



October 11, 2016

The Honorable Stéphane Dion  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa,  
ON K1A 0G2

**SUBJECT: Violence against land and environment defenders in the Americas**

Dear Minister Dion,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Americas Policy Group (APG), a regional working group of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, which brings together civil society organizations dedicated to sustainable development, the promotion of human rights and social justice in the Americas. We wish to express our grave concern about the rising number of attacks against land and environment defenders throughout Latin America, many at the hands of multinational extractive companies. An alarming number of these victims are Indigenous women.

In particular, we would like to draw attention to the recent attack against Angélica Choc and her family in El Estor, Guatemala. On September 16, 2016, four bullets impacted the walls of Angelica's home where she and her two children were asleep. This attack takes place as the criminal trial for the murder of Angélica's husband, Adolfo Ich on September 27, 2009, nears its conclusion in Guatemala, and as the civil case against HudBay Minerals moves through the courts in Ontario.

We have attached a solidarity statement signed by nearly 90 organizations and 650 individuals, including members of the Americas Policy Group, that was presented at events related to the 7th anniversary of Adolfo Ich's murder in Guatemala. This statement demonstrates the strong solidarity and deep concern that Canadians feel for Angélica Choc, her family and other defenders of water, land and life who have been threatened, criminalized, attacked and even killed. Signatories expressly reject the use of threats, intimidation and violent attacks by governments and companies to repress and try to deter legitimate resistance to their projects.

These recent attacks against land and environment defenders underscore the need for legislative change in Canada for greater accountability when it comes to the activities of Canadian companies abroad. As Canadians, we have a responsibility to ensure that our companies comply with international and national law and jurisprudence concerning Indigenous rights, human rights and the environment, and that there are mechanisms in place to ensure companies respect these rights in the first place and that they are held to account when they do not. Specifically, we reiterate the demands central to the Open for Justice Campaign for:

- An independent and impartial extractive-sector Ombudsman to oversee Canadian extractive sector operations outside of Canada, with a mandate to: receive complaints, investigate the international operations of Canadian extractive-sector companies, evaluate compliance with Canada's Indigenous rights and human rights obligations, and make public recommendations, to both companies and the Government of Canada, for remedy, including the suspension of government support (political, financial and diplomatic).
- Legislation to facilitate access to Canadian courts for people who have been seriously harmed by the international operations of Canadian companies. These mechanisms would mean that people like Angélica Choc and others who have experienced egregious harm, including defenders mentioned in this solidarity statement, would not have to struggle to have their cases heard in Canada.

Furthermore, we call on the Canadian government to fully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada and overseas, ensuring that the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is respected by Canadian resource extraction companies wherever they operate. This includes respect for communities' rights to protest and to say "no" to such projects, and a rejection of the use of force in any form (political, legal, physical) to implement projects against the will and without the consent of those affected.

Partners, particularly Indigenous women, have drawn attention to the "gendered impacts of resource extraction," highlighting the particular impacts of large-scale resource extraction on women. These include increases in violence against women and the negative social, ecological and economic impacts of resource extraction that women often feel first and foremost within communities. As a government committed to a feminist foreign policy and defense of women's human rights, it behoves the Canadian government to ensure that the activities of Canadian corporations do not undermine or threaten the lives of women defenders of the land and the environment and to guarantee that the critical perspectives and concerns of women are heard when considering resource extraction projects.

We cannot forego mentioning the ongoing impunity around the case of acclaimed Indigenous Lenca leader, Berta Cáceres, whose murder in March 2016 was internationally condemned and mourned. In this context we call on the Canadian government to support a number of demands that are being made to Honduran authorities to seek justice and address the impunity in this case including supporting an investigation by a group of independent experts under the auspices of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) into the material and intellectual authors of Berta Cáceres' murder.

Beyond Honduras and Guatemala, the **support and protection of land and environment defenders across Latin America, particularly Indigenous and women human rights defenders**, must be a cornerstone of Canada's foreign and international development policy. Many of these land and environment defenders at risk are the leaders, experts and practitioners in the development processes that Canada seeks to support. At the same time, Canada must invest in mechanisms to protect land and environment defenders, including strengthening the implementation of national and international laws that protect the rights of all citizens and supporting multilateral human rights institutions such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.

Those are the concrete measures that can be taken to help guarantee the safety of Angelica Choc and of all the brave women, men and communities who are fighting to defend their land and the well-being of their communities.

We look forward to your response and to working with you to implement these critical measures.

Yours sincerely,



Rachel Vincent  
co-chair  
Americas Policy Group



Jim Hodgson  
co-chair  
Americas Policy Group

cc Chrystia Freeland, Minister of International Trade  
Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie  
MP Karina Gould, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development  
MP Tony Clement  
MP H  l  ne Laverdi  re  
MP Elizabeth May  
David Morrison, Assistant Deputy Minister, Americas Division, Global Affairs Canada  
Isabelle B  rard, director general, Americas Programming Bureau (GAC)  
Julian Ovens, chief of staff, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Mark Allen, executive director, Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion (GAC)

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