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Dear Attorney General,

I am deeply concerned about the imprisonment of human rights defender Bernardo Caal Xol, who is serving a prison sentence after an unfair trial, apparently because of his peaceful activities to defend indigenous and environmental rights.

In 2015, Bernardo Caal Xol, a local teacher, was appointed by Mayan Q'eqchi communities in the department of Alta Verapaz to represent them in a legal action against the construction of a hydroelectric project on the Cahabón River. Because of this, he was subjected to harassment, threats, and a smear campaign.

In June 2017, less than a month after the Constitutional Court of Guatemala ruled in favour of the Q'eqchi communities, three workers employed by the company in charge of the building project accused Bernardo Caal Xol of having led a group of locals who allegedly had attacked and robbed them 20 months earlier. On the basis of these accusations, a court on Cobán sentenced Bernardo Caal Xol to 7 years and 4 months in prison for "aggravated theft" and "illegal detention" on 9 November 2018, in spite of the fact that no objective evidence was presented to support the accusations against him, and he was able to show that he had not even been in the vicinity when the alleged assault was committed.

I am concerned that the real reason for the sentence against Bernardo Caal Xol is an attempt to silence him and to stop him from continuing his work to defend the rights of the Q'eqchi communities. Therefore, I appeal to you to take all necessary steps to ensure all charges against Bernardo Caal are dropped and he is immediately released from prison.

Yours sincerely,