UFE)
27. Watertown-El Salvador Sister City Committee
28. Madison-Arcatao Sister City Project
29. Doctors for Global Health
30. Oxfam America
31. La Alianza Latina (Oberlin College)
32. Canadians against Mining in El Salvador (CAMES)
33. Latin American and Caribbean Solidarity Network (LACSN) Canada
34. Friends of the Earth, U.S.
35. Democracy Center