

7 December 2016

Nicaragua: National Police seize Francisca Ramírez' property

On 1 December 2016, two trucks belonging to land and environmental rights defender Ms **Francisca Ramírez** were seized by the National Police. The vehicles were ostensibly seized in retaliation for her leadership of a major mobilisation of small farmers and indigenous peoples opposing the construction of an inter-oceanic canal. Francisca Ramírez is a farmer and the confiscation of her vehicles -which she uses to transport and sell her produce- endangers her means of subsistence and her ability to carry out her human rights work.

[Francisca Ramírez](#) is the Coordinator of the ***Consejo por la Defensa de la Tierra, Lago y Soberanía (Council for the Defence of the Land, the Lake and Sovereignty)***, a civil society movement that opposes the construction of an inter-oceanic canal financed by the Hong Kong based HKND Group. The mega-project would displace thousands of small farmers and indigenous peoples in places like Nueva Guinea and the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS), without respecting their right to free, prior and informed consent. The main goal of the Council is to repeal Law 840, which grants a 100 year concession to HKND Group for the land over which the route of the canal will be built. Francisca Ramírez, based in La Fonseca, Nueva Guinea, has been intimidated, arbitrarily detained and her family members have been violently attacked in retaliation to her activism.

On 1 December 2016, Francisca Ramírez was in Managua to denounce the [repression of peaceful protests](#) by the authorities, when she received a call that one of her trucks had been damaged, and seized along with another vehicle that belonged to her. Her trucks were parked in two different locations when they were seized, one in El Boninche and the other in La Lechera. Her vehicles were taken to the Nueva Guinea police station, where they have remained since. On 5 December Francisca Ramírez made an enquiry about her vehicles. Images and [videos](#) published by local media show [numerous police](#) officers guarding the two vehicles, which appear to have been [damaged](#), with one vehicle seemingly having had shots fired at its wind shield. Francisca Ramírez has not been presented with a seizure order to justify the confiscation of her property. As a farmer, she depends on her vehicles to transport her produce to the market and sell it. By seizing her vehicles, Nicaraguan authorities compromise her means of subsistence and ability to perform her human rights work.

Between 27 November and 1 December 2016, demonstrators from all over the country attempted to make their way to the capital to reject the construction of the inter-oceanic canal but also to denounce the lack of transparency in the general elections of 6 November 2016. Human rights defenders reported that truck drivers who transported demonstrators to the capital for the mobilisation were harassed as a result of their involvement. In addition, defenders and social leaders travelling through public transport were reportedly searched and harassed by authorities. Several protesters and

community leaders were [detained](#) but all have now been released. Human rights defenders in El Tule, Nueva Guinea and the RAAS, have reported the use of tear gas, rubber and lead bullets by police against protesters.

During the same time period, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Mr Luis Almagro, conducted a visit to Nicaragua where he met with the President, members of opposition parties, the private sector and civil society – including a meeting with Francisca Ramírez.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arbitrary seizure of Francisca Ramírez's property which appears to be in retaliation of her legitimate work in the defense of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Nicaragua to:

1. Immediately return Francisca Ramírez' property, as it appears to have been confiscated in retaliation for her legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Appropriately compensate Francisca Ramírez for any damage to her property whilst in police custody;
3. Immediately cease all further harassment of Francisca Ramírez;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Nicaragua are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all undue restrictions.