

The National Working Group against Metallic Mining Denounces New Aggression

Last Friday around noon, Father Neftalí Ruiz, priest of the Salvadoran Catholic Church, Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Cabañas Environmental Committee, and member of the National Working Group against Metallic Mining, was victim of thieves passing themselves off as university students. They stole his personal computer, cell phone and media storage devices.

The criminals entered his house declaring that they were interested in Father Neftalí's social work and the organizations he works with. They then tied him up and proceeded to strip him of his belongings.

This latest attempt on the life, integrity and work of the Cabañas Environmental Committee and the National Working Group against Metallic Mining forces us to, once again, express our strong rejection of and condemn the wave of persecution against environmental activists and defenders of human rights, including Father Neftalí. They have faced similar harassment since the beginning of the anti-mining struggle in El Salvador. In recent days, colleagues from the Radio Victoria in Cabañas have once again suffered from death threats and have been the target of messages that promote violence and intolerance against this important media outlet. These new attacks appear to be rooted strictly in party politics, but also demonstrate the social tension that exists in communities that have opposed metallic mining.

The anti-mining struggle in El Salvador and the defense of human rights against metallic mining has generated social conflicts without precedent and the assassination of four environmentalists and activists. Dora Sorto, Ramiro Rivera and Marcelo Rivera, assassinated in 2009, were assassinated in conditions that the Human Rights Ombudsman has labeled as characteristic of death squad activity. Our peers have been victims of threats, persecution and lightning operations that remain in impunity. The Attorney General of the Republic and the National Civilian Police have not assured the rights of the families and the victims to prompt and clear justice

As the National Working Group against Metallic Mining, in the framework of the commemoration of new institutionalism that began with the Peace Accords, we make a clear call to state authorities to fulfill their duties to provide constitutional guarantees to the citizens of this country. We demand that the Attorney General of the Republic investigate and bring to justice those who are guilty for these and other violent acts committed against anti-mining activists. We also unite with the Environmental Committee of Cabañas to demand that the Civilian National Police protects the lives of its members and of the people of the communities that live in permanent social conflict caused by the presence of mining projects.

To the Salvadoran population in general, the social organizations and the international community that accompanies the struggle against metallic mining projects in our country, we express that our struggle is not a crime: our cause is in favor of life, health, the environment and the sustainability of our country. **The State, through its institutions, should assure that in this country an industry of this type is never permitted, and additionally it should assure that the citizens' rejections against these extractive projects is not a motive for persecution,**

threats or death. We roundly condemn the violent acts committed against Fr. Neftalí Ruiz, and against other anti-mining activists. We say with even greater conviction:

NO TO METALLIC MINING IN EL SALVADOR. YES TO LIFE.

San Salvador, January 23, 2012

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