

VENEZUELA

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ATTACKED AND AT RISK

The Pemón Indigenous communities in the Canaima National Park (western Venezuela) were the target of a violent attack during a two-day military operation. The operation lacked justification. The communities fear for their safety in the context of these operations and the militarization of their ancestral territory ordered by the national government.

On 8 and 9 December, officials of the Venezuelan General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar, DGCIM) carried out a military operation in the ancestral territory of the Pemón Indigenous communities in the Canaima National Park (western Venezuela). The operation took place in the context of the Orinoco Arco Mining megaproject – under which the area was declared a "National Strategic Development Zone" to promote the exploitation of mineral resources by companies – and the Tepuy Protection Plan (Plan Tepuy Protector) to stop illegal mining. During the operation on 8 December, young Indigenous member Charly Peñaloza was killed and three other members of the Pemón Indigenous people were injured. According to survivors and the statements of the Council of Chiefs of the Pemón People, none of them was armed.

On 9 December, members of the armed forces and of the DGCIM, blocked all access to the Canaima National Park, preventing the free movement of Indigenous people in their traditional territory. They then started to harass and violently attack the Canaima community using tear gas, bursts of high-calibre machine-gun fire and helicopters.

The abuses and violence endangered the life and physical integrity of those living in the community of Canaima, most of whom are Indigenous. There was no effective judicial control and no deployment of security forces to protect the community. Venezuela must guarantee the protection of the human rights of the Indigenous people living in the Canaima National Park and areas of the Arco Mining project.

Please send a fax, tweet or email without delay. (The postal system in Venezuela is not functioning efficiently.)

- * Call for a thorough, immediate and impartial investigation into the circumstances in which Charly Peñaloza was killed and other members of the Pemón Indigenous communities were injured, for the findings to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice.
- * Urge the authorities to take the necessary measures to guarantee the physical integrity of the Pemón Indigenous communities of the Canaima National Park and other areas where the Tepuy Protection Plan is being implemented, with the full participation of the Indigenous people of the area, respecting their traditional authorities and special jurisdiction, as established in national and international law.

Please fax, tweet or email your messages to

Ministry of Popular Power for Internal Affairs and Justice

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Salutation: Dear Minister

Ministry of Popular Power for Indigenous Peoples

Aloha Nuñez

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Salutation: Dear Minister

Please send a copy to

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Additional information

The traditional territory of the Pemón People is located in the Venezuelan Amazon on the borders of Guyana and Brazil. The military presence in the area is linked to the Orinoco Arco Mining project (Arco Minero del Orinoco, AMO), an extractive project that covers 12% of the national territory and the Guiana Shield, one of the oldest geological formations on the planet. The AMO was declared a "National Strategic Development Zone" in February 2016 in order to promote the exploitation of the large mineral deposits in the area.

The Tepuy Protection Plan was developed by the Ministry of Defence and the Strategic Operational Command of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (Ceofanb) to prevent illegal mining in the state of Bolívar. In a press conference on 11 December, Minister of Defence Vladimir Padrino said that the operation that took place on 8 and 9 December was coordinated with the Pemón communities. However, in a statement published on 13 December, the traditional authorities of the Indigenous community denied this was the case.

The Venezuelan Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) is part of the Ministry of Defence.