

Chilean Carabineros raid Mapuche homes and arrest six



Santiago de Chile, January 8 (RHC)-- Chile's Carabinero national police force, whose popularity has sharply declined since November after members shot and killed an unarmed Indigenous man in his town of Ercilla, went back to the southern Chilean town to raid and arrest Mapuche leaders in their homes.

Some 70 Carabineros and federal police investigators raided several homes in Ercilla located in Chile's southern region of Araucania early Monday morning arresting six unnamed residents.

Local media says mayor Jose Vilugron, a member of President Piñera's right-wing National Renovation party, gave the go-ahead for the arrests of the Mapuche community members, as well as permission to militarize the zone.

Indigenous Mapuche leaders have been blocking major highways in Araucania since late December demanding justice for the Carabinero murder of Indigenous 24-year-old Camilo Catrillanca on November 14. Demonstrators in the region are calling for Carabineros to leave the now militarized region, a promise that President Sebastian Piñera made in December but has yet to keep.

The Mapuche protesters, along with activists in Santiago, are also calling for the immediate resignation of Interior Minister Andres Chadwick who, they say, is ultimately responsible for Catrillanca's murder and the botched investigation of his assassination and later cover-ups by Carabinero authorities and lawyers.

Roadblocks have been placed on at least two Araucania highways since December 27th when Mapuche began their planned anti-Carabinero protests.

Mapuches in southern Chile have been demanding the return of their native lands, stolen by loggers and the government decades ago. The Piñera administration has increased Carabinero presence and repression against the Mapuche since taking office last March.

Chile's Minister of Social Development Alfredo Moreno made a surprise visit to residents of Malleco in Araucania to discuss the Plan Araucania. Local Mapuche were disgusted by Moreno's uninvited visit to a meeting of regional leaders who say that the plan is focused on militarizing their territory. The government says the Plan Araucania, rolled out by Piñera's administration after Catrillanca's death is to promote dialogue, peace and economic development.

Moreno spent several minutes explaining the what he said were the benefits of the program, says local media, but Mapuche representatives disagreed. "I was not rebuffed, we just had a fairly calm conversation," the minister said to reporters.

In another row, Camilo Catrillanca's father, Marcelo is fighting to not have his son's body exhumed as requested by the lawyer for the Carabineros to recreate the murder scene. Marcelo said he will continue to block the request saying it shows a lack of respect for him and his family.

"This shows a lack of respect for the family. This man is very wrong for wanting to do this. We as a family will not allow it. ... The Legal Medical Service delivered all the information and there is nothing else to do because my son is buried. His body needs to rest," Catrillanca told Bio Bio media.

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