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Chile: threats and police harassment against Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo

On 5 June 2019, Chilean human rights organisations filed a judicial appeal (*amparo*) for the protection of Mapuche woman human rights defender **Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo** at the Court of Temuco, Araucania. The appeal is a response to a series of security incidents against the human rights defender, particularly the increased police harassment she has been facing.

[Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo](#) is a Mapuche educator and human rights defender. She is the spokesperson of **Red por la Infancia Mapuche**, a network promoting the rights of Mapuche children. Onesina Riquelme Lienqueo is recognised in Araucania for her work around multicultural education and the rights of Mapuche children.

The woman human rights defender currently accompanies a minor who is a witness in the trial concerning the killing of Camilo Catrillanca, the grandson of a local Mapuche leader, by the police.

On 16 November 2018, Camilo Catrillanca was shot dead in the head by officers of the Chilean Police, while he was returning home. It became a landmark case reflecting the historical violence against the Mapuche people and the impunity of agents of the Chilean State.

Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo has been involved in the case of Camilo Catrillanca by accompanying a key witness in the trial, and consequently followed and harassed by police officers on the streets of Temuco and Nueva Imperial. On 28 May 2019, around 1pm, after returning home from a deposition hearing, the human rights defender noticed that the doors to her house were open, however nothing was missing inside. Minutes later, a police car stopped in front of her house and remained there until 6pm. On another occasion, the mother of the human rights defender received threatening phone calls warning her to keep silent and stop denouncing human rights violations against Mapuche children.

This is not the first time that Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo has been targeted for her human rights work. She has been facing threats and harassment since 2016.

Chilean human rights defenders have denounced the pattern of criminalisation against the Mapuche communities, reflected in the intense police surveillance, with the use of tanks, riot shields and rifles, as well as the undue use of force against the Mapuche people.

Mapuche communities have strengthened the organisation of their collective struggle after Chile's transition to democracy. For decades, Mapuche rights defenders have called on the

Chilean government to grant their people jurisdictional autonomy, allow their return to ancestral lands, and respect their cultural identity. However, the authorities have selectively enforced the anti-terrorism law in order to criminalise the peaceful Mapuche resistance and demands.

Front Line Defenders is concerned about the harassment and threats against Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo, as well as other witnesses seeking justice in the Catrillanca case. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern about the ongoing discriminatory treatment of the Mapuche indigenous people by Chilean authorities, reflected in their neglect and the criminalisation of their collective struggle for human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Chile to:

1. Strongly condemn the threats and harassment against Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo, as they are believed to be directly motivated by her peaceful and legitimate work in defence of the rights of the Mapuche children;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo, her family members, as well as all Mapuche people, in consultation with them;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against woman human rights defender Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo and the break-in at her house, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the alleged attacks and human rights violations perpetrated by state forces against the Mapuche communities in Chile, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Chile, especially members of the Mapuche people, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including police and judicial harassment.