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October 24, 2008

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Mr. Juan Evo Morales Ayma
President of the Republic of Bolivia
La Paz, Bolivia

Re: Investigations of illegal detentions, political arrests and persecution, and attacks against the media

Your Excellency President Morales,

On October 7th, you received a letter from the Human Rights Foundation (HRF) informing you of our report entitled *Bolivia's Human Rights Situation as of September 2008*. The report found, among other things, that your government's official rhetoric, which consisted of degrading adjectives aimed at the political opposition and repeated calls for your supporters to "die" in order to "defend the revolution," constituted propaganda for war and encouraged political violence and racial hatred, endangering the lives of Bolivians. This rhetoric towards the opposition, compounded by your aggressive speeches against the independent media, breach Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

In light of these acts, HRF expressed its concern regarding the biased way in which your government approached the case of at least 21 deaths resulting from political violence in September. As a consequence of the September 11th deaths, in which the majority of victims were government supporters, Pando Governor Leopoldo Fernandez and more than a dozen other people were detained and accused of "genocide," while more than 400 other people fled to Brazil for fear of persecution. Meanwhile, no legal action has been taken with respect to the deaths of opposition members on September 11th, 12th, 13th and 23rd.

HRF also communicated its worry regarding the growing number of detentions and incarcerations of people who oppose your government under charges of terrorism and sedition. These detentions appear to have been performed arbitrarily by masked people reportedly under orders from the executive branch and without a proper judicial warrant. According to information gathered by HRF staff sent to Bolivia and reports from leaders of Bolivian civil society, more than 20 such people have been arbitrarily detained and jailed. Amongst them are: Hugo Apaza Sahonero, Gualberto Paz Mugro, Felipe Brigabriel Villarroel, Gabriel Delgadillo Vargas, Jose Salinas Bazan, Ruben Franco Tuno, Mirtha Sosa del Chalar, Adhemar Herrera Guerra, Claudio Franco Eguez, Osvaldo Valdivia, Nestor da Silva Rivero, Agapito Wira, William Misuko,

Luis Marquez, Lisandro Perez, Raul Vargas Valdivia, Juan Carlos Rios and Jose Vaca Ortiz.

Most recently, independent journalists have also been arbitrarily detained. On October 13th at 4 a.m., masked men violently arrested journalist Jorge Melgar Quette. This arrest occurred just five days after Melgar published controversial footage implicating Juan Ramon Quintana, Minister of the Presidency, as one of the key instigators of the violence that occurred in Pando on September 11th. In the video, Quintana shouts: "We are going to take Pando's governor to the end of the world, so that when he wakes he does not have the chance to climb up the stairs of his political hell [...]. And as a noble people, a patriotic people, a generous people, we will give him an epitaph: Prefect, rest in peace and live with the worms."

In response to Melgar's arrest, a Federation of Press Workers representative stated: "The government has gone from aggression to kidnapping, from giving hostile speeches to violating our liberties." This statement confirms the findings of the *Report on aggressions of the media and journalists 2007-2008* released by the UNIR Foundation, according to which 117 aggressions against journalists were registered between the dates of June 1st, 2007 and August 21st, 2008. According to UNIR, the most frequent aggressions against journalists include: beatings and stoning (46%), verbal aggressions and threats (27%), and the destruction of press equipment (10%). In fact, 44% of the attacks on the press are committed by "presumed partisans" of your government, reinforcing a National Press Association statement on August 26, which states, "[e]very time the head of state [Morales] verbally attacks the press [...] hordes of government supporters hit, beat and throw stones at journalists."

Mr. President, the multiple detentions carried out against citizens opposing your government and the intimidation and arrests of the press are in direct violation of Article 13 paragraph 2 and Article 19 paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrine the rights of freedom from arbitrary detention and freedom of speech and opinion.

President Morales, given the critical situation of human rights in Bolivia, HRF has decided to dispatch a team of research professionals to Bolivia to thoroughly investigate these alleged political detentions and persecutions, as well as the attacks committed against the press.

Sincerely,



Thor Halvorssen
President



Armando Valladares
Chairman



Alvaro Vargas Llosa
International Council Member

cc.

Bolivian Embassy, Washington DC (Mario Gustavo Guzmán Saldaña)
Permanent Mission of Bolivia to the United Nations (Hugo Siles Alvarado)
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Santiago Canton)
Organization of American States (José Miguel Insulza)
Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Sergio García Ramírez)
International Society for Human Rights (Martin Lessenthin)
European Parliament - Human Rights Unit (Geoffrey Harris)
UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Louise Arbour)
Council of Europe Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Thomas Hammarberg)
Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation (Ken Coates)
Christian Solidarity Worldwide (David Atkinson)
Comisión Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Nicaragua (Nicolás Bolaños Geyer)
UK Parliament - House of Lords (Lord Avebury)
International Federation for Human Rights (Jimena Reyes)
Human Rights Watch (Jose Miguel Vivanco)
Amnesty International
Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (Luis Saavedra)