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Colombia – Environmental human rights defender Nini Cárdenas Rueda receives death threat

On 1 December 2020, environmental human rights defender **Nini Cárdenas Rueda** received a death threat during a phone call with a man who identified himself as commander of the paramilitary group known as “Los Caparros” who operate in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia.

[Nini Cárdenas](#) is an environmental human rights defender, the president of the Communal Action Board of Carmen de Chucurí municipality, and a member of national environmental platforms such as [Alianza Colombia Libre de Fracking](#) and [Movimiento Nacional Ambiental](#). Nini Cárdenas has spent many years defending the land and rights of peasant communities in the Magdalena Medio region against extractive companies implementing illegal projects. Despite being subject to multiple threats and the target of surveillance and physical attacks, Nini Cárdenas has courageously continued her work as a human rights defender in the absence of state protection.

On 1 December 2020 at approximately 08.30 a.m. Nini Cárdenas received a phone call from an individual who identified himself as commander “Bajira” from the paramilitary group known as “Los Caparros”. The man threatened to kill the defender and her family as a result of her human rights work in the town of Carmen de Chucurí, in the Santander department in north-eastern Colombia. Later that day Nini Cárdenas received another phone call from an individual who identified himself as a sub commander of “Los Caparros”, who told the defender that a group of men were coming to pick her up and bring her to a meeting at La Salina del Carmen trail in Santander. At the end of the phone call the man ordered Nini Cárdenas to comply and collaborate with the paramilitary group Los Caparros, otherwise her fate would be similar to that of social leaders who were murdered in regions such as Corozal in Sucre. After the phone call, Nini Cárdenas went to a safe and secure place in order to protect herself from this threat.

The death threat received by Nini Cárdenas on 1 December is only the latest in a series of threats and attacks against her, and unfortunately forms part of an ongoing and intensifying trend. On 10 July 2017, an unknown man followed Nini Cárdenas in the central park of Carmen de Chucurí, while the defender was intending to attend a protest which was later postponed due to the Mayor’s orders. When Nini Cárdenas realised she was being followed, she walked towards the police situated within the park, which led the man to drive away on a motorbike, as he shouted out threats and profanities towards the defender. Moments later, the same unidentified resurfaced and attempted to follow the defender on her way home, however, Nini Cárdenas stayed at the park with a friend until the man left.

The death threats received by Nini Cárdenas are in response to her human rights work denouncing the illegal development of extractable resources on or under peasant communities’ land in Carmen de Chucurí, Santander. Extractive projects in Santander have hugely affected the fauna and flora, water sources, crops, as well as other collective assets and resources of peasant communities in the region.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the ongoing direct threats against Nini Cárdenas, which not only put her life and integrity at risk, but also that of her relatives. These incidents demonstrate the dangerous situation in which environmental defenders find themselves as they carry out their work in Colombia. Violence against community leaders opposing environmentally destructive mega-projects has spiralled since the 2016 peace accords, and [Colombia continues to be the most dangerous country in the world for environmental human rights defenders](#). Despite denunciations, requests for personal security guarantees and the Government declaring that the

protection of human rights defenders through the UNP was a *priority*, the Colombian Government has failed to provide effective protection for environmental human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Colombia to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Nini Cárdenas and her family, in constant consultation with her;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death threats against Nini Cárdenas, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Colombia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions;