

The death of Julia Chuñil in Chile: Boric's war against the Mapuche people

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Gabriel Boric, the President of Chile, issued the following statement last week on the disappearance of Julia Chuñil, a 72-year-old Mapuche Indigenous leader and environmental activist:

I cannot fail to mention the government's concern and involvement in the disappearance of Julia Chuñil. I mention this because when a person disappears, the state is neither neutral nor passive. We have long, long ago requested that the PDI (investigative police) act; made all resources available for this purpose and asked that all lines of investigation be pursued. We respectfully ask the Public Prosecutor's Office, as an autonomous body, to act with a sense of urgency in this matter.

The president's statement is a lie from beginning to end, and an obscenely cynical one at that. Julia Chuñil did not disappear a week or two weeks ago. Her adult children reported their mother's disappearance on November 8, 2024, at a property that she had occupied as part of a historical struggle by the Mapuche people to reclaim ancestral lands. That is, she went missing more than 11 months ago.

Her children, Pablo, Jeannette, Javier and Andalien, from the beginning pointed the finger at Juan Carlos Morstadt Anwandter. A bourgeois figure in the forestry and agribusiness, he had for years made threats and paid third parties to commit acts against Chuñil in an attempt to kick her off a substantial piece of land that the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI)—a state body purportedly created to benefit the indigenous population—handed to Morstadt without a cent being exchanged.

In fact, her children reported very early on in her disappearance that Julia Chuñil had warned, "If anything happens to me, you know who did it."

From the outset the regional prosecutors did not meet with the disappeared woman's family or provide them assistance. They would not even take witness statements without the family lawyers being present. The case findings have, from the moment Chuñil went missing to this very day, remained confidential, or at least kept from the family and their lawyers.

Morstadt, brought in for questioning in January, invoked his right to remain silent. This procedure by the regional prosecutors

was done to appear as though they were conducting a serious investigation. His phone was never seized to confirm or deny the Chuñil family's accusation, nor a timely forensic investigation ordered. His home was never raided. On the contrary, the disappeared woman's adult son, Pablo San Martín Chuñil, reported that Morstadt somehow knew when one of homes of Chuñil's adult children was about to be raided and was present when it happened.

Morstadt's attorney Carole Monroy recently said that "my client was initially investigated as a defendant and then became a witness."

The Chuñil family on the other hand was from the beginning made by the state to appear as criminals responsible for the disappearance of their own mother. In "evidence" leaked to the right-wing corporate paper *La Tercera* and *Meganoticias*, the right-wing network owned by the Bethia conglomerate, a pair of pants were found at the home of adult daughter, Jeannette Troncoso Chuñil, which apparently had a bloodstain which matched Julia Chuñil's DNA. The newspaper reported in breathtaking and sensationalist detail how on day of the raid, January 30, Jeannette's home was raided by a massive contingent of the Special Operations Group, the high-risk tactical unit of Carabineros, Chile's notorious militarized police force.

This "evidence" turned out to be a pack of lies. In the middle of June, *Interferencia* reported that the bloodstained garment story that the police "used to raid the home of Jeannette ... was false. Expert and genetic reports say there was no trace of Julia Chuñil's blood or DNA." On this issue the corporate press and media maintained a deathly silence.

On that same January 30, Jeannette was "interrogated" in such a way that it amounted to torture—something with which the Chilean state apparatus has copious amounts of experience.

Mariela Santana and Karina Riquelme, the main lawyers representing the Chuñil family, filed a complaint against José Arriagada head of Carabineros Criminalistics Laboratory and the head regional prosecutor, Tatiana Esquivel, for unlawful coercion and they applied for a writ of habeas corpus (*recurso de amparo*) for the horrific action of interrogating Jeannette inside a police vehicle for three hours, pressuring her to confess to disappearing her mother.

The writ explained that at one point in the interrogation Jeannette was driven to the locale where her mother went missing. There, Arriagada, with Esquivel present, allegedly said to Jeannette that:

“You are responsible. Tell the truth, that your husband was the one who did something to your mother,” while claiming to have evidence against her.

The writ alleged that Arriagada “made intimidating gestures, putting his hand on his gun and partially removing it from its holster, leading Jeanette to believe that he was pointing it at her.”

To really grasp the significance of these repulsive, sickening actions in the context of Chile, thousands of workers, youth, activists, peasants, Mapuches were made to vanish from the face of the earth by these same methods during Pinochet’s military junta. Such methods, though with much less frequency, have continued under civilian rule. Mapuche people, in secluded rural settings and away from the public eye, have been made to “disappear” or have even been executed at point blank range by Carabineros—Camilo Catrillanca, a 24-year-old killed in 2018, and Pablo Marchant, a 29-year-old killed in 2021, are just two names that come mind.

On June 26, four months after that first of no less than six raids against the homes of the Chuñil family, the Supreme Court upheld an earlier ruling of the Valdivia Court of Appeals rejecting the complaints and denying the writ of habeas corpus. The Court ruled that “there is no current or future threat to the right to personal liberty or individual security of those protected.”

A gruesome revelation and the state goes into damage control

Then, on September 30, the Chuñil family’s lawyers, in the presence of human rights groups including Amnesty International, held a press conference revealing that Morstadt, in an intercepted phone conversation, had admitted to his father that Julia Chuñil “had been burned.”

The lawyers explained that this document had appeared on the public prosecutor’s online platform and then it disappeared along with all the files and history of Chuñil’s case. The lawyers were unable to view the legal proceedings of the case or request meetings with the public prosecutor’s office.

Santana clarified: “It is not that we do not have access to the case, it is that the case has been removed from the system. We also have no accreditation in it, we cannot access it, and emails (sent to the public prosecutor’s office) have not been answered.”

She added, “I sent approximately five emails with copies to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the National Human Rights Institute, the Undersecretary of Human Rights, and the National Prosecutor’s Office.”

At first, Ángel Valencia, the right-wing National Prosecutor selected by Boric as an overture to the right-controlled Congress, simply downplayed the implication of Morstadt’s statement and questioned its veracity. At the same time, he said that an investigation would be conducted into how it was leaked.

“I can neither confirm nor deny the existence of such information... The Los Ríos Prosecutor’s Office also opened an investigation into an apparent leak of information that should have been kept confidential in court, which, I insist, even if it were true,

would be very partial and I would even dare to say that it would also be very biased in terms of the content of the ongoing investigation, which is a serious matter, the most serious being that we have not yet found Mrs. Chuñil’s body. Consequently, we cannot deduce what happened to her either.”

With his arrogant and contemptuous statement, he inadvertently let slip that Julia Chuñil, who up until that point was classified as “disappeared,” was dead. How he knew this he did not say. Up until then, apparently, the state wasn’t looking for a body; they were searching for a living person.

At that point, the state went into damage control. The Boric administration’s ministers, the government’s spokesperson Camila Vallejo—a darling of the international pseudo-left—along with the government’s supporters in congress, made handwringing statements of how horrified they were by the revelations and how the “rule of law” must prevail.

It was in this context that Boric made his grotesque address two days ago about “the government’s concern and involvement in the disappearance of Julia Chuñil.”

The government of Chile bears political, if not material, responsibility for the Mapuche leader’s death.

A lengthier article that provides the exact details of the role played by the various state appendages in this horrific case is forthcoming. But the *World Socialist Web Site* must register this accusation against the pseudo-leftist Gabriel Boric—as head of the Chilean State—and his accomplices in the Broad Front, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and Party for Democracy that constitute his government.

What has been unleashed by Boric’s regime against Julia Chuñil and her family is part of a war against the Mapuche people, among the most vulnerable and destitute sectors in Chilean society, on behalf of mining, forestry and landed property interests.

Almost from the moment Boric assumed power he declared a state of emergency over the regions of Biobio and Araucanía—historically Mapuche territory—imposing virtual martial law and all that it entails. Boric has also employed against Mapuche leaders and the broader indigenous community the authoritarian Usurpation Law and the State Security Law, while also revamping Gen. Augusto Pinochet’s Anti-Terrorist Law to use it against the Mapuche as the dictator did.

Make no mistake. This war is a dress rehearsal in preparation for the entire working class.

Workers and youth must come to the defence of the Chuñil family and the Mapuche people. Marx’s dictum that “labour with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labour with a black skin is branded,” applies in full measure in this instance.



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