

4 March 2021

## Update – Peru: Environmental rights defenders and their communities subjected to continued harassment

Members of the campesino community of Muchik Santa Catalina de Chongoyape and the group Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparrí (Save Chaparrí Defense Front) have reported continued incidents of harassment by officers of the Environmental Unit of the Peru National Police (PNP) since the first week of February. The environmental rights defenders have been subjected to harassment in the form of police operations in the community, threats of criminalization and summonses to testify.

On 6 February 2021, around twelve officers of the Environmental Unit of the PNP carried out an operation in the rural community of Muchik Santa Catalina de Chongoyape. The operation was conducted by the Unit in attempts to verify environmental crimes allegedly committed by members of the community, including environmental human rights defenders from the Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparrí.

During the operation, the officers registered the names and identity documents of about 30 members of the community, including women and men human rights defenders who at the time were carrying out activities to prepare trails and promote reforestation, and conducting legitimate monitoring activities in the ecological area. The 30 individuals were threatened with arrest if they did not leave the area and cease their activities. Members of the community reported that during the same operation, the officers threatened to bring legal action against environmental human rights defender [Edivar Juan Carrasco Vásquez](#), who is currently the president of the community.

On 10 February 2021, another police operation took place in the community, this time with an increased number of officers, reported by members of the community as "never before seen in communal lands". The operation included riot troops and the presence of the commander of the Environmental Unit of the PNP, Mr. Lizardo Urbieto Pacheco. State agents once again said they were there to investigate whether members of the community had committed environmental crimes.

On 13 February 2021, unknown individuals in a vehicle entered onto the property of **Edivar Juan Carrasco Vásquez**, leaving after several minutes. The same incident occurred again one week later. Edivar Juan Carrasco Vásquez believes that these actions were an attempt to intimidate him.

On 15 February 2021, the Lambayeque Provincial Specialized Prosecutor for Environmental Matters officially notified [Wilson Bautista Sánchez](#) of a summons to testify before the prosecutor, dated for 19 March. The human rights defender was subjected to a physical assault and attempted arrest by four officers on 16 January 2021 in the same area of the community where the two most recent police operations occurred. Wilson Bautista Sánchez is yet to receive any notification of progress in the complaint he filed against the four officers who assaulted him.

The recent police operations in the community and the harassment of its members have further contributed to a climate of intimidation in relation to the territorial defence work of Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparrí, which has long been an activity fraught with risk, as evidenced by the [assassination](#) of Chaparrí human rights defender Napoleón Tarrillo Astonitas in December 2017.

Front Line Defenders reiterates its grave concern in response to the harassment and criminalization of environmental human rights defenders of the Muchik Santa Catalina de Chongoyape community, as well as leaders of Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparrí.

Front Line Defenders condemns the continued escalation of tensions in Chaparrí, which appears to coincide with the Lambayeque Regional Court's approval of feasibility studies for the construction of the "La Montería" dam to take place within the ecological reserve of Chaparrí.