

URGENT ACTION

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER ATTACKED BY FOUR GUNMEN

Rubén Irala, human rights defender and coordinator of the Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá, suffered an armed attack on 20 March at the December 23 Settlement, Caazapá Department. In view of previous threats, the aggression is highly likely linked to his work protecting the environment and communities affected by environmental degradation. Paraguayan authorities must effectively investigate the motive behind the attack and provide adequate protection measures for him and his family.

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

Dr. Emiliano Rolón Fernández

Calle Chile y Avda. Ygatimi

Asunción - Paraguay

Email: comunicaciones@ministeriopublico.gov.py

,Dear Dr. Rolón,

*I am writing to express grave concern about the recent attack suffered by the environmental human rights defender **Rubén Irala** (Ref.: File N° 355/2026). Rubén Irala is the coordinator of the Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá; an organization linked to the Catholic Church that takes an active role in tackling socioenvironmental conflicts in the territory.*

It is distressing to learn that Ruben was intercepted by an armed man on 20 March 2026, after a day working with his team on efforts to resolve a territorial conflict in the December 23 Settlement. On his way back to the Social Pastoral in Villarica, the armed man attempted to block his vehicle, ordered him to get out of the car, and fired shots into the air and at the tires. Attempting to flee, Ruben was intercepted again a few meters later by a group of three-armed men carrying long firearms and wearing face coverings. This group opened fire on his vehicle, striking the front and the side. Despite the attack, he managed to escape the area.

While I acknowledge that the authorities have managed to detain one suspect, I find it worrying that the attack is simply being treated as a case of “common robbery” without considering its possible link to Ruben’s human rights work. Ruben has received previous intimidation and threats because of his activism against mining pollution. Effectively investigating this potential motive is necessary to provide adequate protection to Ruben. In view of the threats that Ruben faced before the attack, the authorities should ensure that protection, including local police, is effective and sustained over time.

Paraguay has binding obligations under human rights law and standards, including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, to ensure a safe environment for human rights defenders. I urge you investigate effectively, independently, and impartially the attack against Ruben, including to consider Ruben’s work as an environmental human rights defender as a possible motive for the crime. Further, I urge Paraguayan authorities to protect Ruben Irala and his family effectively so that he can carry out his work without retaliations.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Guairá and Caazapá are departments in the central eastern region of Paraguay. Rubén Irala Galeano is an environmental engineer who serves as the Coordinator of the Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá and the Secretary of the Economic Council of the Diocese of Guairá of the Catholic Church. The Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá has an active role in tackling socioenvironmental conflicts in the territory, with a proven track of defense of the rights of affected communities.

Rubén's organization is currently working to solve a territorial conflict in a 1500 hectares property of the Church, which has been occupied by an indigenous community of the Mbya Guaraní people, peasant families and the agribusiness. The Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá, with the leadership of Rubén, is working to donate 80 hectares of land to the indigenous community, as well as 230 hectares to the peasant families, formalizing their title of their lands. However, there is not any agreement with the agribusiness sector. In the place operated by the agribusiness is where Rubén suffered the attack.

The Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá also has denounced the environmental and health consequences of illegal gold mining in the district of Paso Yobái, [the same district where the environmental defender Vidal Brítez was criminalized in 2025 because of his activism against the environmental pollution from mining activities](#). In April 2025, the Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá carried out research, led by Rubén, in partnership with the Catholic and National Universities of Asunción about the pollution by mercury and cyanuric. The mining company LAMPA S.A denounced immediately what it considered "a disinformation and smear campaign" and sent notarial intimidation to Rubén, as a precursor to criminal defamation charges.

On 24 April 2026, the Diocesan Social Pastoral Ministry of Guairá was supposed to launch the second part of the research, focused on the impacts of health of the pollution. Rubén reported to Amnesty International that in February 2026, he received a threat to not implement this second research, presumably by a person linked to the mining industry. After the attack against Rubén, this research has been suspended.

The Paraguayan authorities have detained one suspect in connection with the attack, who is currently being held in pretrial detention, and are searching for another suspect. However, Amnesty International expresses its concern about indications that the investigation may be reduced to a case of common robbery, without considering its possible link to Rubén's human rights defense activities or the prior threats he has faced. Although currently Rubén has protection from the local police, this protection can be lifted unilaterally at any moment, as Paraguay does not have a protection system for human rights defenders.

Paraguay must ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders, to prevent attacks against them, to protect them when they are at risk, and to ensure that any attacks are promptly, thoroughly, independently and impartially investigated, including by examining whether they are linked to their human rights work. Amnesty International has documented how human rights defenders working on issues related to access to land, and the rights to territory and the environment in Paraguay [continue to carry out their activities in hostile contexts and face a high level of risk due to their work](#).

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 October 2026

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Rubén Irala (he/him)