

24 June 2020

Chile: Judicial threat against feminist collective LasTesis

On 16 June 2020, the four members of the feminist collective **LasTesis** learned of a criminal case opened against them by the national police force, the Carabineros de Chile, through the media. Neither the members of LasTesis nor their legal representatives were informed of the case.

[LasTesis Collective](#) is a feminist artistic group based in Valparaíso, Chile. Their art aims to hold to account state institutions that perpetuate violence against women and dissidents. The Collective first became widely known in 2019 through the performance “A Rapist in Your Path”, which resonated with many women’s rights movements and became an anthem for women’s movements around the world. In May 2020, LasTesis released a new song alongside the Russian feminist group Pussy Riot. The lyrics denounce police violence against women in Latin America, reflecting on the rise in incidents of domestic violence in the context of COVID-19, and the economic inequalities that contribute to the deaths of thousands of workers during the pandemic, who cannot access adequate living and health care.

On 16 June 2020, the four women’s rights defenders were informed through coverage in the media that a criminal case had been opened against them by the national police force, the Carabineros de Chile, who have jurisdiction over the entire national territory of Chile. LasTesis are accused of inciting violence and threats against the police. According to the information published by various media outlets, the police reported feeling intimidated and were fearful of attacks against them, as a result of LasTesis’ performances. In its coverage of the case, one media outlet cited the police officer’s report on the case, however the members of LasTesis were unaware of the existence of the report.

On 17 June 2020, the Valparaíso Regional Prosecutor’s Office issued a press release regarding two complaints received from the Carabineros Unit “OS-9”, a police unit that specializes in combating organized crime. The press release stated that the criminal investigation would be carried out by Unit “OS-9”, the unit that made the complaint against LasTesis in the first place, which would indicate that the investigation is unlikely to be impartial.

The office of the Public Prosecutor is currently the authority on the investigation into the four members of LasTesis, as the complaints against them are under preliminary investigation. The lawyers for the Collective have requested a copy of the investigation, but are yet to receive a response to their request, nor have they been informed of the case number. As a result, they are unable to access any information or updates regarding the case through official channels.

Since news of the criminal case was circulated on mainstream media, the four members of LasTesis and members of their families have been subjected to threats and harassment online, some of which was misogynistic. The Minister of the Interior publicly supported the

complaints against LasTesis, stating that the dignity and image of the institution of the police must be protected.

In Valparaiso, where the defenders live, serious restriction measures are in place due to COVID-19 and residents must ask for police permission before leaving their homes. In this case, these are the same police officers who made the complaints against the WHRDs, whilst also being responsible for investigating the case. This situation not only raises serious concern regarding the impartiality of the investigation, but also creates an intimidating environment for the defenders to live in.

Front Line Defenders expresses its deep concern regarding the attempt to criminalise LasTesis, as well as the administrative obstacles put in place to inhibit their right to a fair and adequate legal defense. Front Line Defenders believes they are in reprisal for their peaceful and legitimate artistic work in defence of women's rights.

In addition, Front Line Defenders is concerned by the persecution of women human rights defenders' freedom of expression by the Carabineros de Chile, whilst numerous incidents of violence by police officers against Chilean women during the social protests that took place in October 2019, have gone unpunished.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Chile to:

1. Publicly acknowledge the important and legitimate role of women human rights defenders;
2. Drop all charges against members of LasTesis, as they are believed to be solely motivated by their human rights work and exercise of freedom of expression;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the police harassment and the online threats against members of LasTesis, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Ensure that the members of LasTesis are formally notified of the charges against them, and that they can freely exercise their right to a proper defence;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Chile, in particular women rights defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.