

OPEN LETTER TO PERUVIAN PRESIDENT ALAN GARCÍA

Peru, 21 July 2009

Dr. Alan García Pérez
President of the Republic of Peru

Mr. President:

As citizens of Peru and the world, we are writing to you about the disproportionate and violent police incursion carried out to remove protesting indigenous people in Bagua, Amazonas, that Santiago Munuin Valera, a 52 year old Awajun indigenous leader, has been seriously injured. At the moment that he was shot, he was unarmed and calling for peace.

Santiago Munuin, chief of the indigenous leaders (Apus) of the five River-basins of Santa María de Nieva, is one of the most important leaders of the Aguaruna–Huambisa communities. A pacifist and founder of the Jesuit Social Center SAIPE, he was also President of the Aguaruna-Huambisa Council (CAH) and the Organizing Committee for Respect of the Indigenous People of Condorcanqui Province, Amazonas. He has been internationally recognized for this commitment to the environment and human rights.

This past June 5th, Santiago Manuin was shot 8 times throughout his body with bullets coming from AKM rifles. As a product of this disproportionate use of force by members of the DINOES, the Awajun leader was rushed to the Las Mercedes hospital in Chiclayo.

This situation notwithstanding, this past June 13th, Francisco Miranda Caramutti, judge with the First Penal Court of Utcubamba, ordered the search, finding, capture, and booking (order no. 0610-09-1) of Santiago Manuin, for his responsibility in the confrontation that happened in “The Devil’s Curve”, in which dozens of people were killed, among them police and indigenous citizens. Given Manuin’s history, it is surprising and outrageous that the court is attempting to hold him responsible for the lamentable death of police officers.

In recent weeks, some authorities have pressured for this pacifist indigenous leader to be released from the hospital and taken to the local jail, even as his health situation continues to be delicate and requires medical attention. Manuin has 8 gunshot wounds in his body and is at great risk of infection. Because of the gunshots, his colon is outside of his body that requires a prolonged and intensive treatment. Additionally, he is diabetic, which makes more difficult the healing of his wounds and requires new surgical procedures. At the moment the hospital’s doctors have indicated that he won’t be released until he has recovered fully.

Similar to the case of Santiago Manuin, there are other cases of indigenous leaders facing legal charges, investigations, and legal persecution. The Peruvian government intends to hold them responsible, both materially and intellectually, for various violent acts. Amongst them we mention Alberto Pizango Chota, Saúl Puerta Peña, Cervando Puerta Peña, Teresita Antazú López, Marcial Mudarra Taki, Daysi Zapata Fasabi, Walter Kategari Iratsimery and Milton Silva, amongst leaders, even though there isn’t valid evidence to support the accusations against them.

In this regard, the recent report on the events in Bagua and Utcubamba by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, “reiterates the recommendation to revise the criminal charges against the individuals and indigenous leaders and urges the State to carefully justify future claims, given the special circumstances that have arisen surrounding the alleged crimes and the need to create adequate conditions for dialogue”.

The Special Rapporteur also emphasizes that “while recognizing the need to preserve the public order and to investigate and punish those responsible for crimes and/ or human rights violations, the use of criminal recourse should not be the standard route for dealing with social unrest and protest, but should instead be applied as a last resort and should be strictly limited to the principle of social necessity in a democratic society”.

We have no doubt that behind the arrest warrant of Santiago Manuin and other leaders, exist forces not only driven by legal motivations but also by a political interest to criminalize public protests in Peru.

Given this, we the citizens of the world in exercise of our rights and ethical responsibility to defend life and human rights from any kind of abuse, are asking that:

- An investigation be initiated around the attempt on the life of Santiago Manuin Valera (ID# 337600081, 52 years old) and that the material and intellectual authors be brought to justice.
- Economic reparations be paid to this Awajun leader, that he be provided with quality medical expertise independent of the State, and that the State guarantee his health and complete recovery, assuming the costs of medical attention for the injuries he has suffered.
- Legal harassment against Santiago Manuin and other social leaders be ended, that the police officers that surround the hospital where Manuin is being interned be called off, and that the arrest warrant be changed to a summons for a court appearance.

We reiterate our belief in the innocence of Santiago Manuin, for whom we are expressing our solidarity.

Send signatures until the 7th of August to: justiciaparasantiago@aprodeh.org.pe

Individuals should send the following information:

1. First and last names
2. City
3. Country

Organizations should indicate:

1. Organizational name
2. Country

Additionally, the letter can be sent directly to the following link:

http://www.presidencia.gob.pe/cartas_presidente.asp

and insert the following text:

JUSTICE FOR SANTIAGO MANUIN

The indigenous leader, Santiago Manuin was shot 8 times on the 5th of June, when he attempted to calm the violence in Bagua. Today, the Judicial Power has ordered his detention. The rights of our Amazonian brothers should be respected and their demands heard. See the letter at:

www.aprodeh.org.pe/casomanuin.html

Include a copy to: justiciaparasantiago@aprodeh.org.pe