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Bolivia: Ongoing death threats against and potential surveillance of Waldo Albarracín

Human rights defender **Waldo Albarracín** continues to be the subject of death threats and may be the target of surveillance, as a result of his work in Bolivia. Since October 2019, the defender has been targeted on a regular basis with threatening messages via his Facebook account by known and unknown individuals. The messages include threats to incriminate him and to set his house on fire.

Waldo Albarracín is a well established and widely recognised human rights defender in Bolivia. He was the President of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights of Bolivia (APDHB) from 1992 to 2003 and the Bolivian Ombudsman from 2004 to 2010. Until the beginning of 2020 he was the Rector of Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in La Paz and is currently the President of the National Committee for the Defence of Democracy (CONADE), a civil platform defending political rights.

In May 2020, Waldo Albarracín was mentioned as a target in a threatening video posted and circulated on social media by an unknown illegal armed group. At 1:10 in the video, one man of a group of six men, hooded and armed, stated: “we will fight on behalf of Bolivia against Waldo Albarracín and Bolivian political leaders.”

In June 2020, the Fake Antenna Detection Project, an initiative established by the South Lighthouse organisation, released its findings that Waldo Albarracín, along with a number of human rights organizations and academic entities, may have had their mobile phones intercepted. The study identified 24 suspicious antennas, capable of interfering with mobile phones, some of which were located by the Office of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights in Bolivia and also by the University Mayor de San Andres, where he worked until the beginning of 2020. It has been suggested by local media that the interceptions were orchestrated by the military and government authorities, however the authorities are yet to comment publicly on the existence of the antennas and how permanent they are. South Lighthouse researches and monitors surveillance activities and abusive technological practices threatening human rights, security, and privacy in Latin America and other parts of the world.

Front Line Defenders has previously expressed concern regarding the risks faced by Waldo Albarracín. Although the human rights defender has faced risks since 2004 as a result of his human rights work, there has been a worrying escalation since the protests in 2019 regarding the results of the presidential election. On 10 November 2019, the defender’s house was set on fire by a crowd of around 500 people, whilst his family were still inside.

Front Line Defenders condemns the continuous death threats against and the potential surveillance of human rights defender Waldo Albarracín. It is further concerned that this pattern of attacks and threats against the defender may continue and increase in the context of the upcoming Presidential elections in September. Front Line Defenders believes he is being targeted solely as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Bolivia to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against and possible surveillance of Waldo Albarracín, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all the necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Waldo Albarracín, in coordination with the defender;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bolivia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.