

Open letter to the Global Salmon Initiative (GSI) and the Chilean Marketing Council from socio-environmental organizations and communities of native peoples of Chile

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To whom it may concern,

The director of Salmones Camanchaca, Mr. Tore Valderhaug, in his presentation about the salmon industry in Chile, held at Seminaret 2022 (Lofoten, Norway), identified the main threats that would affect the second largest producer of industrially farmed salmonids globally. According to the director of this company, a member of the Global Salmon Initiative and the Chilean Salmon Marketing Council, the increase in health and environmental regulations, as well as the actions of the regulatory bodies of the new Chilean government, which he described as uncertain, would be creating a “circle of menace”, where “the biggest threat is radical environmentalists” (1) .

This corporate criminalization of organizations that defend the environment, public health and human rights in Chile is an attempt to create the conditions that justify future actions of intimidation against citizen organizations, socio-environmental movements and communities of native peoples.

According to the organization Global Witness, violence against defenders of the environment and human rights is increasing in Latin America, being the most dangerous region in the world with 165 murders in 2020 (2). Chile is no stranger to intimidation against those who resist projects with a high health, social and environmental impact, as evidenced by the four activists murdered in the last four years (3).

It is noteworthy that the characterization of socio-environmental organizations as the main threat to the salmon producing and exporting industry in Chile takes place weeks after the new government adhered to the Escazú Treaty, a binding international instrument that guarantees access rights to information and citizen participation in environmental decision-making, and ensures access to justice and the protection of socio-environmental organizations and movements.

The entry into force of the Treaty of Escazú will ensure informed citizen participation in the processes of environmental impact assessment declarations of new industrial aquaculture expansion projects, without distinctions between mega projects with citizen participation and those that were exempted by the administrative route.

Due to the consequences on human rights that Salmenes Camanchaca's statement could have on defenders of the environment, public health and communities of native peoples in Chile, it is necessary to know if they correspond to the corporate governance standards of the Global Salmon Initiative (GSI) and the Chilean Marketing Council, and if they share the view that the regulatory actions of the new government are creating a "threat circle" where socio-environmental organizations and communities of indigenous peoples constitute their main threat.

During the recent meeting called “Aquaforum Patagonia” (June 23, 2022, Punta Arenas, Magallanes region), the salmon industry, using union leaders, took another step, accusing national and international socio-environmental organizations of “making orthodox calls ” (sic) to block the productive development of the country by manipulating Law 20,249 on Marine Coastal Spaces for Original Peoples (EMPOs), known as the Lafkenche Law (4),(5).

This situation occurred a week after the Mapuche Williche communities participating in the United Nations Ocean Conference on the defended the status of the Coastal Spaces of Native Peoples (ECMPOs) for shared governance of the marital and fulfillment of the challenges of SDG 14. At the same time, they expressed their rejection of the attempt to weaken the Lafkenche Law by criminalizing their struggle by qualifying them as “radicals” or “extreme environmentalists”.

From your responses or from the corporate silence, we will be able to assess whether these threats are signals that constitute an isolated event, or are part of an ongoing corporate agenda.

References:

1. <https://www.salmonexpert.cl/article/salmenes-camanchaca-la-mayor-amenaza-son-los-ambientalistas-radicales/>
2. <https://www.globalwitness.org/es/comunicados-de-prensa/global-witness-reports-227-land-and-environmental-activists-murdered-single-year-worst-figure-record-es/>
3. Macarena Valdés, Javiera Rojas, the leader of the Quintero fishermen's union Alejandro Castro and the indigenous leader of Chan-Chan, Marcelo Vega, whose deaths have not yet been resolved.
4. <https://www.elcalbucano.cl/2022/07/multisindical-de-trabajadores-del-salmon-expone-su-postura-y-reparos-a-ley-lafkenche/>
5. <https://www.salmonexpert.cl/article/es-responsabilidad-de-todos-resolver-incertidumbres-en-torno-a-la-salmonicultura/>

Signed by:

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