

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office  
First Floor, Avoca Court  
Temple Road, Blackrock  
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org  
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750  
fax +353 1 233 8695

**BRUSSELS**

Front Line Defenders – EU Office  
Square Marie-Louise 72  
1000 Brussels  
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org  
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383  
fax +32 2 230 0028

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### **Ecuador: new threats against human rights and nature defender Néstor Caicedo**

On 15 January 2025, the human rights and environmental defender **Néstor Caicedo** received threatening messages to his phone by unidentified phone numbers. This is the second time he has received threats in the context of his work defending the collective territory of Afro-descendant communities of San Javier de Cachaví.

[Néstor Caicedo](#) is a human rights and environmental defender of the Afro-descendant population of northern Ecuador. He was previously the president of the Barranquilla commune and in 2023 became the representative of the Decentralised Autonomous Government of the Rural Parish of San Javier de Cachaví, which includes several communes, including Barranquilla de San Javier, where he lives with his family, in the province of Esmeraldas on the border with Colombia. Since 2005, through his various roles, Néstor Caicedo has been instrumental in the peaceful defence of his community's territorial and land rights against logging and attempts by palm oil companies to seize communal lands for tropical timber extraction and palm oil plantations.

On 15 January 2025, the human rights defender received threatening text and voice messages from two unidentified phone numbers identifying themselves as “the mafia.” They demanded \$1,000 (one thousand dollars) in exchange for protection and threatened retaliation if their demands were ignored. In recent years, Néstor Caicedo and other Barranquilla community leaders have faced threats and intimidation, prompting them to take self-protection measures to continue their work as human rights defenders and community representatives. Previous threats have been reported to the authorities in Esmeraldas, resulting in Néstor being temporarily accompanied by a police escort. However, despite reporting this latest threat, Néstor Caicedo does not currently have any institutional protective measures in place.

These threats come in a context of heightened vulnerability for human rights defenders and their communities due to increased violence involving criminal groups and growing conflicts with extractive companies, particularly palm oil producers. These companies have pressured communities and leaders for exposing socio-environmental violations. This latest threat against Néstor Caicedo comes just days before a hearing on 21 January 2025 hearing in the protection action brought by the Barranquilla Commune against the company Energy & Palma (Protection Action is a constitutional guarantee for the protection of the rights recognised in the Ecuadorian Constitution, by omissions of a non-judicial public authority). The case involves the illegal acquisition of communal lands and environmental damage. Recently it is also reported by community members the presence of armed individuals in the community, causing widespread fear among community members.

In addition to the ongoing case, Energy & Palma has filed complaints against Néstor Caicedo and community leaders Andrés Arce, Samir Mina, and Luis Quintero for alleged damages, which were a result of their legitimate right to resistance, peaceful defence, and protest against the company's activities on Afro-descendant collective lands. The defenders were [convicted](#) in September 2021, and the sentence was upheld on appeal in 2022. The Barranquilla Commune filed a verbal appeal immediately after the trial and is awaiting written notification to formally file its appeal. The criminalization of Barranquilla's leaders has hindered the collective defence of rights within the

community, and these new threats against human rights defender Néstor Caicedo exacerbate the situation.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern about the persecution and threats against human rights and environmental defender Néstor Caicedo, and the intimidation of the Barranquilla community through the presence of armed actors, particularly in the days leading up to a crucial hearing. The lack of protective measures in response to this new intimidation could severely limit Néstor Caicedo's ability to continue his human rights defence and representation of the community.

**Front Line Defenders urges the Ecuadorian authorities to:**

1. Conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation to identify and sanction the people responsible of the threats against human rights and environmental defender Néstor Caicedo;
2. Adopt immediate and effective protection measures for human rights and environmental defender Néstor Caicedo, to ensure his safe attendance and participation in the hearing on 21 January 2025;
3. Adopt protection measures to ensure safe participation of other human rights defenders and community leaders to the hearing, including on-site accompaniment of the Protection Action;
4. Ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their activities without fear of retaliation or restrictions, in line with Ecuador's commitments under the Escazú Agreement and through public policies to protect human rights and environmental defenders facing risks, harassment, and threats due to their work.