



November 25, 2009

Raúl Velásquez
Interior Minister
6^a Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

José Amílcar Velásquez Zárte
Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office
15 avenida 15-16, 8^o nivel
Zona 1 Barrio Gerona,
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Dear Minister Velásquez and Attorney General Velásquez Zárte,

Killing of Indigenous Lawyer Fausto Leonel Otzín Poyón

We, the below-signed 1,830 individuals, join Human Rights First in writing to express our deep concern over the brutal killing of Fausto Leonel Otzín Poyón, a leading human rights lawyer and defender of the Mayan community. We urge you to guarantee a prompt and impartial investigation into his killing that leads to the identification and prosecution of all those responsible for his death.

Fausto Otzín was only 32 years old and was heavily involved in promoting the rights of indigenous communities from early on in his student days. He founded a Mayan student association and helped to create the Law Institute of Indigenous People. He was also the first Executive Director of the Association of Mayan Attorneys. Moreover, he was part of a student movement demanding justice for the mass atrocities committed during Guatemala's armed conflict, in which members of his family were disappeared. Most recently he worked for a program co-financed by the European Union to promote justice reform in Chimaltenango. He also provided legal advice to communities in San Juan Sacatepéquez after they were criminalized for opposing a local cement factory.

On October 18, 2009, in San Juan Comalapa, Chimaltenango, Fausto Otzín was found badly beaten in a ditch with machete wounds to his head, stab wounds to his back, and bruises all over his face and body. Shortly after he was found, Otzín passed away. In the week before this violent attack, Otzín had received various text messages threatening his life.

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We fear the violent attack of Otzín may be linked to his extensive human rights work. We are also concerned that this attack represents a threat to all those human rights defenders advocating for the rights of indigenous communities and seeking justice for past atrocities in Guatemala.

We urge you to ensure that the investigation into the killing is prompt, impartial and comprehensive and leads to the identification and prosecution of those responsible, whoever they may be. Such an investigation may well necessitate examining illegal security organizations that operate in San Juan Comalapa. A successful prosecution in this important case would help break the culture of impunity associated with violent crimes against human rights defenders.

Thank you for your attention in this urgent matter. We will continue to closely monitor this situation.

Sincerely,

(The names of the 1,830 signatories have been removed for privacy reasons.)