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Peru: Upcoming trial of environmental rights defenders who protect Chaparri

On 12 August 2022, a public trial will be held against six environmental rights defenders and members of the [Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparri](#) (Save Chaparri Defense Front) on the unsubstantiated charge of "altering the environment or landscape". The trial will take place in the Second Supraprovincial Unipersonal Criminal Court of Chiclayo in the Lambayeque region and could result in a four-year prison sentence.

Hermenegildo Torres Perales, Porfirio Torres Perales, Segundo Fabián Culqui Mendoza, Dociteo Tafur Díaz, Américo Laboreano Ramos and [Juan de Dios Carrasco Fernández](#) are members of the Campesino community Muchik Santa Catalina de Chongoyape, the Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparri and the Asociación para la Conservación de la Naturaleza y Turismo Sostenible Chaparri (Association for the Conservation of Nature and Sustainable Tourism) dedicated to the conservation and protection of the nature reserve "Área de Conservación Privada Chaparri". The Chaparri Reserve was recognised in 2001 as the first Private Conservation Area (ACP) in Peru, with the aim of protecting more than 34,000 hectares of tropical dry forests and endangered animals, such as the Andean bear and the white-winged turkey.

On 27 January 2021, the six defenders learned through the local press and social networks that the Specialised Provincial Prosecutor's Office for Environmental Matters of Lambayeque had opened an investigation against them.

The criminalisation of the six defenders is part of an alarming pattern of violence against the legitimate work of the Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparri and the Comunidad Campesina Muchik Santa Catalina de Chongoyape. Over the years, members of the community have reported being [targets of harassment, verbal and physical violence, surveillance, arbitrary separation from the community](#) and death threats by organised criminal groups dedicated to land grabbing, in retaliation for their opposition to the interests of those seeking to building dams in protected territory.

Despite the fact that since March 2018 the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice recognised the defence work of the members of the Frente de Defensa Salvemos Chaparri and granted personal protection measures in their favour, environmental defenders continue to face a serious escalation of risks in retaliation for their work from unknown entities. There has been no effective implementation of protection measures or investigation into those behind the attacks.

Front Line Defenders expresses deep concern at the upcoming trial of environmental rights defenders Hermenegildo Torres Perales, Porfirio Torres Perales, Segundo Fabián Culqui Mendoza, Dociteo Tafur Díaz, Américo Laboreano Ramos and Juan de Dios Carrasco Fernández and condemns the criminalisation process against them.

Front Line Defenders believes that the criminalisation of environmental rights defenders seeks to hinder their valuable work in defence of environmental and land rights in the country and reiterates its concern at the discouraging message this sends to those carrying out human rights work in Peru.

Front Line Defenders urges the Peruvian State to take all necessary measures to protect the safety of the human rights defenders and to ensure that the judicial system is not misused as a tool to delegitimise and obstruct the work of environmental and land rights defenders in Peru.

Front Line Defenders urges the Peruvian authorities to:

1. Drop the unfounded charges against Hermenegildo Torres Perales, Porfirio Torres Perales, Segundo Fabián Culqui Mendoza, Dociteo Tafur Díaz, Américo Laboreano Ramos and Juan de Dios Carrasco Fernández as they are motivated solely by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Ensure the effective implementation, in constant collaboration with the defenders, of the protection measures granted by the Ministry of the Interior;
3. Publicly recognise the important and legitimate role of environmental and human rights defenders;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Peru, in particular environmental defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.