

17 February 2020

## Costa Rica: Indigenous rights defender Mainor Ortíz Delgado shot

On 9 February 2020, indigenous rights defender **Mainor Ortíz Delgado** was shot in the leg while working his land on the Salitre indigenous Bribri territory in southeastern Costa Rica. This is not the first time he has been attacked in retaliation for his activities defending indigenous land rights.

[Mainor Ortíz Delgado](#) is a Bribri indigenous human rights defender and member of the Rio Azul community living on the Salitre indigenous territory in southeastern Costa Rica. He is an active member of the 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 9 February 2020, at approximately 2pm, Mainor Ortíz Delgado was shot in the leg by an individual on a motorcycle. At the time of the incident, the indigenous rights defender was working his ancestral land along with his brother, wife and three young children. He was transferred to a hospital and is currently recovering at home.

The perpetrator of the attack was detained by the police and released the next day under precautionary measures. For the next three months, he is prohibited from coming near the house of Mainor Ortíz Delgado. The Public Prosecutor has appealed the decision to release the author of the attack. Local defenders report that the family of the perpetrator have illegally occupied the indigenous land. Using documents falsely asserting their indigenous identity, they have been trying to acquire the land where the family of Mainor Ortíz Delgado lives. Mainor Ortíz Delgado holds a certificate of possession issued by a local indigenous authority recognised by the State. The area 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.

This is not the first time Mainor Ortíz Delgado has been attacked in retaliation for his activities defending indigenous land rights. In 2013, ten individuals violently attacked him with a machete and a cattle branding iron. During the attack, he was also shot in the leg. The perpetrators, including a non-indigenous person who still illegally occupies the Bribri indigenous lands, were identified by Mainor Ortíz Delgado and his family, and the human rights defender filed a complaint with the police. However, the case was dismissed by the police. In 2016, a group of unknown persons destroyed a structure located on the ranch of the defender, and damaged valuable property kept inside. It is suspected that these persons belonged to, or were helping, the family of the perpetrator of the latest attack. The complaint concerning this incident was also dismissed by the authorities. In 2017, a day before testifying in a case against a non-indigenous trespasser, Mainor Ortíz Delgado received a call from an unknown individual who told him that he would be shot dead. In December 2018 and February 2019, Mainor Ortíz Delgado and his family members were shot at by presumably the father and brother of the perpetrator of the latest attack of 9 February. No one was injured as a result of these attacks. No action was taken by the authorities to hold the perpetrators accountable. They remain free and live just meters away from the human rights defender and his family.

The case of Mainor Ortíz Delgado is not isolated. The Bribri and Brörán indigenous peoples living in the area have faced violence and threats, and their land rights have been violated as a result of the illegal occupation of their territories by non-indigenous trespassers. In 2015, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted them precautionary measures. 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. On 18 March 2019, nationally renowned Bribri indigenous leader Sergio Rojas was shot dead at his house by unknown perpetrators. The crime remains unpunished.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned about the recent attack on indigenous rights defender Mainor Ortíz Delgado and the past attacks against him and his family, which appear to form part of a pattern of violence against indigenous peoples defending their ancestral lands in Salitre. It believes that the human rights defender had been targeted solely as a result of his peaceful activities defending indigenous land rights.

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

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack against Mainor Ortíz Delgado as well as the past security incidents against him, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Provide the necessary medical treatment for Mainor Ortíz Delgado and take all necessary measures to guarantee his physical and psychological integrity and security;
3. End the impunity of perpetrators of violence against indigenous peoples by impartially investigating reports of threats and violence against indigenous rights defenders in Salitre 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 are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.