9 June 2021

## Chile: New death threat against woman human rights defender Verónica del Carmen Vilches Olivares

On 7 June 2021 graffiti containing a death threat against woman human rights defender **Verónica del Carmen Vilches Olivares** was found on a water treatment plant in Cabildo, province of Petorca, Valparaíso.

Verónica del Carmen Vilches Olivares is a  woman human rights defender from the Cabildo region of Valparaíso. She is the president of the Rural Drinking Water Committee (APR) of San José in Cabildo and leader of the Movement for the Defence of Water, Land and Environmental Protection (MODATIMA) which seeks to defend the rights of farmers, workers and locals to access water in the Chilean province of Petorca.

On 07 June 2021, threatening graffiti with the message "*muerte Veronica Vilches* (death to Veronica Vilches)" was found on a water plant in Cabildo, where the woman defender lives and carries out her human rights activities and leadership. Earlier this year, in February 2021, Veronica del Carmen Vilches Olivares received a similar death threat. On both occasions, unknown individuals covered part of a water treatment plant with graffiti, containing threats against the woman human rights defender.

Environmental rights defenders working on the right to water are often targeted in Chile, due to increasing concerns regarding access to water, as private companies have been responsible for water distribution since its privatization in 1981. According to Chilean human rights defenders, despite their regular failure to supply water to some Chilean communities, these companies are not held accountable. In addition, the threats and attacks against these environmental rights defenders lack proper investigation by the Chilean authorities.

It is not the first time Veronica del Carmen Vilches Olivares and MODATIMA members have been targeted. The woman human rights defender has been the target of consistent threats and verbal attacks delivered in various ways for defending access to water in her territory and drawing public attention to the negative impacts of the agricultural industry in the province. Rural communities in Petorca have been seriously impacted by water scarcity.

Front Line Defenders condemns the death threats against Verónica del Carmen Vilches Olivares and expresses further concern at the lack of proper investigation into these threats, leading to continuous threats being made against Verónica del Carmen Vilches Olivares and other members of MODATIMA.

### Front Line Defenders urges the Chilean authorities to:

1. Carry out an immediate and impartial investigation into the threats against Verónica del Carmen Vilches Olivares, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice, in accordance with the highest international standards;

2. Adopt all necessary measures, in consultation with the woman human rights defender, to guarantee her physical and psychological integrity and safety, as well as that of other members of MODATIMA;

3. Guarantee that all human rights defenders in Chile are able to continue their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of any restrictions.