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## Peru- Criminalization against environmental defenders in Peru

On 27 January 2020 human rights and environmental defenders **Hermenegildo Torres Perales, Porfirio Torres Perales, Segundo Fabián Culqui Mendoza, Dociteo Tafur Díaz, Américo Laboreano Ramos y [Juan de Dios Carrasco Fernández](#)** members of the campesino community of Muchik Santa Catalina de Chongoyape, Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparrí (Save Chaparrí Defense Front), and Asociación para la Conservación de la Naturaleza y Turismo Sostenible Chaparrí – ACOTURCH, (Association for the Conservation of Nature and Sustainable Tourism) learned that an investigations had been opened by the Attorney General of the Environment of Lambayeque, through local press and social media. Neither the defenders nor their legal representatives were informed of the case, which would result in custodial sentences of 4 years against the defenders on the basis of potential charges related to environmental damage and illegal sale of and appropriation of land.

The Chaparrí Private Conservation Reserve (Área de Conservación Privada Chaparrí) was recognized in 2001 as the first Private Conservation Area (ACP) of Peru, with the aim to protect more than 34,000 hectares of tropical dry forests and endangered animals, such as the spectacled bear and the Aliblanca turkey. The area has been conserved and protected by the community organisations of **Santa Catalina de Chongoyape, Save Chaparrí Defense Front** and the **Association for the Conservation of Nature and Sustainable Tourism**. Community members have reported being targets of harassment, verbal and physical violence, monitoring, arbitrary separation from the community and death threats because of their opposition to megaprojects in their territory, such as the Regional Hydraulic Plan of Lambayeque which includes plans for at least 19 mega-dams, prioritizing “La Montería” on protected territory, which has not been previously consented by the local community of Santa Catalina.

Defenders reported that security risks started to increase after 9 December 2020 when the Regional Council of Lambayeque approved the beginning of feasibility studies for the construction of “La Montería” dam inside Chaparrí’s Ecological Reserve without consideration of the status of the protected area or consultations with the owners of the land. Following the Regional Council’s decision, The Save Chaparrí Defense Front organized peaceful demonstrations in defence of the territory, against the dam and illegal appropriation of lands. In response to the community’s defensive actions, a new wave of criminalization and stigmatization was initiated against them.

On 16 January 2021, four members of the Environment Unit of Peru National Police (PNP) attacked and tried to arrest human rights defender and community leader **Wilson Bautista Sánchez** in front of his brother Wilmer Bautista Sánchez, who recorded part of the attack, in the community of Muchik Santa Catalina, district of Chongoyape. Six unidentified civilians accompanied the police and verbally attacked the HRD and his brother. The defender was beaten and ultimately handcuffed and then forced to walk at gunpoint by the policemen. Ultimately, the officers did not arrest Wilson, but left him severely injured on the ground. The police intervention was based on a complaint against Wilson Bautista Sánchez, claiming he committed environmental crimes, such as illegal appropriation and sale of lands. Given that other Chaparrí defenders have experienced

similar types of criminalization in the past, it is concerning that the complaint could end in a new process of criminalization against the HRD.

Unfortunately, since the attempted arrest and attack against Wilmer Bautista Sánchez and other members of the Save Chaparri Defense Front, there has been a smear campaigns and public stigmatization in local media and on social networks. Several departmental and national media outlets such as “Diario Correo” and “ABC Chiclayo” publicized the news of the case, distorting information and facts, which has only contributed to creating an atmosphere of misinformation and stigmatization of members of the Save Chaparrí Defense Front.

Front Line Defenders condemns the spread of false accusations against defender Wilmer Bautista Sánchez and other leaders of the Save Chaparrí Defense Front.

Front Line Defenders also condemns the latest smear campaign and strategy to delegitimize the community and HRDs being carried out against members of the Chaparrí community in order to undermine their valuable work in defense of indigenous, environmental and land rights in Peru.

Front Line Defenders reiterates its worries about the patterns of attacks and defamation of environmental rights defenders and those who carry out human rights work in Peru, and urges the state to adopt all necessary measures to ensure its commitment to protection of environmental defenders, as a signatory to the Escazu agreement,

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Peru to:**

- 1.Publicly acknowledge the important and legitimate role of environmental and human rights defenders;
- 2.Drop all charges against the seven members of Santa Catalina community and the Save Chaparrí Defense Front, as they are believed to be motivated by their human rights work and defense of the land and territory;
- 3.Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the police actions against human rights defender Wilson Bautista Sánchez, with a view to bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
- 4.Ensure that the members of Santa Catalina community and the Save Chaparrí Defense Front are formally notified of the charges against them, and that they can freely exercise their right to a proper defence;
- 5.Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Peru, in particular environmental defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.