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Environmental rights defenders under surveillance by order of electric energy company AES Corporation.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned to hear reports that human rights defenders who are protesting the Alto Maipo hydroelectric project in Chile, which has the financial backing of several multilateral development banks, have been branded 'eco-terrorists' and are subject to significant surveillance for opposing the project.

An [investigation](#) carried out by the media outlet Interferencia revealed that electricity company AES Andes S.A. hired a consultancy firm to surveille and to infiltrate private WhatsApp and Facebook chats of environmental groups who are critical of the Alto Maipo hydroelectric project. Interferencia had access to intelligence reports produced by a consultant between February and June 2020, which contained information on organisations and social movements opposing the project including the **Coordinadora No Alto Maipo** and the **Red Metropolitana No Alto Maipo**. It also had information on other environmental movements working for the right to water in the country, such as the **Movimiento por el Agua y los Territorios (MAT)**.

The intelligence report contains personal data of environmental defenders, such as telephone numbers, personal identification numbers and addresses, as well as information about their current and previous work relating to environmental rights. The intelligence report also includes the names of AES Andes S.A employees who were members of social media groups in opposition to the Alto Maipo project through social media. In addition to the mapping of environmental defenders, lawyers who work for the rights of communities affected by the project and "suspicious" company workers were also included. The intelligence report classifies the actions organised by these groups as "eco-terrorist acts" and labels several human rights defenders as "eco-terrorists".

The Alto Maipo hydroelectric project is run by the AES Andes S.A. company. AES Andes S.A. is a Chilean subsidiary of the North American company AES Corporation, which was founded in the U.S. state of Delaware, and which has multiple subsidiaries in Latin America. Environmental rights organisations mentioned in the intelligence report have been carrying out several advocacy initiatives since the project began in 2008 to raise concern about the project's negative impact on human rights and the environment. These organisations have also been outspoken about the labour rights violations and the Chilean government's apparent oversight and lack of inspection into the human and environmental rights violations committed by the company. Despite the fact that these environmental organisations and social movements have been demanding the right to information and participation within the implementation of the Alto Maipo project, AES Andes S.A. decided to obtain information about them through surveillance and infiltration instead of directly engaging with them in a transparent manner.

They have also submitted [complaints](#) to the International Finance Corporation and Inter-American Development Bank regarding their financial backing of the project. In March 2020, the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) [requested](#) the Chilean authorities to present the measures implemented to guarantee the right to water, food, housing, health and culture of communities affected by the project.

Front Line Defenders expresses great concern about the objectives of this intelligence report and the company's efforts to criminalise and delegitimise environmental defenders and social movements that have been struggling for years to guarantee the human rights of communities affected by extractive projects in Chile, and to denounce the irreversible social and environmental impacts that the Alto Maipo project has caused. It is also alarming that the methods used to prepare the report try to legitimize the practice of surveillance, monitoring and infiltration of social movements by private companies.

Front Line Defenders has been monitoring with great concern the [increase](#) of attacks against environmental rights defenders in Chile. In the first half of 2021, Front Line Defenders registered death threats, attacks and intimidation against those defending environmental and indigenous peoples' [rights](#) in the country. Studies and reports which frame environmental and indigenous defenders as potential terrorists contribute to the stigmatisation of human rights defenders and expose them to greater risk.

Front Line Defenders condemns the monitoring and surveillance of environmental rights defenders and the attempt to criminalise and stigmatise their struggles and forms of organisation. Front Line Defenders calls on the Chilean authorities to clarify the objective of this report and to review the license for the implementation of the Alto Maipo hydroelectric in the light of this event. Front Line Defenders calls on the international financiers of this project to [review](#) this report and to [implement](#) their commitments against reprisals. Finally, Front Line Defenders calls for international support for the protection of environmental rights defenders in Chile.