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Guatemala: New acts of criminalisation against journalist Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub

On 25 March 2022, members of the media outlet **Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro 169** were notified that one of their journalists, Maya Q'eqchi' journalist **Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub**, is the subject of a new complaint filed by 13 members of the National Civil Police (PNC) and prosecutors from the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) of the municipality of Morales in the department of Izabal. The complaint against the journalist is based on the charge of "incitement to commit a crime", according to Article 394 of the Penal Code of Guatemala. The complaint is related to events that allegedly occurred on 22 and 23 October 2021 in El Estor, in the context of the wave of [violence and repression](#) by the state against human rights defenders and those who have demanded the right to consultation and held protests against the activities of the Russian-Swiss mining company, Solway Investment Group.

Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub is an indigenous Maya Q'eqchi community journalist who is part of the independent media outlet Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro 169, based in the municipality of El Estor, Izabal. His journalistic work and that of the media outlet has a wide reach within Guatemala. Since 2017, the journalist has faced digital attacks, judicial harassment, including criminalisation on charges fabricated by the company CGN-PRONICO, and threats that have materialised in attacks against him such as raids on his home. The journalist has relocated several times for his safety.

Thirteen members of the PNC and the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Public Ministry of Morales Izabal filed criminal charges against journalist Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub and 11 other authorities representing the four Maya Q'eqchi Ancestral Councils that lead the peaceful resistance against the mining company. The 12 individuals are facing the charge of "incitement to commit a crime", after elements of the Guatemalan police were allegedly beaten and suffered injuries and threats in El Estor on 22 and 23 October 2021. This occurred after a contingent of hundreds of Guatemalan police attempted to evict Maya Q'eqchi' people from a peaceful sit-in at the Solway processing plant. The communities had been maintaining the sit in since 4 October 2021 to protest against the activities of the Russian-Swiss mining company, Solway Investment Group, and a demand for the right to consultation.

On 6 March 2022, more than 20 media outlets around the world, including Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro 169, participated in the investigation [Mining Secrets](#), coordinated by Forbidden Stories, a French organization that publishes the stories of journalists facing threats or censorship. The investigation revealed that Solway Investment Group's Russian-Swiss mining company channels money to the PNC. In turn the PNC carry out evictions of Maya Q'eqchi' communities that the mining company has identified as opponents, employing strategies that include surveillance and bribes.

Front Line Defenders believes that the complaint filed by the 13 members of the PNC and prosecutors from the MP of the municipality of Morales in the department of Izabal is directly related to the journalistic work of Carlos Ernesto Choc Choc and Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro

169. Furthermore, Front Line Defenders believes that the complaint appears to be directly related to the recent publication of the investigation *Mining Secrets*.

This is the second time that journalist Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub faces [criminal charges](#) for reporting the facts surrounding the mining company in El Estor. Front Line Defenders believes the Guatemalan State is targetting the human rights defender, attempting to link his journalistic work to the anti-mining resistance in order to discredit and undermine his status as a community journalist. Both the practice of journalism and the defence of land and territory are legitimate activities and should not be persecuted by law or by the authorities.

Front Line Defenders condemns the attempts to criminalise the journalistic work of Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub and the work of Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro 169. Additionally, it expresses its deep concern for the journalist's physical and emotional well-being. The events appear to be directly related to his work, in particular his reporting on the violence committed by authorities in October 2021 in El Estor and Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro 169's participation in the *Mining Secrets* investigation.

Front Line Defenders reiterates its deep concern regarding the attacks, judicial harassment and criminalisation of human rights defenders and journalists in Guatemala.

Front Line Defenders urges the Guatemalan authorities to:

1. Immediately drop the charges against journalist Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub as they are based on his legitimate and peaceful work;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of journalist Carlos Ernesto Choc Chub and all members of the media outlet Prensa Comunitaria Kilómetro 169 in consultation with them;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders and journalists in Guatemala are able to carry out their legitimate journalistic activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions, including judicial harassment.