

ASSISTING Endangered Activists

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Following death threats, Benicia Chichay's husband was murdered in August 2010 in an ambush where she was also injured. The case remains unsolved. Chichay's two sons were arrested and charged in February 2011 for the murder of four miners and she herself accused of setting up a revenge killing of the man who allegedly murdered her husband.

Thousands of environmental defenders trying to protect natural resources and the livelihood of their communities, who denounce land grabbing or engage in action against the construction of dams or mining on their land, are often the victims of violence, repression, raids on property, and even killings. A Peruvian community leader, Chichay is one of these defenders advocating environmental rights. She has been subject to ongoing intimidation and harassment directly linked to her work as a human rights defender since 2005.

As spokesperson for her association of agricultural workers, Chichay fights to persuade the authorities to respect a unanimous vote by the community against all mining activity on their territory. After concessions were granted, she proposed that the authorities invest in agriculture and livestock, rather

than accept more mining deals. She has also denounced mercury contamination of the river and the appearance of skin lesions on children. However, the authorities have not responded to her demands and continue to ignore complaints of violations carried out by the mining companies.

Following a call for help from the Latin American Mining Monitoring Programme (LAMMP), a charity supporting Latin American women and their communities in their campaign for socially and environmentally responsible mining, the European Commission dipped into its emergency fund for human rights defenders at risk to help Chichay. Most of the small grants from this fund are confidential to protect the people involved. Small amounts can also have great effect.

Thanks to EIDHR support, Chichay was helped with legal expenses and the purchase of security equipment for her house. Her sons have since been released and the charges against them dropped. But the threats against her continue and for her own safety she is considering moving away from her community. She is likely, however, to find it difficult to sell her property due to the current campaign of intimidation against farmers who speak out.