

UA 135/17

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## **GUATEMALA**

### **INDIGENOUS DEFENDERS ATTACKED AND AT RISK**

**Aura Lolita Chávez, a renowned Guatemalan human rights defender and Indigenous leader, and members of her organization the K'iche People's Council (CPK) were threatened and attacked by unidentified armed men. The defenders are currently in hiding and fear for their lives. Guatemalan authorities must take action to protect them.**

On the afternoon of 7 June, the K'iche People's Council (Consejo de Pueblos K'iche, CPK) and its leader and ancestral authority Aura Lolita Chávez, stopped a truck loaded with wood between Chichicastenango and Los Encantos in the K'iche department, northern Guatemala, in order to verify the origin and legality of the wood. The CPK asserts the right to carry out these verifications as part of their right to ownership and control of natural resources on their ancestral lands (a right which is protected by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). According to the CPK, the truck had no logging permits. The CPK therefore escorted the truck to Santa Cruz del Quiché (the capital of the department) in order to hand it over to the government authorities. The Ombudsperson's office attended with some officials of the National Police but then left. The CPK told Amnesty International that as soon as this happened, at least 10 unidentified armed men arrived in a pick-up truck with long guns. They threatened Aura Lolita Chávez and a few women human rights defenders of the CPK and told them they were going to sexually assault them. The women ran away but the armed men chased them while firing gunshots into the air. They eventually managed to escape.

Since the incident, rumours have circulated in Santa Cruz indicating that the group of armed men are looking for Aura Lolita Chávez. Aura Lolita Chávez is currently in hiding as she fears for her safety. She is the beneficiary of precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2005, and is permanently accompanied by one police officer. The NGO Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEQUA) alerted the authorities of these attacks on the night of 7 June, but the authorities have yet to implement any further protection measures to guarantee the integrity of Aura Lolita Chávez and the other members of the CPK.

**Please send a letter, email, tweet or fax without delay.** (Postage: \$2.50)

\* Calling on the Attorney General's Office to promptly investigate the 7 June incidents reported by Aura Lolita Chávez and the CPK as well as their allegations of unidentified armed men in the K'iche people's territory;

\* Calling on the Ministry of the Interior to promptly implement protection measures to guarantee the integrity of Aura Lolita Chávez and others CPK members in consultation and agreement with them.

**Here is the contact information you will require:**

Minister of Interior

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Salutation: Dear Minister/ Sr. Ministro

Attorney General's Office

Sra. Thelma Aldana Hernández  
Fiscal General de la República  
15 Av. 15-16 Zona 1, Edificio Gerona,  
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Salutation: Dear General Attorney/  
Sra. Fiscal General

Presidencial Commission on Human Rights in Guatemala (COPREDEH)

Sr. Victor Hugo Godoy  
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C.P. 01009 Guatemala,  
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Email: [vhgodoy@copredeh.gob.gt](mailto:vhgodoy@copredeh.gob.gt)  
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Salutation: Dear President/ Sr. Presidente

**Please send a copy to:**

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Aura Lolita Chávez is the representative of the K'iche Peoples Council (Consejo de Pueblos K'iche, CPK). She is also an ancestral authority of the K'iche Mayan people. The CPK was founded in 2008 to defend the land, territory and common goods of the K'iche Indigenous peoples in northern Guatemala. They defend and promote the rights of over 87 communities of the K'iche department. The organization has conducted popular and good faith consultation processes in the region in order for the communities to express their views over the implementation of economic projects such as hydroelectric, mining, logging and agribusiness projects. The CPK members and especially Aura Lolita Chávez have faced several death threats and security incidents over the past years.

According to the civil society organization UDEFEGUA, environmental and land human rights defenders are the main group of activists attacked in Guatemala. According to Amnesty International research, they have been constantly subjected to smear campaigns aimed at stigmatizing and discrediting them in order to force them to stop their legitimate work. This includes being falsely accused and prosecuted as a way of keeping them silent. Although the State of Guatemala has developed guidelines and protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, these have proven to be ineffective.

**For more information, see the Amnesty International report “*We are defending the land with our blood*”:** Defenders of the land, territory and environment in Honduras and Guatemala (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/4562/2016/en/>) and Americas: State Protection Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/6211/2017/en/>).