

URGENT ACTION

CHILD CLIMATE JUSTICE ACTIVIST INTIMIDATED IN HER HOME

14 year old climate activist Leonela Moncayo reported that on 26 February there was an explosion outside her home caused by an improvised explosive device. This happened five days after Leonela was stigmatized alongside other eight girls by the Minister of Energy and Mines in the National Assembly due to their activism against routine gas flaring. Leonela, her family and other eight child activists may be at risk. We demand Ecuadorian authorities to effectively investigate what happened, refrain from stigmatizing child activists, and protect them so that they can carry out their work in a safe environment.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Ms. General Attorney Diana Salazar,

I am writing to express grave concern about the situation suffered by the 14 year old climate activist, Leonela Moncayo, and her family outside their house. On 26 February Leonela and her mother heard a noise in the yard of their house. They thought it was an oil pipe that has burst. However, when they went out to verify what happened, they realized it was not an oil pipe and they observed abundant white smoke that smelled like pyrotechnics. After the smoke cleared, they saw an improvised explosive device made of quadua cane, paper and a tube made of carion. I'm concerned that this might be a threat and an act of intimidation against Leonela and her family's climate justice activism.

Leonela is one of nine brave child climate activists from the Provinces of Sucumbíos and Orellana that achieved a historical ruling that obliges the Ecuadorian state to eliminate all gas flares that significantly contribute to the climate crisis and harm the health of fence line communities. On 21 February, four of the nine plaintiff girls, including Leonela, went to a session in the Biodiversity Commission of the National Assembly of Ecuador to demand the compliance with the ruling by the relevant authorities, where they were stigmatized by the Minister of Energy and Mines, Andrea Arrobo, who insinuated the child "were manipulated" and said the "government has already complied the ruling" because it "has eliminated 2 gas flares". The girls refuted minister's claims and bravely defended their right as children to participate and the rights of their communities.

We urge you to investigate effectively, independently, and impartially the attack against Leonela Moncayo and her family. All people suspected of criminal liability, whether as material or intellectual authors, must be brought to justice in fair trials. Further, I urge Ecuadorian authorities to refrain from stigmatizing the nine plaintiff girls, guaranteeing their security so that they can carry out their work in defence of human rights and the climate in a safe environment. These girls are brave human rights defenders in the fight against climate change.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Leonela Moncayo is a climate activist from the Ecuadorian Amazon. She is the daughter of two recognized human rights defenders, Donald Moncayo and Silvia Zambrano from the strategic litigation organization "Unión de Afectados por Texaco" (UDAPT). Leonela is part of the group of Amazonian girls that, together with UDAPT, [achieved a historic ruling against the operation of routine gas flaring in the provinces of Sucumbíos and Orellana in Ecuador](#). Routine gas flaring is one of the processes of oil extraction that contributes the most to climate crisis due to the emission of methane, a greenhouse gas (GHG) more powerful than CO₂. Methane is thought to be [responsible for one-third of the net global warming since the industrial revolution](#). Routine gas flaring also has been linked with negative health impacts on [fenceline communities](#), since it emits a variety of harmful gases and components.

On 29 July 2021, the Provincial Court of Justice of Sucumbíos established that the Ecuadorian State ignored the right to a healthy environment, disregarded the right to health of the plaintiffs and failed to comply with its obligations to mitigate climate change. The Court established that the State must gradually eliminate the gas flares, especially those near populated areas, and provide reparations for the affected communities. Since the date of execution of the ruling, only the public apologies, the presentation of a "Substitute Regulation of the Environmental Regulation for Hydrocarbon Operations" and two technical reports on routine gas flaring prepared by the Ministry of Energy and Mines have been complied with. No environmental remediation actions have been initiated, nor have the right to health or any other rights been repaired.

On 21 February 2024, four of the nine plaintiff girls, including Leonela Moncayo, attended a [session in the Biodiversity Commission of the National Assembly](#) that had the aim of auditing the correspondent authorities the compliance of the ruling. In her intervention, the Minister of Energy and Mines, Andrea Arrobo, said that the government has "eliminated 2 flares" and thus "they have already complied with the ruling". She mentioned that "one thing is to insist on eliminating gas flaring and another one is to cause panic", underestimating the dimension of the problem. Also, the minister Andrea Arrobo insinuated the girls were "manipulated".

[The four plaintiff girls, including Leonela Moncayo, raised their voice to refute the minister's declarations](#). They took the microphone and refuted the declaration of the compliance of the ruling, mentioning that according to Ombudsman's Office, the gas flares have increased from 447 to 486. Also, one of the plaintiffs told the authorities "How are you going to say we are being manipulated, we are fighting for our rights?". Finally, Leonela, with tears in her eyes told the minister and parliamentarians that what girls and communities obtained from them in that session was "a pittance, a mockery". UDAPT, Leonela and her parents think the intimidation they suffered on 26 February was a retaliation against Leonela and the other plaintiff girl's protest in the National Assembly, and in general their activism to ensure authorities comply with the ruling.

The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, [mentions](#) in her last report about the situation of child and youth human rights defenders that child activists often face "demeaning and belittling remarks, questioning their experience, expertise and motivation", something worsened by "political narratives that use the age of child and youth human rights defenders to imply that they are being manipulated, recruited or brainwashed". These narratives of stigmatization, [according to the Interamerican Human Rights Commission](#), can exacerbate hostility and intolerance by different sectors of the population, which can put the lives and integrity of human rights defenders at risk. In 2023, [Amnesty International released an urgent action](#) to urge Ecuadorian state to refrain from using expressions that stigmatize, insult or discredit Pablo Fajardo, an Ecuadorian lawyer and activist who is part of UDAPT, after the last Minister of Energy and Mines accused him of being an "international criminal".

[Amnesty International documented throughout 2018](#) a series of attacks and threats perpetrated against women human rights defenders and leaders Patricia Gualinga, Nema Grefa, Salomé Aranda and Margoth Escobar, members of Mujeres Amazónicas (Amazonian Women) collective. In February 2023, Eduardo Mendúa, leader of the A'I Cofán indigenous people, [was shot and killed](#). Mendúa had been outspoken in his opposition to oil exploitation in the area. These examples and the unfortunate situation of Leonela and her family show how Ecuadorian authorities continue to fail to protect human rights defenders, especially land, territory, and environmental defenders, and guarantee them a safe and enabling environment to carry out their work.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: April 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Leonela Moncayo [she/her]

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a