



United States Department of State
*Assistant Secretary for Democracy,
Human Rights, and Labor*
Washington, D.C. 20520-7827

July 31, 2013

Mr. Armstrong Wiggins
Washington D.C. Office Director
Indian Law Resource Center
601 E Street, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003.

Dear Mr. Wiggins:

Thank you for your letters of May 31 and April 26 to Secretary Kerry concerning the human rights of indigenous peoples in Guatemala. I have been asked to reply on his behalf.

Strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Americas is a foreign policy priority for the United States. We share your concerns regarding the lack of political representation and participation of Guatemala's indigenous peoples in government, as well as the lack of dialogue between indigenous communities, the government, and the private sector, particularly with regard to development projects. In our conversations with government officials, the private sector, and indigenous groups, both in Guatemala and in Washington D.C., we encourage dialogue to insure respect for human rights and rule of law.

Secretary Kerry raised human rights issues with President Perez Molina in their meeting on the margins of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in June including equal access to justice, the Rios Montt genocide trial, improving childhood malnutrition, and broad based economic growth - concerns stated in your April 26 letter. The U.S. Embassy officials in Guatemala City monitor human rights issues closely, including land rights issues that affect indigenous peoples, and their findings are reflected in our annual Human Rights Report. Among other things, our Embassy works with the parties involved in land disputes to encourage dialogue and peaceful resolution. Embassy officials also work with civil society and NGOs, including those that defend the

rights of indigenous peoples. The U.S. Agency for International Development sponsors the \$2.2 million Mercy Corps Tierras Project, which promotes peaceful land conflict resolution in Guatemala.

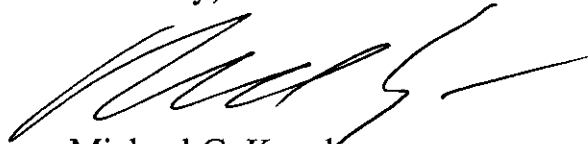
We also share the concern you expressed in your letter regarding Guatemala's most serious human rights abuses, including official involvement in unlawful killings. Embassy officials urge the government to investigate thoroughly any cases of alleged discrimination or abuse, and when appropriate, to provide additional security to human rights defenders and others. As you may be aware, pursuant to U.S. law, we vet our assistance to the security forces to ensure individuals and units that receive that assistance have not committed gross human rights violations.

As you urged in your letter, we continue to support the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and other efforts in the region to promote democratic institutions, respect for rule of law, improved citizen security, and more inclusive economic prosperity. We also remain strong supporters of the independent and autonomous Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and appreciate your ongoing efforts to engage its Commissioners – including Commissioner Dinah Shelton and Commissioner-elect James Cavallaro – on issues impacting indigenous communities throughout the Americas.

You may know that President Obama recently nominated Keith Harper as United States Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Mr. Harper has an extensive background in the rights of indigenous people. We anticipate he will take an active interest in those issues in Geneva.

Let me underscore my appreciation for the ongoing efforts of the Indian Law Resource Center to ensure the human rights of indigenous peoples in the region are protected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael G. Kozak", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael G. Kozak
Acting Assistant Secretary