

URGENT ACTION

BOLIVIAN CIVIL SOCIETY CENTRE UNDER THREAT

The civil society organization Bolivian Documentation and Information Centre (CEDIB) reports being harassed, threatened, and evicted from its premises in Cochabamba, central Bolivia. This is a worrying sign of shrinking civic space in Bolivia and could mean the loss of decades of evidence related to human rights in the country.

On 21 March, the Dean of Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS), a public university in Cochabamba, Juan Ríos, issued an official letter to the Director of the **Bolivian Documentation and Information Centre (Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia, CEDIB)**, Marco Gandarillas, informing CEDIB that they had 48 hours to vacate their office, located inside the UMSS, which they have occupied since 1993. This letter was sent following a visit on the same day by a UMSS advisor to the CEDIB office. CEDIB staff members reported that during this visit the UMSS advisor threatened the CEDIB staff, stating that they would be “locked in” and “they would not be allowed in or out of their office” if they did not evacuate the premises immediately.

The Director of the CEDIB answered the letter from UMSS on the same day, reminding the Dean of the formal agreement between the organizations, and expressing that a two-day timeframe to evacuate the CEDIB office and to move their archives housed there was “irrational and [did] not comply with judicial guidelines.” CEDIB’s Director requested that their agreement with the UMSS be respected and demanded the UMSS’s actions comply with the law. The letter also reiterated CEDIB’s requests for dialogue between both institutions. This letter was met with a response from the Dean on 31 March, in which mention of immediate eviction with the “help of the security forces” was made if premises were not vacated within 48 hours. Fearing violence against the staff and archives, CEDIB decided to start moving their archives to a safe location.

Between 5 and 6 April, CEDIB’s Director sent letters to the Dean, the Ombudsman, and the Mayor and Governor of Cochabamba requesting safety guarantees be provided to his staff and archives while in the process of leaving the UMSS premises. He reports that the only response received was from the Dean, stating that the University would not intervene in any “peaceful or violent way” during the process of vacating the premises. Nevertheless, while delivering the letter, CEDIB’s Director stated that the Dean’s legal advisors forced their way into CEDIB’s offices to verify that CEDIB was effectively moving its archives. CEDIB’s staff is currently in the process of moving the archives, but fears they and the archives will be attacked in the process. These actions send a worrying sign of shrinking civic space in Bolivia.

1) TAKE ACTION

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- Calling on the Minister of Education to ensure that the Dean and staff of the UMSS refrain from any actions that place CEDIB’s staff and archive at risk;
- Calling on the Ombudsman and the Governor of Cochabamba to safeguard the integrity of CEDIB’s staff and archives and ensure that civil society organizations enjoy a safe environment to develop their activities.

Please contact these officials by 9 June, 2017:

Minister of Education
Roberto Aguilar Gómez
Avenida Arce Nro. 2147
La Paz, Bolivia
Email: webmaster@minedu.gob.bo
Twitter: @minedubol

Salutation: Dear Sir/ Estimado Señor

General Freddy Bersatti, Embassy of the Republic of Bolivia
3014 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20008
Phone: 1 202 232 8573 Fax: 1 202 328 3712
Email: assistant@bolivia-usa.org
Salutation: Dear Ambassador

2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The CEDIB has been a vocal voice in Bolivia denouncing human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples related to extractive industries in the Bolivian Amazon. Recently, CEDIB submitted a request for precautionary measures to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), along with the Centre for Legal Studies and Social Research (Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social, CEJIS) on behalf of Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation whose survival, they allege, will be affected by oil exploration in their territory.

On 6 February 2017, during a press conference at the Human Rights Assembly in La Paz where CEDIB participated alongside CEJIS and leaders of the *Community Territory of Origin Tacana II Indigenous Territory* to announce that the IACHR had requested the Bolivian government provide information on their request for precautionary measures, the presentation was interrupted by leaders of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) political party, who threatened to take over the Human Rights Assembly headquarters.

In 2015, Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García threatened CEDIB (along with three other organizations) with expulsion from Bolivia, after CEDIB questioned a group of legislative decrees related to the oil industry which placed protected areas and the Indigenous Peoples who live in them at risk.

In 2016, CEDIB reported ongoing harassment as a result of their investigation into mining rights being issued on Bolivian glaciers. The harassment included personal information and photographs of the investigating team being shared publicly.

Name: Members of the Bolivian Documentation and Information Centre (Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia, CEDIB)

Gender m/f: all

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