

11 August 2017

The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

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Dear Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,

We are writing to express our grave concern for the safety of Fr. Ismael “Melo” Moreno, a fellow Jesuit and prominent human rights advocate in Honduras. Fr. Melo is the director of the Honduran Jesuit social action centre ERIC (Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación) and of *Radio Progreso*, which has already had two of its staff assassinated in recent years. He was also a close friend and colleague of the well-known environmental activist Berta Cáceres, who was murdered last year. Last year he visited Canada and many Canadians had the opportunity to meet Fr. Melo and to be deeply inspired by his vision and commitment to the poor. On that occasion, The Toronto Star wrote an extensive article about Fr. Melo and the serious threat to his life. We wrote to you last year in a letter dated August 25th, 2016 expressing our serious concerns for his safety.

Currently the situation is escalating and Fr. Melo is again being targeted. On 19 July, he joined hundreds of students at a concert protesting the treatment of their fellow classmates by university authorities at the national university in Honduras. Subsequently, the university cancelled its contract with ERIC and the university’s rector accused Fr. Melo of promoting anarchy and generating violence. There is great irony in such an accusation. Fr. Melo is widely known as a person of peace who, while defending freedom of expression and justice, promotes democracy and the rule of law at every opportunity. As the Conference of Jesuit Provincials for Latin America and the Caribbean has expressed it, Fr. Melo embodies “a spirit of open and flexible dialogue, of reasonable tolerance.”

The threats and accusations now being directed against Fr. Melo are part of a pattern of attacks against human rights defenders in Honduras. It portrays any dissenting voice as “the enemy”; it aims first to discredit, then to criminalize, and finally to assassinate any opposition. In such a highly charged situation, a public accusation by a formal authority like the university rector increases considerably the level of risk for Fr. Melo.

We therefore urge you and the Government of Canada to apply immediate pressure on the Government of Honduras to ensure that the rule of law is upheld, that Fr. Melo’s safety and freedom of expression are protected, and that all people in Honduras enjoy the full range of human rights.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Peter Bisson SJ
Provincial Superior
Jesuits in English Canada



Erik Oland, SJ
Supérieur provincial
Les jésuites du Canada français et d’Haïti

Cc: Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca