

13 June 2017

Guatemala: Intimidation and death threats against indigenous rights defender Aura Lolita Chávez and members of her organisation

On 7 June 2017, the indigenous rights defender, **Aura Lolita Chávez**, and members of her organisation were threatened, chased and intimidated by ten unidentified armed men while she and her colleagues accompanied a truck loaded with illegal wood to the local authorities, in Santa Cruz del Quiché, K'iche department, Guatemala.

[Aura Lolita Chávez](#) is a leader of the [Consejo de Pueblos K'iche' por la Defensa de la Vida, Madre Naturaleza, Tierra y Territorio - CPK](#) (Council of K'iche' People for the Defense of Life, Mother Nature, Land and Territory) of Guatemala. The CPK coordinates dialogue, community consultations and collective action against human rights violations stemming from the expansion of mining, logging, hydroelectric and agro-industry in their territory without the previous, informed and free consent of the owners. The projects are carried out on their land without minimal sustainable standards, posing threats to their surrounding environment and livelihood as a result of pollution from toxic metals, deviation of water courses and deforestation.

On the afternoon of 7 June 2017, several members of CPK, including Aura Lolita Chávez, stopped a truck between Chichicastenango and Los Encantos in order to verify if the wood being transported was from illegal logging on their land. After certifying that the wood was illegal, the members of CPK escorted the truck to Santa Cruz del Quiché in order to report the case to the authorities. Before they arrived at their destination, a group of ten unidentified armed men approached the human rights defenders and threatened them with sexual assault, among other threats. Aura Lolita Chávez and her group ran away, but the assailants chased them firing gunshots into the air. During the escape, part of the group got separated and disappeared for several hours. After the incident, several people in Santa Cruz del Quiché reported that the group of armed men were looking for the human rights defender.

Aura Lolita Chávez has been granted [precautionary measures](#) by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2005, but this has not prevented her from being targeted with threats, intimidation and harassment.

The Guatemalan government has continuously failed to comply with international and national legislation and judicial decisions demanding it to respect the rights of indigenous communities, and to ensure private interests do too. Front Line Defenders has previously reported on violations against indigenous and land rights defenders in the country. On 27 May 2017, indigenous and land rights defender, [Carlos Maaz Coc](#), was killed while he attended a peaceful demonstration which called on the authorities to resolve the contamination of Lake Izabal, El Estor, Guatemala, due to mining activities. On 4 February 2017, [Abelino Chub Caal](#), an indigenous Maya-Q'eqchi' defender, was detained and falsely charged with aggravated land grabbing, arson, coercion, illicit association, and belonging to illicit armed groups. He remains in detention as he waits for his case to be heard. On 17 September 2016, shots were fired outside the home of [Angélica Choc](#) in El Estor, where she slept with her two children. Angélica Choc along with 12 other plaintiffs, sued the company Hudbay Minerals and its Guatemalan subsidiary CGN in Canada, in an unprecedented effort to bring justice to the Maya-Q'eqchi' community.

Front Line Defenders is concerned at the most recent threats and intimidation against human rights defender, Aura Lolita Chávez, and other members of CPK, as it believes that the acts carried out against them are motivated solely by their legitimate work in defense of their ancestral land and community rights. Front Line Defenders is also concerned at the reports that the unidentified group of assailants are still looking for Aura Lolita Chávez.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Guatemala to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats and intimidation against **Aura Lolita Chávez** and other members of CPK, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures, in consultation with the defenders, to guarantee their physical and psychological integrity and security;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Guatemala are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.