

18 March 2021

Costa Rica: Death threats against Pablo Sibas Sibas and other Brörán indigenous peoples' rights defenders

On 13 and 14 March 2021, human rights defender **Pablo Sibas Sibas** and other Brörán indigenous peoples' rights defenders received online death threats from individuals the local community believe are associated with non-indigenous land occupiers in the Terraba territory. The threats, which contained racist language, were posted online in response to two alert statements posted by Brörán indigenous peoples' rights defenders about a recent attempt by two non-indigenous people, referred to as "occupiers", to forcibly remove indigenous communities from the ancestral land officially returned to them.

[Pablo Sibas Sibas](#) is a Brörán indigenous peoples' rights defender and is the current coordinator of the National Front of Indigenous Peoples (FRENAPI), focusing on the rights to freedom, autonomy and land for indigenous peoples. For over 40 years, he has promoted peaceful resistance initiatives for the restitution of indigenous peoples' lands that were usurped by non-indigenous occupiers.

On 15 March 2021, Pablo Sibas Sibas filed a complaint with the Prosecutor's Office of the Buenos Aires Canton in Terraba, Puntarenas province, in response to at least three public death threats issued against him and other Brörán indigenous peoples' rights defenders online. The threats, which were posted on 13 and 14 March, and named Pablo Sibas Sibas specifically, were racist in their tone and language. According to local human rights defenders, one of the accounts from which the threats were issued belongs to a worker of one of the non-indigenous land occupiers in the Terraba territory. On 16 March, Pablo Sibas Sibas discovered that the water hose that provides drinking water for his home had been cut in multiple places.

These events are particularly worrying, given that Pablo Sibas Sibas was the victim of an assassination attempt in July 2020 by a worker for one of the non-indigenous occupiers in the Terraba territory, who attempted to run him over. The recent threats against the indigenous peoples' rights defender are not an isolated case, but form part of a broader pattern of structural violence and discrimination against indigenous peoples in Costa Rica who claim and defend their rights. The threats are further concerning, given the assassination of two indigenous peoples' rights defenders, [Sergio Rojas Ortiz](#) and [Jhery Rivera Rivera](#) on 18 March 2019 and 24 February 2020 respectively, in connection with their legitimate human rights work.

Following the most recent threats, the affected indigenous peoples' rights defenders have reiterated that the government is yet to implement effective protection measures for them and their communities, an issue that has contributed to the worsening of social conflicts and a new escalation of violence against indigenous communities and defenders in Terraba indigenous territory. Of particular concern is the unilateral removal of the protection measures that Pablo Sibas Sibas had been granted until September 2020.

Front Line Defenders reiterates its deep concern regarding the violent and discriminatory threats against the indigenous peoples' rights defender Pablo Sibas Sibas and the indigenous Brörán people, which appear to be in response to their legitimate human rights work, defending the rights of indigenous peoples. Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the apparent lack of

political will of the authorities in Costa Rica to implement the protection measures granted by the Inter American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) in a satisfactory and effective manner.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Costa Rica to:

1. Carry out an immediate, exhaustive and impartial investigation into the death threats against indigenous peoples' rights defender Pablo Sibas Sibas and other defenders of the rights of the Brörán people, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures, including the resumption of security and protection measures both for Pablo Sibas Sibas and other indigenous peoples' rights defenders in the Terraba territory, in order to guarantee their physical and psychological integrity in consultation with them, as well as refraining from taking further unilateral measures regarding their security schemes;
3. Ensure in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Costa Rica, particularly those who defend the rights of indigenous people, can carry out their legitimate activities in the area of human rights without fear of reprisals and without any restriction.