

January 15, 2025

Dr. Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo
President of the United States of Mexico
Mexico City, Mexico

cc: Jennifer Feller Enríquez. General Director for Human Rights and Democracy. Secretary of Foreign Affairs
cc: Rosa Icela Rodríguez Velázquez, Secretary
Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales
cc. Marcelo Erbard, Secretary of Economy
cc. Comité contra la Desaparición Forzada de la ONU (CED)
Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH)
Procedimientos Especiales de la ONU

Dear Madam President Sheinbaum,

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 environmental 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 on January 15th, 2023. Their whereabouts remain unknown, and their families are demanding truth and justice. We urge you Madam President 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.

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 of grave concern, and the case of Ricardo and Antonio is emblematic. From 2012-2023, 36 of the 203 environmental defenders killed in Mexico were victims of enforced disappearances. A shocking 21 of these disappearances occurred 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, and the investigation stalled. 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. In the case of Ricardo and Antonio, requests by the families 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 UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance (CED), six UN Special Procedures Mandates, and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) demanded an impartial investigation and urgent action to search and find the human rights defenders. The UN 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. Luxembourg, in turn, has recommended during the Universal Periodic Review that Mexico advance in the search and [investigation](#) for the missing defenders.

Ternium has failed to engage with family of the defenders and has responded to requests for dialogue by 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 time of the enforced disappearance. There is no information of any internal investigation into several [allegations](#) of threats by Ternium executives against the defenders. It is crucial that your government demands human rights due diligence from transnational corporations operating on your territory, especially considering the heightened risks associated with operating in conflict-affected areas where human rights defenders work. Recently, Madam President participated in the [4th edition of the US-Mexico CEO Dialogue](#), along with Ternium’s executives Máximo Vedoya and Guillermo Vogel in what is considered a high-level meeting for investors. There is no indication that concerns regarding the missing defenders were raised.

In light of the gravity of this situation we urge you to take the following actions:

1. **Publicly demand captors to return Ricardo and Antonio to their families.**
2. **Appoint a Special Prosecutor and a dedicated searching team** with the necessary resources and expertise to conduct a thorough, independent, and impartial revision of the investigation into the disappearances of Ricardo Lagunes Gasca and Antonio Díaz Valencia and craft a strategic plan for the search.
3. **Meet and engage in direct dialogue with families and representatives** to understand their concerns, their requests for a humanitarian solution and offer support.
4. **Engage with the independent experts** working for the families advancing the Humanitarian Mechanism to facilitate the search for the missing defenders in Mexico to ensure their safe return to their families.
5. **Engage with other countries and institutions in a position** to offer the most advanced technical assistance in the search.

6. **Demand Ternium to commission an independent investigation** into its local executives and to use its influence to help the search, engage in constructive dialogue with the families of the missing and their representatives, and implement robust human rights due diligence with zero tolerance to violence against defenders.
7. **Reestablish the political commitment to address enforced disappearances** of persons in México, and make finding the disappeared a priority.

We believe that these measures are essential to address the ongoing violence against defenders in the region, ensure the safety and protection of those who speak out against abuses, and bring to justice those responsible for Ricardo and Antonio's disappearances. We urge you to demonstrate your commitment to human rights and the rule of law by taking swift and decisive action on this matter to ensure that their families receive the answers and justice they deserve.

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