
[The criminalization of social protest against mining](#)

Photo: <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/>

The criminalization of social protest upheld by local communities is a worldwide phenomenon. In Latin America, the Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL), a network comprising social organizations, has issued the following declaration denouncing the violent repression of opposition against the mining companies in the region:

“The Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL), gathered for its Fifth Meeting in Lima, Peru, expresses its utter condemnation of the series of murders that have taken place in recent weeks in Our America, and which claimed yet another victim in our sister nation of Ecuador yesterday. Comrade Fredi Ramiro Taish Tiwiram of the Shuar indigenous community was killed during a muddled Ecuadorian army operation against so-called illegal mining. It should be stressed that the Shuar people are currently facing a double threat, posed by both the arrival of transnational mining companies and the ongoing small-scale mining in the region. This new crime comes on the heels of another recent murder in Colombia, that of César García, a member of the Environmental and Peasant Committee of Cajamarca and well-known leader of opposition to the Colosa mining project, spearheaded by the mining transnational AngloGold Ashanti. These killings remind us of the death of José Mamani and the gunshot wounds suffered by eight others during protests against the Malku Khota mining project in Bolivia last year; and the repression, legal prosecution and deaths in Peru resulting from opposition to Yanacocha’s Conga mining project and the GlencoreXstrata mining project in the province of Espinar, among many other cases.

OCMAL believes that these killings cannot be viewed in isolation from the imposition of the extractive mining model in the region. On the contrary, they form part of a larger panorama of conflicts generated by the corporate invasion of territories currently disputed by companies deploying strategies of community plunder. If these external actors had not arrived in these territories with their projects, there is no doubt that the wives, families and communities of our fallen comrades could continue to live in their company, enjoy their teachings and their smiles.

We express our deep concern and indignation over the growing criminalization of defenders of nature in the region, a strategy that is being used by corporations and Latin American governments, even some of those who label themselves as progressive or alternative. We interpret strategies of criminalization in a broad sense, including stigmatization, invisibilization, individual and collective threats, legal prosecution, repression and the militarization of territories, which have even resulted in death, as demonstrated by the recent killings mentioned above, and which have historically occurred in our countries. Ultimately, criminalization in our region today is aimed at eradicating the possibility to be different, to freely exercise opposition and denounce destruction, and to be able to maintain harmonious relations with nature.

We invite our sister peoples and their national and international organizations to offer their characteristic solidarity to the families and communities that are now in mourning as a result of the physical loss of our comrades. The solidarity that reflects the loving affection of our peoples will forever remind us that the death offered by the extractive model will neither silence our struggle nor dampen the joy of men and women who live in freedom, dignity and solidarity.

We demand that the competent institutions in the countries where these crimes have been committed take speedy action to uncover the motives and identify and arrest the masterminds and perpetrators of the attacks. We also demand respect for constitutional regimes and international agreements for the guarantee of the right to a healthy environment as a necessary condition for the protection of the right to life. We further demand a review of the regulatory and legal frameworks that contribute to the impunity of the economic and ecological crimes of companies and corporations, as reflected in, among others, the new mining law being developed in Bolivia and the law to safeguard public order in Chile, which are not only abominations but also exacerbate social repression.

We respectfully call on international human rights organizations to provide preventive monitoring for communities facing serious risks due to the social and environmental conflicts that the extractive model has generated and exacerbated.

We also request that they speak out and take action against the lack of guarantees in our countries for the exercise of the legitimate right to peaceful protest and freedom of organization to defend our territories.

Because we celebrate life, in Our America, mining shall not pass!"

Source: Declaration of the Fifth Meeting of the Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL), <http://www.conflictosmineros.net/noticias/comunicados-ocmal/15723-declaracion-v-encuentro-del-observatorio-de-conflictos-mineros-de-america-latina-ocmal>