

11 January 2018

Ecuador: Patricia Gualinga attacked and subjected to death threats

On 5 January 2018, the indigenous human rights defender, **Patricia Gualinga** was attacked by an unidentified individual who threw rocks at her house, breaking several of the windows of her apartment, located in cantón del Puyo, Pastaza Province, Ecuador. At the time of the attack, the human rights defender was at home with her husband, parents, brother and daughter. The attacker also yelled death threats specifically aimed at the human rights defender.

[Patricia Gualinga](#) is an indigenous rights defender and foreign relations leader of the *Pueblo Kichwa de Sarayaku* (Kichwa People of Sarayaku), an indigenous community based in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The Kichwa People of Sarayaku have defended their lands and livelihood from human rights violations caused by the illegal appropriation of community land without free, prior and informed consent for extractive projects. Their human rights work in preventing such violations has included a case submitted to the Inter-American System. Patricia Gualinga was one of the representatives of the case which came before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2012. The defender is currently working protecting the Kichwa People of Sarayaku from similar human rights violations resulting from oil extraction projects by Chinese companies on their land.

On 5 January 2018, at approximately 1.15 am, while Patricia Gualinga was at home with her family, an unidentified individual threw rocks at the defender's house, located in cantón del Puyo, Pastaza Province, Ecuador, breaking several of the windows of her apartment. She woke up when one of the rocks broke her bedroom window, showering her with glass. Patricia Gualinga then looked out the window and saw a man who pointed at her and, using abusive language and repeated twice that the next time he would kill her before running away. Fortunately, the human rights defender did not suffer any injuries from the attack.

On 8 January 2018, the human rights defender stressed in a press conference that the attacker did not appear to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs and that the death threat was unequivocal. The Community Police Unit is located only a few meters away from Patricia Gualinga's house, making it possible for her to immediately report the attack. To date, the police have failed to locate the perpetrator.

Later in the day of 8 January 2018, Patricia Gualinga submitted a formal complaint before the Prosecutor's Office regarding the attack and death threat, urging this body to investigate and sanction the person responsible for the acts.

The situation of indigenous and land rights defenders in Ecuador is highly worrying. In the last few years, indigenous human rights defenders such as [Gloria Ushigua](#), have been subjected to aggression, threats and intimidation by state and non-state actors, due to their work protecting their ancestral territories and the livelihood of indigenous communities from human rights violations linked to extraction projects. Many indigenous leaders and human rights defenders have been criminalised by Ecuador's governmental authorities, such as [Lina Solano Ortiz](#), [Georgina Gutama](#) and [Herlinda Gutama](#).

In the case of the Kichwa People of Sarayaku, in 2012 the Inter-American Court on Human Rights issued a [decision](#) upholding the responsibility of Ecuador under international human rights law for neglecting to consult and ensure their previous, free and informed consent regarding the oil extraction project that took place on the indigenous community's ancestral territory, violating their right to communal property, cultural identity, effective remedy and humane treatment.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the safety of indigenous human rights defender, Patricia Gualinga. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern about the increasing persecution and intimidation against indigenous and environmental rights defenders in Ecuador and the risks they face everyday in order to protect their land and livelihood.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Ecuador to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Patricia Gualinga and her family, in coordination with the human rights defender;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack and death threats against Patricia Gualinga with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Ecuador are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.