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Peru: Criminalization of Ashaninka indigenous defender Ángel Pedro Valerio

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern that on 4 September 2023, the Prosecutor's Office issued a preliminary arrest order against the human rights defender and indigenous leader **Ángel Pedro Valerio**. The warrant relates to an investigation in the context of the disappearance of four people in April 2023. The human rights defender's defense claims he was unjustly accused as he was not even present in the area when the alleged crime took place.

[Ángel Pedro Valerio](#) is an Ashaninka indigenous human rights defender and current president of the Central Ashaninka del Rio Ene (CARE). He is well known for defending his territory, and for advocating for indigenous and environmental rights in the face of drug trafficking mafias, illegal logging and land grabbing in the Ashaninka territory. He has faced increased risks as a result of his protagonism in defence of the land and the rights of Ashaninka people.

On 4 September 2023 the Prosecutor's Office issued a preliminary arrest order against Angel Pedro Valerio, together with seven other leaders, for his alleged involvement in the disappearance of four people. The disappearances happened in the context of a protest in April 2023. The lawyers of CARE had urged the Prosecutor's Office that Pedro Valerio be excluded from the investigation, since he was participating in the [XXVII Asháninka Congress of the Ene River](#) at the time of the events under investigation .

On April 14 and 15 2023, a week after the [killing of Ashaninka indigenous leader Santiago Contoricón](#), communities from the Tambo River blocked the bridge of Puerto Ocopa community in protest against the lack of efforts taken by authorities to investigate the killing of the indigenous leader. Santiago Contoricón was known for his work in support of indigenous communities. He had previously worked as a bilingual intercultural teacher and had held various public offices, including district mayor of Río Tambo, first councillor in the Provincial Municipality of Satipo, regional councillor of Junín and president of the Central Ashaninka indigenous organization of Río Tambo (CART). Unfortunately, the mobilization resulted in the disappearance of four people, whose whereabouts remain unknown and, according to the evidence presented, had been retained during the protest.

CARE claims that the accusation against the human rights defender Angel Pedro Valerio have not been conducted in due course of law, since the indigenous leader was never informed of his obligation to participate in the proceedings or testify as a witness to the events. Pedro Valerio's legal defence has learned of a preliminary arrest order against him, which they allege to be disproportionate, since the human rights defender has neither demonstrated any indication of hindering the investigations, nor has there been any risk of possible escape attempt. The measure contradicts his right to the presumption of innocence, the right to proper defense and the required due process. In addition, the legal defence of the human rights defender has also discovered, since the authorities have not initiated any formal communication with the human rights defender, that the prosecutor's office has recently updated Angel Pedro's procedural status to a simple appearance, meaning that the human rights defender will have to report periodically to the prosecutor's office, forcing him to cover transportation costs and frustrating his ability to carry out his human rights activities in the territory.

Local organisations accompanying the case are concerned that, in addition to the criminalization of the indigenous leader, there is an increasing atmosphere of confrontation against the Ashaninka people, which have included the use of social media and other local media to disseminate racist and xenophobic messages labelling them as savage and uncivilized.

Front Line Defenders recognises the need to an independent investigation to clarify all the facts about this very serious case involving the disappearance of the four people. Nevertheless, Front Line Defenders believes the investigation of the disappearances has been weaponised as an opportunity to undermine Pedro Valerio' work as a human rights defender.

Front Line Defenders urges that the right to presumption of innocence of Pedro Valerio to be respected by the authorities throughout the proceedings of this case, and implores the authorities in Peru to drop the warrant for his arrest while an impartial investigation into the allegations made against the human rights defender is carried out.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Peru to:

1. Drop the unfair charges against human rights defender Angel Pedro Valerio and carry out an impartial investigation into his criminalisation;
2. Respect the right to defense and due process of the human rights defenders Angel Pedro Valerio;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the human rights defender, as well as that of the other members of CARE, in direct consultation with him;
4. Guarantee that all human rights defenders in Peru are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restrictions, including judicial harassment.