



Interview with Miguel Guimaraes, President of FECONAU*

*Federation of the Indigenous Community of the Uyacali river and affluent

CA: Miguel, how are you?

Miguel: Fine, thank you for asking. We are just a little worried because three FECONAU representatives have been sick for over a week and are suffering from fever. Furthermore, support from the government is very limited. We are fully in the second wave of the pandemic and we can all only hope that the situation worldwide will improve soon!

CA: We are very sorry to hear that! We hope that our colleagues will recover quickly! Especially in the Amazon region, a lot of people were and are affected by Covid-19. According to the ombudsman's office, over 30,000 indigenous people were infected in Peru alone. Last year was very turbulent for you, not only because of the pandemic, but also because illegal logging threatened you and your territories more and more often. You were under a lot of fire and that's why we called on our members to **support** you in December.

Miguel: It has been a difficult year – for all of us! Not much has changed in our situation: deforestation is accelerating and the pandemic is causing supply shortages in the communities, among other things. Due to the food shortage, we are working on pilot projects on organic farming to secure our nutrition.

However, I continue to stay in the city. Returning to my community is too much of a security risk for my family and me. In mid-October I received a death threat: the text of the threat, which included a picture of a dismembered person, read: "Any more accusations from you and you'll be the next bastard".

CA: That is very frightening! Do you know what the accusations are?

Miguel: The threat followed my participation in the public hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in early December, which focused on the links between the murders of indigenous defenders and corruption. Various indigenous representatives from Peru, including FECONAU representatives, denounced the links between state corruption and the attacks and murders of Amazon defenders during the virtual public hearing. The four indigenous representatives, who took part at the hearing deplored the murder of 11 people killed for their efforts to protect their territories. In the days before and after the hearing at the IACHR, everyone who was invited as a witness received threats.

CA: What did you do about it?

Miguel: The death threat I received is only the latest in a series of threats and attacks against members of FECONAU and is unfortunately part of a constant and growing trend. We have made public and reported threats and attacks against our members before.

CA: What is this related to?

Miguel: The current threats are a reaction to our struggle against the expansion of agribusiness, linked to land grabbing, illegal logging and other illegal activities such as the cultivation of coca in different communities. In 2018, when I held the position of Secretary in the municipality of Flor de Ucayali, I was also the target of death threats, possibly linked to drug traffic in the region.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic reached the Peruvian Amazon, violence has claimed the lives of at least six people who were defending indigenous peoples' rights and land rights. Gonzalo Pío Flores, was tortured and murdered in May 2020, despite having previously reported death threats. Gonzalo's father, Mauro, was murdered with impunity in 2013.

Land grabbing, aggressive expansion of logging and illegal cultivation of coca have increased significantly since March last year.

CA: These are alarming developments. FECONAU is doing important work here.

Miguel: Yes, and it's been going on for 40 years! We are constantly monitoring our areas without sufficient support from the government. Despite the adoption of a protocol for the protection of human rights defenders in 2019, there is little support for indigenous peoples from the Peruvian state. This is another reason why international cooperation and the support of the Climate Alliance are particularly important for us.

CA: Thank you very much, Miguel!

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