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Chile: Misogynistic attack and death threats against environmental rights defender Camila Bustamante Álvarez

On 18 March 2020, **Camila Bustamante Álvarez** was targeted with a series of online threats and misogynistic attacks coordinated by a group of unidentified men, in reprisal for her advocacy for the right to water.

[Camila Bustamante Álvarez](#) is a woman human rights defender who works on the promotion and protection of environmental rights. She is a member of the **Secretaría de Ecología y Medio Ambiente de la Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Chile** (Secretariat for Ecology and Environment of the University of Chile Student Federation) and the *Movimiento por El Agua y los Territorios* (Movement for Water and Territories), where she organises social mobilisation activities to promote access to water by marginalised communities in Chile.

On 18 March 2020, Camila Bustamante Álvarez started receiving threatening pictures, including sexual images, sent by a group of men on a WhatsApp chat to which she was added by the perpetrators. Her contact details had been leaked by three WhatsApp users who were members of an open chat created to raise awareness on the activities of the Movement for Water and Territories planned to commemorate the World Water Day celebrated on 22 March. Camila Bustamante Álvarez was one of the main organisers of these activities.

In addition to sending threatening pictures of a misogynistic character, the perpetrators verbally abused Camila Bustamante Álvarez for supporting water de-privatisation. When she warned them that she would place a formal complaint for harassment, they made death threats against her, using pictures of guns with captions such as “I will kill you” or “walk carefully”. She tried leaving the WhatsApp chat but was re-added to it multiple times during the day, for a period of approximately 12 hours.

Around the world, including in Chile, human rights defenders, in particular those identifying as women, are targeted with attacks including sexual content, aimed at silencing their work. The threatening pictures sent to Camila Bustamante Álvarez had a strong misogynistic character, portraying male genitals and firearms.

The original group chat created to commemorate the World Water Day was hacked by the same three WhatsApp users who had leaked the contact information of Camila Bustamante Álvarez. They began posting offensive and pornographic comments and pictures, and changed the name and description of the group. They also took screenshots of the contact numbers of all group members, and threatened them with cyberbullying. One of the attackers mentioned that his group regularly targets people with online attacks in reprisal for their ideology.

Environmental rights defenders working on the right to water [are often targeted](#) in Chile, due to the pressure exerted by private companies who have been responsible for water distribution since its privatisation in 1981. Despite their regular failure to supply water to some Chilean communities, these companies are not held accountable.

The work of human rights defenders who promote access to water is of even greater importance at a time when concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic are growing rapidly. These defenders are now working tirelessly alongside communities, [promoting strategies](#) to combat the spread of the virus,

denouncing water shortages during the pandemic and contributing to safeguarding people's health and lives in Chile. Front Line Defenders condemns the attack against Camila Bustamante Álvarez and expresses its concern over the hostile environment for environmental rights defenders in the country.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Chile to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the misogynistic attack and death threats against Camila Bustamante Álvarez, recognising the probable link between these acts and her human rights work, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures, including collective security measures, to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Camila Bustamante Álvarez and all members of the *Movimiento por El Agua y los Territorios*, in consultation with them;
3. Sign, ratify and implement the Escazú Agreement, with the objective of creating an enabling environment for the defence of environmental rights in the country;
4. Publicly acknowledge the important and legitimate role of human rights defenders in Chile, in particular those defending the right to water, and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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