

Courage and resistance: the history of women peasants in Paraguay

The ***Comisión de Víctimas de la Masacre de Curuguaty*** (Commission of Victims of the Curuguaty Massacre), arose as an initiative to demand justice and reparation for the incidents that took place in Curuguaty on June 15th, 2012, in the context of a peasant struggle against illegal dispossession. The land in the area have been in dispute since 1967.



The conflict saw its highest expression of violence after an operation was carried out by over 300 armed police officers, to evict the families who lived there, resulting in 17 people dead; 11 peasants and 6 police. After this, a Trial Court convicted 11 peasants for the death of the six police officers. However, there was no legal investigation of the peasants' murders.

That is when a group of women created the *Comisión de Víctimas de Curuguaty*. These women have been courageously resisting criminalization, a strategy frequently used by governments and companies in Latin America to evict communities from their territories, using violent, extractivist, and neoliberal concepts.

The women organized themselves politically to appeal the legal case, through mobilization and alliances with other women defenders and organizations in the region. They have carried out media campaigns to increase the cases visibility, accessed resources for their companions' legal defense, both before the judges in their country, but also to show the importance of fighting the stigmatizations for being women defenders of common goods and the territory, who are criminalized by the State. In 2016, the women peasants of the *Comisión de Víctimas* set up a *Resistance Tent* in front of the Judicial Buildings in Asuncion. For over two years, the victims' mothers, wives, and daughters stayed there day and night, demanding an investigation into their companions' assassinations.



UAF-LAC has accompanied this process since 2016. First, with a Rapid Response Grant, we provided funds to hire a lawyer who could file a *Habeas Corpus* with the Paraguayan Supreme Court. In March 2018, we echoed Lucia Omen, Maria Fani Olmedo, and Dolores Lopez's resistance, women who were given house arrest. Their voices were reflected in the report: *"Impunity for Violence Against Women Defenders of Territory, Common Goods, and the Environment in Latin America"* launched during events in parallel to the CSW62 in New York. Josefa Acosta, a your leader from the Marina Kue reservation was at the launching, and shared her words and strength. Finally, in April 2018, during a recognition trip to Paraguay we were able to visit the massacre site and Marina Kue reservation, where around 120 families live under very precarious conditions and the constant risk of displacement.



On July 26th, 2018, due to the women's resistance and all their local, regional, and international advocacy efforts, the Criminal Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice repealed the ruling against the 11 peasants and they were released. In the words of Martina Paredes: "Those were two years of cold, hot, rain, and wind in the tent, but we saw results and will go for more." The women peasants resistance in favor of the legalization of the

Marina Kue territories and an investigation into the murder of 11 peasants during the violent eviction in 2012, continues in the search for justice, truth, and reparation.