

NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD

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March 27, 2014

Estimada y Honorable Lisa Kubiske
Embajada de los Estados Unidos
Avenida La Paz, APO AA 34022
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Dear Honorable Ambassador Kubiske:

The National Lawyers Guild is profoundly disturbed by the recent murders of attorney José Nicolás Bernárdez and Judge Lenin Castañeda on March 14, 2014.

José Nicolás Bernárdez was a former Libre party congressional candidate, and an activist in the Unificación Democrática (UD) party. He was murdered on the morning of March 14 by motorcyclists while driving his car in the Cabañas neighborhood of San Pedro Sula.

Lenin Castañeda, a judge in the municipality of Iriona, was shot and killed by armed men while walking near the center of Tocoa. He was also the son of Adolfo Castañeda, one of the founders of MUCA, United Campesino Movement of the Aguán. Castañeda had just participated in the Honduran Bar Association elections.

Practicing law is a high risk profession in Honduras. According to the website [Infosurhoy.com](http://infosurhoy.com), 67 lawyers were killed between January 2010 and November 2013. These killings occur in a climate of pervasive impunity; only nine of these cases have gone to trial.¹ Roy Urtecho, president of the Bar Association of Honduras has said, "some lawyers are no longer interested in practicing their profession . . . because they are scared for their lives."²

A delegation from the National Lawyers Guild met with you on November 21, 2013, and voiced its concerns for the safety of human rights defenders, and in particular Libre party members. You assured the delegation that the State Department shared these concerns and that the embassy denounces human rights abuses and impunity. You further indicated that the embassy provides support to the Honduran Fiscalía to conduct investigations into targeted killings.

The targeted killing of lawyers and judges undermines a functioning legal system that is essential to a vigorous and fully functioning democracy and the rule of law. Lawyers and judges must be able to engage in their work of guarding against prospective harms to the rule of law, and to individual rights, without fear of reprisal.

We ask that you publicly denounce these killings and insist that the Honduran government undertake an immediate and impartial investigation leading to the prosecution of perpetrators. The Honduran government must end impunity and uphold the rule of law.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Azadeh N. Shahshahani
President

CC: John F. Kerry, Secretary of State
Roberta S. Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs

¹ Infosur Hoy, November 1, 2013. http://infosurhoy.com/en_GB/articles/saii/features/main/2013/11/01/feature-01.

² Infosur Hoy, July 30, 2012. http://infosurhoy.com/en_GB/articles/saii/features/main/2013/04/30/feature-01.