



global witness

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## **New report on murders of environmental defenders in Peru as nation prepares to host UN climate talks**

*Award ceremony in New York will honour indigenous leaders who died protecting forests*

A new report by Global Witness sheds light on what's driving the high number of killings of environmental defenders in Peru, less than a month before the country hosts the UN climate talks in Lima. *Peru's Deadly Environment* calls into question the commitments of Peru to protect its carbon-rich forests and the people who live in them, in light of unfettered illegal logging, disregard for indigenous land claims, and new laws that favour industrial exploitation over environmental protection.

The report comes on the heels of the killings of four indigenous leaders in Ucayali in September, including prominent anti-logging activist Edwin Chota and three of his fellow Ashéninka leaders from the Peruvian Amazon.

"The murders of Edwin Chota and his colleagues are tragic reminders of a paradox at work in the climate negotiations," said Patrick Alley, Co-Founder of Global Witness. "While Peru's government chairs negotiations on how to solve our climate crisis, it is failing to protect the people on the frontline of environmental protection. Environmental defenders embody the resolve we need to halt global warming. The message is clear, if you want to save the environment, then stop people killing environmental defenders."

Peru is the fourth most dangerous country to be an environmental defender, behind Brazil, Honduras and the Philippines. (1) At least 57 environmental and land defenders were killed in Peru between 2002 and the present day, more than 60% of them in the last four years, according to new Global Witness data. Most of these deaths involved disputes over land rights, mining and logging. 72% of Peru's indigenous communities still have no way of demonstrating their land tenure rights, (2) and over 20 million hectares of land claims have not yet been processed. (3)

*Peru's Deadly Environment* is being launched at an award ceremony in which the Alexander Soros Foundation will honour Chota and his colleagues with its annual Award for Environmental Activism. Diana Rios Rengifo, daughter of one of the murdered men, will accept the award on behalf of her father and their Ashéninka community, which has been fighting for more than a decade for the right to gain titles to its land. The report is also being presented today at [an event in Lima](#) that will serve as a venue for a film by [Handcrafted Films](#) about the Peruvian Ashéninkas and their plight.

"They may have killed my father and his friends, but I am still here," said Diana, daughter of Jorge Rios. "And I will continue to fight for the rights to our territories and for the rights of the other indigenous peoples of Peru."

Peru presides over an area of rainforest roughly the size of the US state of Texas, (4) and recently committed to reduce net deforestation to zero by 2021 as part of a \$300 million deal with Norway.(5) In 2012 deforestation rates in Peru doubled from the previous year and forest loss now accounts for nearly half the country's annual greenhouse gas emissions. (6)

Illegal logging is worth 1.5 times the value of legal timber exports in Peru, (7) and allegations contained in *Peru's Deadly Environment* hint at collusion between loggers and government officials. Edwin Chota had received numerous death threats for his resistance to the loggers who were gutting his community's forests, but his appeals to the authorities were ignored. (8) Before he

died, Chota sent local police photographs of the illegal loggers who are now charged with his murder, (9) and the locations of their logging sites. (10)

Across Latin America, strengthening indigenous rights to their land has proven links to healthier forests and lower carbon emissions (11) – evidence that will take centre stage at the upcoming Lima climate conference. Meanwhile hosts Peru invoked a new law in July 2014 that grants extended land use rights to investors for the expansion of large-scale agriculture, mining, logging and infrastructure projects. (12)

“Peru’s credibility as a forest protector hinges upon providing land and resource rights to the country’s indigenous and rural populations,” said David Salisbury, a University of Richmond professor who has spent time with Edwin Chota’s community of Saweto, and who will speak at the award ceremony in New York. “If you want to keep forests standing, you have to invest in people who live in them, as they have the most at stake in the sustainable development of those areas. Saweto is a perfect example. The government should recognize there are people in the forests, and give them rights to them. How can you maintain standing forest, and mitigate climate change, if the defenders of the forest are being assassinated?”

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Notes to editors:

(1) In April 2014 we reported 58 known killings of environmental and land defenders in Peru. The new figure of 57 includes killings up to this report’s publication date, and the change is due to the exclusion of certain cases that following further investigation did not meet our strict criteria. Due to low levels of reporting of killings, and a lack of official data collection, new historic cases frequently come to light, and existing figures are also subject to revision in light of emerging information. The historic trajectory of killings is clearly rising, but figures can vary in the short term subject to on-going scrutiny.

(2) Plataforma para la Gobernanza Responsable de la Tierra y el Colectivo Territorios Seguros para las Comunidades del Perú, [Advierten Que Paquete Reactivador Amenaza Derechos Sobre La Tierra](#).

(3) AIDSESP, *Indígenas reclamarán títulos de 20 millones de hectáreas en Amazonia peruana*, 23 October 2014.

(4) World Bank, Surface area is a country’s total area, including areas under inland bodies of water and some coastal waterways. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.SRF.TOTL.K2>

(5) Office of the Prime Minister, [Peru, Germany, Norway launch climate and forest partnership](#), September 2014.

(6) Peru’s Environment Ministry, *REDD y REDD+: Iniciativas para reducir las emisiones de carbono derivadas de la deforestación y degradación de los bosques*, *DIÁLOGOS AMBIENTALES Con la Prensa*, September 2012.

(7) OSINFOR press release, *Gobierno Regional de Loreto, Concesionarios y OSINFOR unidos para promover el desarrollo forestal sostenible con inclusion social*, October 2011. FAO, [The State of Forests in the Amazon Basin, Congo Basin and Southeast Asia](#), June 2011.

(8) Edwin Chota Valera, *Solicitud de Garantías Personales y/o Posesorias - Ministerio del Interior*, Alto Tamaya-Saweto Archives, 2005. See also Edwin Chota Valera. 2006. *Solicita Intervención de Madera Illegal Rolliza y Aserrada*. Alto Tamaya - Saweto Archives, 2006.

(9) El Comercio, [Pucallpa: Se entregó otro sospechoso del crimen de Edwin Chota](#), 2014.

(10) Comunidad Nativa Alto Tamaya Saweto, [Carta Multiple NS 001-2014-CC.NN Alto Tamaya-Saweto/ ECV](#), April 2014.

(11) World Resources Institute (WRI) and Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), *Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change: How Strengthening Community Forest Rights Mitigates Climate Change*, September 2014.

(12) Law 30230 available at:

<http://www.minem.gob.pe/minem/archivos/file/Mineria/LEGISLACION/2014/JULIO/LEY30230.pdf>