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Peru

" I promise to keep fighting until my last breath"

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First of all, I want to express my gratitude to all individuals and institutions that, once they heard about my arrest, demanded my liberty. Your support was very important. I want to specially thank our Canadian friends, whose support has made it possible for Lucha Indigena still to be published.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/gif/hugo_blanco_170x170.gif]

Hugo Blanco

A special thank also to Conacami, our friends in the indigenous and social struggle in Peru, and also to Wilbert Rozas, the mayor who set up the first local government governed by the indigenous communities, who travelled to Paruro as soon as he heard the news. Thanks to all this solidarity my liberation was quick...for now.

My relation to this case goes back to my childhood in Huanquite, Paruro, Cusco, when I got the news that the landowner Bartolomé Paz had let the buttocks of an indigenous farmer be branded with hot iron, with his initials: BP. Of course Mr. Paz was not arrested, that was not possible since he was a respected man. That act probably decided the purpose of my life.

Now his son, Rosendo Paz, heir of the hacienda, takes neighbouring land in Markhura, belonging to the indigenous community of Tantarcalla. He has even set up a paddock specifically for stolen cattle, something that was reported by the owner.

The community has documents proving their ownership. In 2006 the members of the community came to the Farmers' Federation of Cusco, of which they are members, bringing their deeds, to ask for the presence of a representative from the federation at the ceremony, where the land was to be distributed amongst the members in order to be used. I was assigned this task by the federation. I fulfilled the task, which I immediately informed the local police station about. They did not object in any way or form.

At a later date, Rosendo Paz ordered the police in Huanquite to go and take the members of the community away, an order that was immediately executed. Since the farmers had the audacity to resist the attack, they were beaten and taken to the village and then to the city of Cusco. This included women with crying children. I was not present when these acts took place, but I was called to give a statement. Obviously, those who were classified as criminals were not the aggressors, but the victims of the aggressions.

When I was arrested and was told that I was accused of "Violence and Resistance to Authority", I thought that it was in relation to this act, at which I was not present. I was wrong, the judge had the good will to tell me. The crime of "Violence and Resistance to Authority" was committed by assisting to the ceremony of the land distribution, during which there was no violence at all and no state representative was present.

I understand. We are in the country in which the Parliament, abdicating from their duty, authorised the cabinet to legislate in their place, against "Organised Crime". Alan García used this authorisation to legislate against claims by organised people, penalising protest.

The victims of this word manipulation are the hundreds of people all around Peru who have been arrested and sentenced for claiming their rights. These are comrades who have the misfortune not to be well known, for which nobody raises their voice to protest on their behalf. Fortunately I did get the support necessary to be released quickly. I call on all the voices of solidarity, which with their swift action brought me out of prison, to protect together all the victims of the penalisation of protest. It seems like Conacami have already started a campaign. Let us take part in

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that campaign. I will keep the addresses of all those who with their voices of solidarity set me free, in order to invite you to take part in the defence of other victims of repression.

As of my case, it is not finished. The system tends to leave the sword of Damocles just above the heads of those who protest, with the threat that if they do not change their attitude and close their mouths, the sword will fall.

The judge gave me an ambiguous document, in which I am called to attend on the 21 November. It is ambiguous because it is unclear whether I may be arrested again if I do not attend. In this way the interpretation is up to the repression and the political needs of the regime.

This is the kind of documents they tend to give out. They mean: "If you keep quiet nothing will happen, but if you keep on protesting you will be incarcerated".

How can they explain my arrest for an event that took place over two years ago, without asking me to give a statement in all that time, when I was called, attended and gave a statement for a later event?

The explanation is that my local activities were not bothering them much back then. Now on the other hand, when all the countryside is moving because of the fierce attacks on indigenous communities, organisations from around the country invite me to talk about the attack and to coordinate the defence, the prime minister calls me old-fashioned and my activities are bothering them.

I promise to keep fighting until my last breath against the oppression against our peoples, which began five centuries ago.