

Ayuba Wabba

President
Président
Präsident
Presidente

Mr. Roberto Ochoa Madrid

Ambassador of Honduras to the Kingdom of Belgium
and to the European Union.
Avenue de Cortenbergh 89
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Sharan Burrow

General Secretary
Secrétaire générale
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Secretaria General

HTUR-AP

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Dear Ambassador Ochoa Madrid:

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) representing 200 million workers in 163 countries and territories, I write to urge the Honduran state to drop all charges against human rights defender Moises Sanchez, to ensure his protection as a human rights defender under threat, and ensure he can freely exercise his trade union activism without violence or reprisal.

Moises Sanchez is the Secretary General of the Fyffes local union, affiliated to the Agroindustrial Workers' Union (STAS). STAS has faced a sustained campaign of anti-union repression and violence since organizing the local union at the Fyffes melon plantations in Choluteca in 2016. Organizers have received death threats, members have been fired, harassed and beaten, and union activists report being followed and intimidated.

In 2017, Moises Sanchez was kidnapped and threatened with machetes (his brother, a member of the union, suffered serious wounds from the machete attack) and told to abandon the union or wait for death.

The ongoing campaign of violence against STAS, and Moises in particular, were cited during the International Labor Organization's (ILO) hearing on Honduras for systematic violations of basic labor standards in 2018, resulting in the global tripartite body sanctioning the Honduran government.

Moises is a recipient of protective measures from the Honduran state's mechanism to protect human rights defenders under threat. Since October 2019, he has suffered a renewed series incidents of surveillance and intimidation by unknown actors visiting his home at night and asking neighbors for his whereabouts (while wearing motorcycle helmets and gloves.)

After surviving his attacks and being illegally fired from the company and refused reinstatement, Moises is now facing criminal charges without the right to appeal and a possible sentence of 30 years in prison.

His trial is on Jan 22, 2020, when he faces four charges related to "usurpation."

Moises is a community member in the small community of La Permuta, a community that had no road access and people had to cross rivers to get to the closest city, Choluteca, (with egress made impossible during rainy weather or flooding.) In 2018, 450 members of La Permuta's village assembly voted to build a road, the mayor of the municipality where La Permuta is located, Santa Ana de Yusguare, agreed with the effort and told them the land was public land.

Nearly two years later, a private landowner has come forward saying the land where the road is built was hers and pressed charges, despite documentation from the municipality stating the land is public. Over a number of years, this landowner has leased other properties she owns to the Fyffes company.

Five members of La Permuta's elected leadership, and Moises, are facing criminal charges. Moises is not a member of the elected leadership, only one of the 450 community members who voted on the road. Moises faces 30 years in prison for four charges related to the usurpation of private to build a community access road. The municipality is providing for the defense of the elected community leaders who implemented the decision to build the road. The municipality is not defending Moises, the only one of hundreds of residents who voted for the project to be criminally charged.

There is no guarantee of life or safety for those incarcerated in Honduras. Due to his years of sustaining threats and attacks; the effects of his union activism resulting in the sanctioning of the Honduran state by the ILO and de-certifications of the Fyffes company by the Ethical Trading Initiative and Fair Trade USA for labor rights violations, and the continued spotlight on Fyffes, we fear for Moises' life should he be imprisoned.

Moises Sanchez is a documented victim of anti-union violence. This latest attempt to imprison him is an obvious part of the longstanding campaign to decimate STAS at Fyffes' Choluteca, Honduras plantations.

The Honduran state has an obligation to protect human rights defenders under threat, it should not permit politicized and unfounded attacks on the life and liberty of a human rights defender under state protection like Moises Sanchez.

The ITUC calls on the Honduran state to drop all charges against Moises Sanchez and comply with their mandate to ensure the life, liberty, and free exercise of his human rights activism for Moises and all human rights defenders in Honduras.

The ITUC also calls on Fyffes to immediately cease its campaign of intimidation and harassment against the STAS union, recognize the legitimately elected leadership of the STAS local at Fyffes, and end its refusal to collectively bargain with the democratically elected, legitimate, independent, STAS local union.

Finally, we kindly request a meeting with you at a time of your convenience to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,



General Secretary