

2 April 2020

## Costa Rica: Arson attack against indigenous rights defender Mainor Ortíz Delgado

On 30 March 2020, an individual set fire to the lands belonging to **Mainor Ortíz Delgado**, destroying part of his crops and areas of environmental conservation. It is believed that the attack was carried out by a land grabber who has made threats against Mainor Ortíz Delgado on multiple occasions in the past. This is not the first time the defender has been attacked for his human rights work.

[Mainor Ortíz Delgado](#) is a Bribri indigenous human rights defender and member of the Rio Azul community living on the Salitre Bribri territory in southeastern Costa Rica. He is an active member of the Ditsö Iriria Ajkonúk wákpá traditional council of the Bribri, whose mission is the protection of indigenous rights. He also represents his people in the Commission for Land Recuperation (Comisión de Saneamiento) established together with State authorities in order to address the illegal occupation of indigenous territories in Salitre by non-indigenous trespassers.

On 30 March 2020, an individual set fire to the lands recovered by Mainor Ortíz Delgado and his wife, destroying part of their crops and areas of environmental conservation. The perpetrator is believed to be the same non-indigenous land grabber who [shot](#) the indigenous rights defender in the leg on 9 February 2020. After the February attack, the perpetrator was held in police custody for a day, after which he was released under precautionary measures.

The most recent attack took place eight days after the latest threats made against the defender by the same land grabber. On 22 March 2020, he told Mainor Ortíz Delgado that since his leg had not been broken by the gun shot, he would kill him. Mainor Ortíz Delgado formally denounced the threat to the indigenous affairs unit at the Public Prosecutor's office in Buenos Aires. To date, he has not received a response.

On 14 March 2020, the mother of the defender was threatened by the same individual that she would be killed along with her son in order to allow the perpetrator to take over their lands. Local human rights defenders report that the family of the perpetrator have illegally occupied the indigenous land, using documents falsely asserting their indigenous identity. By law, lands recognised as indigenous territory can only be used by indigenous peoples. The area in question forms part of the ancestral lands titled to the Bribri people, half of which has been illegally occupied by non-indigenous trespassers. The issue has been recognised by the Government of Costa Rica.

In 2015, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted precautionary measures to the Bribri and Brörán indigenous peoples in Salitre and Térraba. The Commission ordered the government of Costa Rica to take measures to protect the lives and physical integrity of the Bribri and Brörán. However, these measures have not been implemented by the authorities despite the continued targeting of indigenous rights defenders, and their attackers continue to occupy these lands illegally.

This is not the first time that arson attacks have been used to threaten the indigenous communities in the region. On 3 March 2020, unidentified individuals [set fire](#) to Pablo Sibar's land plot in the Brörán indigenous territory in Térraba. On the following day, there were arson attacks in two other locations on the farm. In November 2019, Mainor Ortíz Delgado and other Bribri indigenous people were targeted with similar arson attacks, resulting in food shortages affecting the whole community.

Over the last forty years, indigenous rights defenders in Costa Rica have denounced the human rights violations perpetrated against their peoples, which has often cost them their lives, such as in the cases of [Jerhy Rivera](#) and [Sergio Rojas](#), whose killings remain unpunished.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the arson attacks and ongoing threats, including death threats, against Mainor Ortíz Delgado and his family, as well as the lack of effective action by the Costa Rican authorities to ensure his protection. It believes that the human rights defender has been targeted solely as a result of his peaceful activities defending indigenous land rights. Front Line Defenders is also concerned about the continued impunity over crimes against indigenous rights defenders in Salitre and Térraba, which reinforces the pattern of violence against them.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Costa Rica to:**

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death threats and arson attacks against Mainor Ortíz Delgado and his family, recognising the probable link between these crimes and his 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 Mainor Ortíz Delgado and of all indigenous rights defenders in the Salitre and Térraba territories, in consultation with them;
3. End the impunity for perpetrators of violence against indigenous peoples by impartially investigating reports of threats and violence against indigenous rights defenders in Salitre and Térraba, and adopting immediate effective measures to ensure their protection, including the immediate removal of illegal occupants;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Costa Rica, in particular those defending indigenous rights, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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