

PRESS RELEASE: PRELIMINARY HEARING: JUSTICE FOR SAWETO
SUPERIOR COURT OF UCAYALI'S PRELIMINARY HEARING ON THE CASE OF THE MURDERS
OF SAWETO'S LEADERS TO BE HELD TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2018 AT 8:00 AM

AUGUST 31 2018. Exactly 4 years after the brutal murders of the indigenous leaders of Alto Tamaya Saweto, Edwin Chota, Jorge Ríos, Leoncio Quinticima and Francisco Pinedo, the Superior Court of Ucayali will hold a preliminary hearing on the Saweto Murders on Tuesday, September 4, 2018.

The hearing will not only determine whether charges will be brought against Eurico Mapes, currently the only named perpetrator, the court will also consider whether to expand the case and press charges on those who requested, planned, and covered up the crime. The community of Saweto is asking that the State investigate and prosecute the murders as an organized crime case—taking into account all involved, including timber company executive, José Carlos Estrada Huayta, who continues to operate logging concessions. Investigating the case as an organized crime would set a precedent for other cases of violence against indigenous environmental activists, throughout the Amazon, where perpetrators of violence enjoy almost complete impunity.

Four years ago, the Ashéninka leaders were murdered on their ancestral lands near the Brazilian border. Loggers operating in the region had been threatening Saweto's leaders for years. The four leaders were long known for their work defending their community and as environmental activists. All had formally denounced the illegal logging of their lands to the authorities. They had also officially informed the state of the threats against community members multiple times.

These murders and ongoing, pervasive threats towards indigenous are unfortunately not unique to the Peruvian Amazon. Throughout the world, indigenous communities are at risk as they fight to protect their forests. In fact, murders of indigenous activists and other environmental defenders continue to increase; Global Witness reported 207 murders of territorial and environmental defenders during the year 2017[1]. Sixty percent (60%) of these murders occurred in Latin America. This research is corroborated by a report by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the UN Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which reveals a significant increase in the attacks on indigenous environmental activist in Peru and other countries.[2].

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[1]<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/at-what-cost/>

[2] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Attacks and criminalization of Indigenous Peoples defending their lands and rights, Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session, 10–28 September 2018 (paragraph 42).