



Press Release: Murder in the Peruvian Rainforest

September 2014

Four indigenous Ashéninka leaders, Edwin Chota Valera, Jorge Ríos Pérez, Leoncio Quinticima Melendez, and Francisco Pinedo, were murdered in the Peruvian Amazon due to their efforts to obtain legal title to their native community of Alto Tamaya Saweto and prevent continued illegal logging in their lands. The four men were walking a remote rainforest trail through their ancestral homelands to meet with their Ashéninka cousins in Apiwtxa, Brasil to discuss logging and drug trafficking threats along the Peru/Brazil border. The Alto Tamaya Saweto community had recently made important progress in their long struggle for territorial rights, having met this summer with the Presidency of the Council of Ministries (PCM), the new Peruvian Forestry Service (SERFOR), and the state forest supervisory organization (OSINFOR) to advance Saweto's decade long efforts to downsize the forests of permanent protection (BPP) and legally exclude the inactive forestry concessions overlapping their territory. Since January 2012, Upper Amazon Conservancy and its Peruvian sister organization, ProPurús, have been assisting the community in this struggle.



Edwin Chota Valera



Jorge Rios Pérez



Francisco Pinedo



Leoncio Quinticima Meléndez

The Peruvian state must guarantee that Saweto's legal and administrative proceedings continue while also ensuring the security of this indigenous population that lives in constant threat by illegal loggers and drug traffickers. These defenders of the rainforest and its people must be protected if the extensive forests of the Amazon are to continue their vital roles in maintaining carbon cycles, water cycles, and biodiversity. The widows and children of the assassinated community members have fled downriver to the regional capital of Pucallpa while the remaining members of the community persist in Saweto, surrounded by illegal loggers who continue to issue death threats over the radio.

Edwin Chota and Jorge Ríos featured in the April 2013, National Geographic Article, [Mahogany's Last Stand](#) where author Wallace talks of the same trail where the four men from Saweto were killed: "As long as we don't have title, the loggers don't respect native ownership," Chota says, standing at the rear of the canoe, propelling us with thrusts of a ten-foot pole. "They threaten us. They intimidate. They have the guns." The target of frequent death threats, Chota has repeatedly been forced to seek sanctuary among the Ashéninka's tribal relatives in Brazil, a two-day hike from here along ancient footpaths."

Scott Wallace's National Geographic Blog article, [Threats abound as Peru cops seize ill-gotten timber](#), identifies loggers who issued death threats against the people of Saweto. The Society of Threatened Peoples recognized the danger to Edwin Chota's life in 2012 writing letters to embassies, conducting a [video interview](#) with Chota, and writing a short article: [Edwin Chota in mortal danger](#). The New York Times also quoted Edwin Chota in an article in October 2013 about corruption endemic in the prosecution of illegal logging [Corruption in Peru aids cutting of rainforest](#): "There is no law," Mr. Chota said, during a visit to the sawmill that held the stacks of massive logs that he had followed from his village. "There's no money to investigate. There's only money to destroy."

A facebook page, [Title Saweto's Land](#), and [petition page](#) have been set up to support Saweto's struggle for control of their territory.

Links of interest

[ProPurús](#) and [The Upper Amazon Conservancy's](#) work with Saweto to protect their lands

The **National Geographic Society** has documented the threats to Saweto

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/mahogany/wallace-text>

<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/11/threats-abound-as-peru-cops-seize-ill-gotten-timber/>

<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2011/09/12/loggers-and-natives-face-off-in-the-borderlands-2/>

<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2011/08/25/dark-edge-of-the-frontier/>

The **New York Times** has written on the subject

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/19/world/americas/corruption-in-peru-aids-cutting-of-rain-forest.html?pagewanted=all>

The **Society for Threatened Peoples** repeatedly documented the threats to Edwin Chota's life

<http://www.gfbv.de/inhaltsDok.php?id=2475>

A Society for Threatened Peoples interview with Edwin Chota regarding threats to Saweto and his person

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6xcXPTlosw>

A preliminary article has appeared in **El Comercio**

<http://elcomercio.pe/peru/ucayali/cuatro-ashaninkas-fueron-asesinados-madereros-ilegales-noticia-1755373>

The University of Richmond Geographer David Salisbury has worked with Saweto for a decade

<http://blog.richmond.edu/dsalisbury/>

Salisbury's short Film Interviews with the Ashéninka shows threats a decade ago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytWbGwQrfxw>

Facebook page (Emory Richey visited Saweto as a U. of Texas undergraduate in 2007 and set up this page and a petition)

<https://www.facebook.com/SawetoAltoTamaya>

Petition page: Title Saweto's Land

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/give-saweto-title-to-their-territory/>

English speaking contacts

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