

January 15, 2025

Donald J. Trump  
President Elect of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

cc. Marco Rubio, Incoming Secretary of State  
cc. USA Embassy in Mexico

**Dear Mr. President Elect,**

We, the undersigned human rights organizations and advocates, express profound concern over two years of impunity in the forced disappearances of environmental defenders Ricardo Arturo Lagunes Gasca and Antonio Díaz Valencia. Both defenders were actively involved in the defense of indigenous rights from the Ternium-owned Las Encinas iron ore mine in Aquila, Mexico, prior to their disappearance. Their whereabouts remain unknown, and their families are demanding truth and justice. We urge the President elect to uphold your human rights commitments, use all your power and resources to help locate the missing defenders, ensure their safe return, and meet with the families and their representatives in this endeavor.

We would like to thank the United States and the State Department for considering the case of Ricardo and Antonio as an emblematic one, [and for including the case in the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023](#), recognizing they disappeared after advocating against mining company Ternium. We also appreciate the steps taken to work with the government of Luxembourg. But unfortunately, it is not enough. We need additional efforts by your government.

As documented by Global Witness in its annual report [Missing Voices](#) and the Fair Steel Coalition in the [Real Cost of Steel](#), enforced disappearance of human rights defenders in Mexico is a concerning pattern, and the case of Ricardo and Antonio is emblematic. From 2012-2023, 203 environmental defenders were killed in Mexico, 36 of them were victims of enforced disappearances, and 21 in Michoacán. 70% of the attacks in 2023 were against indigenous people defending their lands from the mining industry, with a concentration of cases along the Pacific Coastal States of Michoacán-Colima-Jalisco. Mass graves and hundreds of bodies and human remains have been discovered in the region since January 15, 2023, many of which remain unidentified due to incomplete forensic analysis. This lack of progress hinders efforts to determine whether any of the remains belong to the missing defenders. Many witnesses or confessed perpetrators that were under custody were inexplicably released and killed. The families' requests

to investigate the case as an enforced disappearance and develop all lines of investigation, including the role of state and private actors in the disappearance went unanswered. The lack of justice for environmental defenders is a pervasive issue, with the majority of cases remaining unresolved and the intellectual authors of these crimes evading accountability.

The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance (CED), six UN Special Procedures Mandates, and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) have demanded an impartial investigation and urgent action to search and find the human rights defenders. The UN has insisted on the need for answers related to Ternium's due diligence, sending communications to Mexico, the Ternium Company, and the Governments of Argentina and Luxembourg. During the Universal Periodic Review Luxembourg recommended that Mexico make advances in the search and [investigation](#). Ternium has failed to engage with family of the defenders and responded denying any involvement in the disappearances, attributing the events to “regional insecurity and a conflict within the community”. On December 9th, it was [made public](#) that there is a new Vice President of Ternium México in Aquila, replacing one of the executives in charge of the mine during the enforced disappearance. There is no information of any internal investigation into allegations regarding the executives.

The United States is the main commercial partner of Mexico, the largest market destination of Ternium Mexico steel products, with Ternium US and entities within Ternium group as the largest reported buyers in the US. Furthermore, Ternium has significantly benefited from the US New York Stock Market since 2006, constructed a port facility in Brownsville, Texas for handling raw material, and expanded the Shavenportt unit in Louisiana, producing galvanized and color coated sheets and processing cold-rolled coils procured mainly from Ternium Mexico, investing 98 million in the expansion for second coil coating paint in 2025.

Taking that into account, the US should require businesses that have a significant footprint within the US to conduct heightened human rights due diligence in conflict-affected contexts, develop policies to protect human rights defenders, and take steps to prevent reprisals against defenders. Preventing, mitigating, and responding to reprisals against defenders is reflective of your nation's founding principles, along with your commitment to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Upholding these principles is essential for strengthening cooperation between the United States and Mexico and to comply with your [Guidelines for U.S. Diplomatic Mission Support to Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders](#). Promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms builds greater levels of trust, which sends a strong message to bad actors and further deters the use of violence.

In light of the gravity of this situation and the lack of significant progress in the investigation, we urge you to:

1. **Express solidarity with families of Ricardo Arturo Lagunes Gasca** and Antonio Díaz Valencia in their demands for the Mexican government to appoint a new Special Prosecutor and to activate humanitarian mechanisms to help the families in their search for truth and justice.
2. **Use diplomatic channels to engage with Mexican** authorities and corporations with operations in the US to respect the principle of due diligence and urge them to take immediate and concrete steps to protect human rights defenders, conduct thorough investigations, and hold perpetrators accountable.
3. **Work collaboratively with international partners**, including other governments, multilateral organizations, and non-governmental organizations, to address the systemic challenges facing human rights defenders in Mexico and advocate for collective action to protect their rights.
4. **Offer US assistance in the investigation and search**, including technical expertise and resources.
5. **Increase public awareness of the plight of human rights defenders in Mexico** through engagement with stakeholders, public hearings with the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Congressional hearings and briefings, and other advocacy channels.
6. **Support civil society organizations** working to protect human rights defenders and promote accountability in Mexico.
7. **Consider targeted sanctions** against individuals and entities found to be involved in the disappearances or other human rights abuses in Mexico.
8. **Emphasize the importance of proactive measures** to address and mitigate the human rights impacts of corporate activities, particularly those with significant global reach. This includes urging the government of Mexico and corporations operating in the country to fulfill its due diligence responsibilities.

We believe that these measures are essential to address the ongoing human rights concerns in the region, ensure the safety and protection of individuals who speak out against potential abuses, and bring those responsible for the disappearances to justice. We urge you to demonstrate the United States' commitment to human rights and the rule of law by taking action on this matter. Please contact us if you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Alejandra Gonza, Global Rights Advocacy, Executive Director and representative of the families of environmental defenders

Jean-Louis Zeien, Initiative pour le devoir de vigilance

Eduardo Mosqueda, Tsikini, Executive Director

Fernanda Venzon, Environmental Defender Law Center (EDLC), Executive Director

David McKean, International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR), Executive Director