

16 May 2018

Ecuador: Kidnapping of four indigenous peoples' rights defenders

On 9 May 2018, indigenous peoples' rights defenders **Yaku Pérez Guartambel, Mario Gonzalo, Fárez Ramon, Víctor Hernández Siavichay** and **Manuel Gayllas** were kidnapped and held for seven hours, during which time they were threatened and Yaku Pérez Guartambel was beaten. The human rights defenders believe the kidnappers work for Ecuagoldmining South América S.A, part of Chinese mining company Junefield Group S.A, which is mining in Molleturo del Cantón Cuenca, Ecuador. After the people of Molleturo del Cantón Cuenca called for their safe return, the defenders were released on the condition that they never again set foot in Molleturo Municipality.

[Yaku Pérez Guartambel](#) is a human rights defender, indigenous leader and the president of Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador – ECUARUNARI (Confederation of the Kichwa Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador). ECUARUNARI's main objective is to promote awareness of human rights abuses against indigenous communities, and to protect human rights defenders in Ecuador who are working on behalf of indigenous peoples' rights. Yaku Pérez Guartambel, Mario Gonzalo, Fárez Ramon, Víctor Hernández Siavichay and Manuel Gayllas are members of the Federación de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas del Azuay (Federation of Indigenous and Campesino Organisations of Azuay – FOA), an indigenous federation that has been supporting local indigenous communities in Río Blanco and Molleturo, who are opposing the activities of Ecuagoldmining South America S.A, because of the risk of pollution to their land, and the effects the mining would have on the communities' health and access to clean water. The mining company did not obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the communities affected by the mining.

On 9 May 2018, Yaku Pérez Guartambel, Mario Gonzalo, Fárez Ramon, Víctor Hernández Siavichay and Manuel Gayllas were travelling by car to the Río Blanco community in Molleturo del Cantón Cuenca Municipality when a group of men, who the defenders believe work for Ecuagoldmining South América S.A, kidnapped them. The men slashed the tires of the car and accused Yaku Pérez Guartambel of an arson attack on the mining camp located in Río Blanco.

The perpetrators pushed the car, with the human rights defenders inside, to a square near Cochapamba School. In front of students, they forced Yaku Pérez Guartambel out of the car, punched him several times, spit on him, pulled his hair, and stripped him of his clothes, while threatening him with crucifixion and being burnt alive. The human rights defenders were eventually taken to a house where the perpetrators continued to insult them, calling them anti-development, instigators against mining activities and threatened to burn them alive.

The people of Molleturo Municipality, who heard about the kidnapping, negotiated with the perpetrators in the hopes of freeing the indigenous peoples' rights defenders. At around 2:30 pm, the perpetrators released the defenders under the condition that they would never again set foot in Molleturo and would stop opposing mining activities. They

threatened to burn them alive if they continued with their activities.

In the last number of years in Ecuador, indigenous human rights defenders have been subjected to aggression, threats and intimidation by state and non-state actors, including [Gloria Ushigua](#) and [Patricia Gualinga](#), due to their work protecting the rights of indigenous communities from human rights violations linked to the activities of extractive industries.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the safety of indigenous leaders and human rights defenders, Yaku Pérez Guartambel, Mario Gonzalo, Fárez Ramon, Víctor Hernández Siavichay and Manuel Gayllas. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern about the increasing persecution and intimidation of indigenous peoples' and environmental rights defenders in Ecuador and the risks they face to protect their land and livelihoods.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Ecuador to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Yaku Pérez Guartambel, Mario Gonzalo, Fárez Ramon, Víctor Hernández Siavichay and Manuel Gayllas, in coordination with the human rights defenders;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the kidnapping and death threats against Yaku Pérez Guartambel, Mario Gonzalo, Fárez Ramon, Víctor Hernández Siavichay and Manuel Gayllas with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Ecuador are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.