

17 June 2016

Guatemala - Killing of human rights defender Daniel Choc Pop

On 8 June 2016, human rights defender **Daniel Choc Pop** was killed in the afternoon by unknown individuals who repeatedly shot him.

David Choc Pop is an indigenous and campesino human rights defender from the community of San Juan Tres Ríos in Cobán, which he represents at the General Assembly of the Highlands Campesino Committee (*Comité Campesino del Altiplano – CCDA*). The CCDA is a national organisation committed to defending local sources of water used by indigenous communities and supporting the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Law (*Ley de Desarrollo Rural Integral*). The CCDA Committee in San Juan Tres Ríos has petitioned the Land Fund (*Fondo de Tierras*) to grant them legal ownership of land disputed with the owner of the estate Rancho Alegre.

Previously, on 30 March 2016, a group of men armed with firearms and machetes went to San Juan Tres Ríos where they announced that the owner of Rancho Alegre, Mr Germán Sierra Sorio, had authorised them to forcefully displace the community from the disputed land. The armed men also said that they had been told to kidnap and kill the community leaders if necessary. The leaders of the community were threatened that they would be kidnapped and killed. Upon leaving the community, the armed men threatened to come back to kill all the residents. The following day, several residents of San Juan Tres Ríos filed a complaint with the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman in Alta Verapaz requesting an investigation into the threats.

On 16 March 2016, human rights defender Walter Méndez Barrios was shot and killed outside his home in Las Cruces, in the department of Petén. At least six human rights defenders working on indigenous peoples' rights, land and environment were killed in Guatemala last year.

Front Line Defenders condemns the murder of indigenous peoples' rights defender Daniel Choc Pop and expresses deep concern for the grave threats made to the rest of the community and the CCDA leadership in San Juan Tres Ríos.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Guatemala to:

1. Conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into the murder of Daniel Choc Pop and the threats issued against other community leaders, and bring to justice those responsible;
2. Make all necessary efforts to protect the family of Daniel Choc Pop as well as leaders and members of CCDA in San Juan Tres Ríos;
3. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Guatemala are able to conduct their peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of harassment, threats or retaliation.