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El Salvador – Illegal searches on the house of human rights defender Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez

On 29 June 2017, the house of human rights defender **Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez** was searched for the second time in one month by members of the National Police in San Salvador, El Salvador. The authorities did not present a search warrant.

[Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez](#) is the coordinator of the **Movimiento de Mujeres de Santo Tomás (Women's Movement of Santo Tomás)** in San Salvador. The organization works in the defence of women's rights, supporting women who have been victims of violence, working for the prevention of gender-based violence, as well as campaigning for environmental justice. Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez is also a well-known environmental rights defender who has been working to protect the natural resources of the El Porvenir forest since March of 2015. The forest has been threatened by an urban development project carried out by the Grupo Roble, one of the largest companies in the country.

On 29 June 2017, the house of Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez was illegally searched by members of the National Police. When the police arrived, only the human rights defender's daughter was at home. The officers searched the house and asked if they were carrying out any illicit activities but did not present any warrant to carry out the search. This is the second time within a month that the authorities have searched the house of the human rights defender, despite the fact that there is no official investigation or procedure against her.

On 7 June 2017, members of the National Police searched the house of Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez. They did not present a search warrant and they asked questions about the residents of Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez's home. One of the police officers stated that they were carrying out investigations, since there were suspected criminals living in the area. Although there are several residences in the neighbourhood, only the defender's house was searched.

Front Line Defenders has previously reported on [violations](#) against the human rights defender. On 29 September 2015, the company Grupo Roble filed a complaint against Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez, accusing her of defamation and slander, in relation to remarks the human rights defender had made on three television stations (Channel 33, Channel10 and TVX) and on national radio. Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez had spoken about the environmental damage caused by Inversiones Roble's projects. The defamation proceedings against the defender appears to be a way in which to hinder the defenders' work by restricting her freedom of speech.

On 15 May 2015 the human rights defender was granted precautionary measures by the Prosecutor's Office for the Defence of Human Rights. In their decision, they stated that the threats she constantly receives "*refer to serious violations of the right to life and personal integrity ... because these threats intended to restrict the exercise of their work ... and involve a violation of the right to freedom of expression*".

Front Line Defenders is concerned at the most recent actions carried out by the National Police against Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez, as it believes that they are connected to her peaceful and legitimate

work in the defence of the environmental and women rights in El Salvador.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in El Salvador to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the illegal searches on Sonia Jeannette Sánchez Pérez's house, 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 human rights defender, to guarantee her physical and psychological integrity and security;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in El Salvador are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.