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Bolivia

The Bolivian Government Must Stop Persecuting Those Defending Nature and Rights and Address the Real Problems

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- News from around the world -

Description:

Pablo Solón, the Director of Fundación Solón, former Executive Director of Focus on the Global South, and former Bolivian Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), is being targeted by the Bolivian government for his vocal criticism of the government and the construction of two hydro-electric projects, El Bala and El Chapete in the Amazonian region. Based on the studies done by Geodata, an Italian company hired by the government to identify where the dams will be built, Solón says they will "inundate an area five times larger than the city of La Paz, displace more than five thousand indigenous peoples, deforest more than one hundred thousand hectares and will not be profitable for the country with the current prices of electricity in Brazil."

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Solón resigned as Bolivia's UN Ambassador in June 2011, and was succeeded by the Deputy Permanent Representative, Rafael Archondo. Archondo a very well known journalist, served as the interim representative for 14 months, until Sacha Llorenti, who was Minister of Government in September 2011 during the repression of the indigenous peoples' march in defense of the National Park and Indigenous Territory of TIPNIS, was appointed as the new UN Ambassador. The Vice Ministry of Transparency and Anti-Corruption has now decided to bring criminal charges with jail sentences of up to 4 years against Solón and Archondo, alleging that Solón "illegally appointed" Archondo and that Archondo committed the crime of "prolonging functions." Both the accused have publicly responded showing that Archondo was appointed by the President of Bolivia as Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN and that he did not prolong in his functions.

Why such charges are being brought against Solón and Archondo now, six years after their tenure in government, is clear. The Bolivian government aims to harass, intimidate and criminalize those who dare to challenge the government's policies and strategies. As Solón has stated: "The news [of the criminal charges] was not a surprise. Following our critical analysis of the mega hydroelectric plants at El Bala and Chepete, several friends had warned me that they would leave no stone unturned to accuse me of something, intimidate me, and silence me."

Despite the threat of imprisonment, Solón has re-affirmed his commitment to voice his opinions. He says, "we will not lose hope for a different Bolivia, where the Rights of Mother Earth and Vivir Bien are a tangible reality."

We strongly condemn the efforts of the Bolivian government to harass and intimidate Solón for standing up for the rights of indigenous peoples, nature and public interest. We urge the Bolivian government to withdraw the sham charges against both Solón and Archondo. We stand in solidarity with them as they challenge these trumped-up allegations, and continue to fight for justice and nature.

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