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6 april 2018

Bolivia: Judge recuses himself from Rositas Hydroelectric Project case following intimidation

On 4 April 2018, the judge reviewing the popular action challenging the activities of Rositas Hydroelectric Project recused himself from deciding the case during a hearing in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Human rights defenders involved in the case reported that the judge had been subjected to intimidation

Human rights defender [Nelson La Madrid](#) is providing legal representation for the Guaraní indigenous communities of Tatarenda Nuevo and Yumao, located in Santa Cruz province, Bolivia. The defender is supporting these indigenous communities, who challenged before the domestic courts the execution of “Rositas Hydroelectric Project” (Proyecto Hidroeléctrico Rositas), promoted by Bolivia’s Electric National Company (Empresa Nacional de Electricidad de Bolivia ENDE) in their territories without their free, prior and informed consent. The communities have opposed the project because it will flood approximately 45,000 hectares of land, leaving the territory of twelve Guaraní communities (approximately 500 families) under water. Nelson La Madrid has been subjected to a series of threatening phone calls as a result of his work on behalf of the communities.

On 29 March, a civil court admitted the popular action and resolved that ENDE suspend all administrative or legal activity in the framework of the construction of the Rositas hydroelectric plant until there is a decision on the merits of the claim. However, during the case hearing on 4 April 2018, Judge Óscar Ortiz recused himself from deciding the case on the grounds of territorial jurisdiction, and ordered the action must be reviewed by the courts in Santa Cruz, because of proximity to Tatarenda Nuevo and Yumao indigenous communities. Nelson La Madrid believes that Judge Ortiz was subjected to pressure and intimidation from ENDE’s legal team and the Attorney General’s Office, which led to his decision to step down from the case.

Furthermore, on 3 April 2018, at a [press conference](#), Bolivia’s Minister of Energy, Rafael Alarcón, and the president of ENDE, Joaquín Rodríguez, labelled those involved in the popular action opposing the project as “bad people” who were only seeking financial compensation.

Front Line Defenders expresses concern about the increasing persecution and intimidation of indigenous and environmental rights defenders in Bolivia and the risks they face because of their work protecting the land and livelihood of indigenous communities from the negative impact of extractive projects.