



Joint statement – Argentine: disappearance of Santiago Maldonado

On 1 August 2017, Santiago Maldonado was disappeared during a protest for the rights of indigenous Mapuche people, which was violently repressed by the Gendarmeria Nacional Argentina (GNA) a military security force. The demonstration was taking place in Cushamen, in Chubut province, in one of the lands owned by Italian fashion brand Benetton in Patagonia which is been reclaimed by Mapuche people. Agents of the GNA attacked the demonstrators, who were occupying the Route 40 and entered in their community, even though they did not have a judicial order for this operation.

According to some witnesses, the agents arrested Maldonado and put him in a GNA truck. A protester also claims she saw Maldonado climbing on a tree while trying to escape from GNA agents, who were preparing to shoot rubber and lead bullets.

The security forces and the government have denied all accusations that GNA agents are responsible for Santiago's disappearance. Patricia Bullrich, Minister of National Security, stated "there can be no absolute certainty that Santiago Maldonado was present at the protest" and that without concrete evidence she would not consider this case as an "enforced disappearance".

The protest on 1 August was organised by the "Pu Lof en Resistencia" community, to claim the right of Mapuche people to return to their ancestral lands and to demand the release of a Mapuche leader, Facundo Jones Huala, jailed since June.

In 1991 the Benetton Group purchased 900,000 hectares in Patagonia. According to indigenous activists these lands should be returned to the Mapuche, who were displaced from here during the colonial era. In 2015, a Mapuche community led by Huala occupied some lands in the Chubut province, and since then there have been frequent clashes and protests between them and the police.

For the past month, international and Argentinian NGOs, social movements and activists have been calling on the authorities in Argentina to carry out a transparent and impartial investigation into Santiago Maldonado's disappearance. On 1 September, during a protest in Buenos Aires to mark one month since Santiago Maldonado's disappearance, the police [attacked the demonstrators](#), including some journalists, and arrested around 30 people who were accused of public intimidation.

The Italian network "In Difesa Di – Per i diritti umani e chi li difende" and Front Line Defenders express their serious concern over the disappearance of Santiago Maldonado while he was exercising his right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, ask the Italian government and its diplomatic corps in Argentina to apply the EU guidelines on human rights defenders and to urge the Argentinian authorities to conduct a transparent and impartial investigation into Santiago Maldonado's

disappearance. We also urge the Italian Commission on human rights of the Senate and the Permanent Committee on human rights of the Lower Chamber to follow up on Santiago Maldonado's case and to pressure on the Argentinian authorities to quickly identify those responsible for his disappearance.

We also urge the Argentine government to:

- 1) Carry out a transparent and impartial investigation to identify those responsible for Santiago Maldonado's disappearance and disclose any information regarding his whereabouts;
- 2) Immediately release Santiago Maldonado if he is arbitrarily detained;
- 3) Respect the rights of Mapuche activists, and all Argentinian citizens, to peacefully protest
- 4) Respect the right of indigenous peoples to prior, free and informed consent, as well as their land rights, as stated in the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples and the 169 ILO Convention.

Finally, we call on the Italian company Benetton to respect the land rights of indigenous Mapuche people, in compliance with national and international laws, and to cooperate with the Mapuche people in order to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, taking into account their right to return to their ancestral lands.