

## **Pabru (Pablo) Presbere, legendary Indigenous land defender of Talamanca, Costa Rica, executed 4th July 1710**

Pabru Presbere was a Suinse community leader from the Cordillera of Talamanca, south-east of Costa Rica. Presbere planned and executed a rebellion on **29th September 1709** against the Spanish crown and Costa Rican authorities.

This was in response to a letter, intercepted by Presbere, written by Franciscan missionaries. The missionaries letter requested the authorities (then based in Cartago) to send military expeditions to forcibly capture and uproot the Indigenous people from their lands, and relocate them [to villages in Boruca, Chirripo, and Teotique](#).

Presbere was thought to be a shaman, rather than a chief, as his name signifies "macaw", which in his Bribri culture has deep religious significance. His status as a shaman may explain how he managed to unite and lead various Indigenous groups - Cabecares, Bribri and Terraba people, [from between Chirripó in Costa Rica to Isla Toja in Almirante, Panama](#) in the uprising.

Presbere had originally refused to be baptised by the missionaries, however he conceded, and was given the Christian name "Pablo"; it was thought that this perhaps was to allow him more time to prepare for the rebellion.

Presbere allied with Comísala, the Cabecar chief. They prepared for the insurrection by arranging a stockpile of spears, made of fire-hardened wood and leather shields. During the insurrection two missionaries Rebullida and Zamora, and others, including one of their wives, a child, and ten soldiers were killed, and fourteen missionary churches, convents and town halls were destroyed, together with images and items symbolic of the real threat to Indigenous life.

In response to the insurrection, the authorities ordered a revenge and punishment expedition for the immediate capture and removal of all Indigenous people from the area. They sent 200 soldiers with 75 muskets, 100 swords, 800 pounds of gunpowder, 4,000 bullets and currency of 4,000 pesos.

After a month long battle, 700 Indigenous people had been captured and taken to Cartago to be utilized as slaves.

Of the 700, only 500 arrived in Cartago as some escaped or died. Nine years later, the authorities reported that 300 of the 500 Indigenous people had died of smallpox or measles.

Comísala escaped capture, whilst Presbere hid and sought refuge in another village, however after further battle he was finally surrendered.

During his trial Presbere refused to admit any responsibility, and claimed to have been elsewhere. He did not betray his captured companions, however he was denounced as their rebellion leader. He defended himself in the Bribri language, not Spanish, and his stoic and proud manner was noted. Presbere justified any of his actions due to the missionaries' request to forcibly uproot all Indigenous people from their land.

Presbere was sentenced to death [by garrotte](#) on **1st July 1710**, and his execution took place on the **4th of July 1710**. (\*)

The rebellion was not entirely unsuccessful, because as a consequence the oppressors left the region, which allowed for the Indigenous people of Talamanca to regain independence and sovereignty.

Presbere's name is now revered as a symbol of heroic resistance, who refused to submit to the barbaric foreign colonial invaders; protecting lands and natural resources, which has allowed for the traditions, identity and language of the Indigenous people to survive to this day.

**In 1997** Presbere was declared a defender of the Freedom of Indigenous peoples by the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. Statues have been built to honour him, including one of copper, 3.12 metres high, outside the Municipality of Limón, and a bronze bust can be seen at the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. ([see photos below](#)).

Indigenous people continue to be forced to defend their lands to date, where they have lived together sustainably, conserving resources and protecting the environment, which are being illegally taken, and often used for extensive livestock production, or marked for future exploration and exploitation, mining operations and hydro-electric plants.

Indigenous land defenders continue to be threatened, attacked and assassinated. These include Sergio Rojas Ortiz, ([age 59](#)) shot and killed with 12 bullets in Salitre on the 19 March 2019. More than one year on there has been no convictions, or progress in the investigation, despite there being identified perpetrators.

Jehry Rivera Rivera, was murdered on the 24 February 2020 whilst reclaiming land in Terraba. Again, to date, there are no accused, or a date for the start of the trial. [Jehry had previously suffered a brutal attack after](#)

denouncing illegal logging in 2013, following which his perpetrator was ordered not to go to the area for 6 months, the only punishment.

Two weeks before Jehry's murder, Mainor Ortiz Delgado, a BriBri leader (age 29), was seriously wounded in a gun attack in Salitre. Again, no-one has been charged.

These events occur in an area designated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ((IACHR) who have issued protective measures in favour of the Indigenous population, as a result of constant threats from those who seek to appropriate their territory. (ENCA 79).

Carlos Alvarado's government since 2010, and practically all governments over the last 40 years, has shown compliance and silence, and a lack of respect for democracy and human rights for Indigenous people, due to the apparent impunity for those implicated when complaints are filed. There are no measures implemented to protect the lands and defend their original inhabitants. Cultural International reports the reality as being on "brink of complete crisis", and Fecon (Federation of Ecologists) state "This crime against the Indigenous rights defender Jehry Rivera splashes with blood the hypocrisy of the Costa Rican state, which claims to protect human rights but its policies leave all Indigenous peoples abandoned and forgotten."

ENCA thanks Roland Spendlingwimmer of Co-operative Longo Mai and Trino Barrantes Araya, University of Costa Rica for contributions.

References:-

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*Ana Lucia Ixchiu (Maya K'iche) in <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/complicity-and-silence-taking-land-Indigenous-peoples-costa-rica> - accessed 2 August 2020*

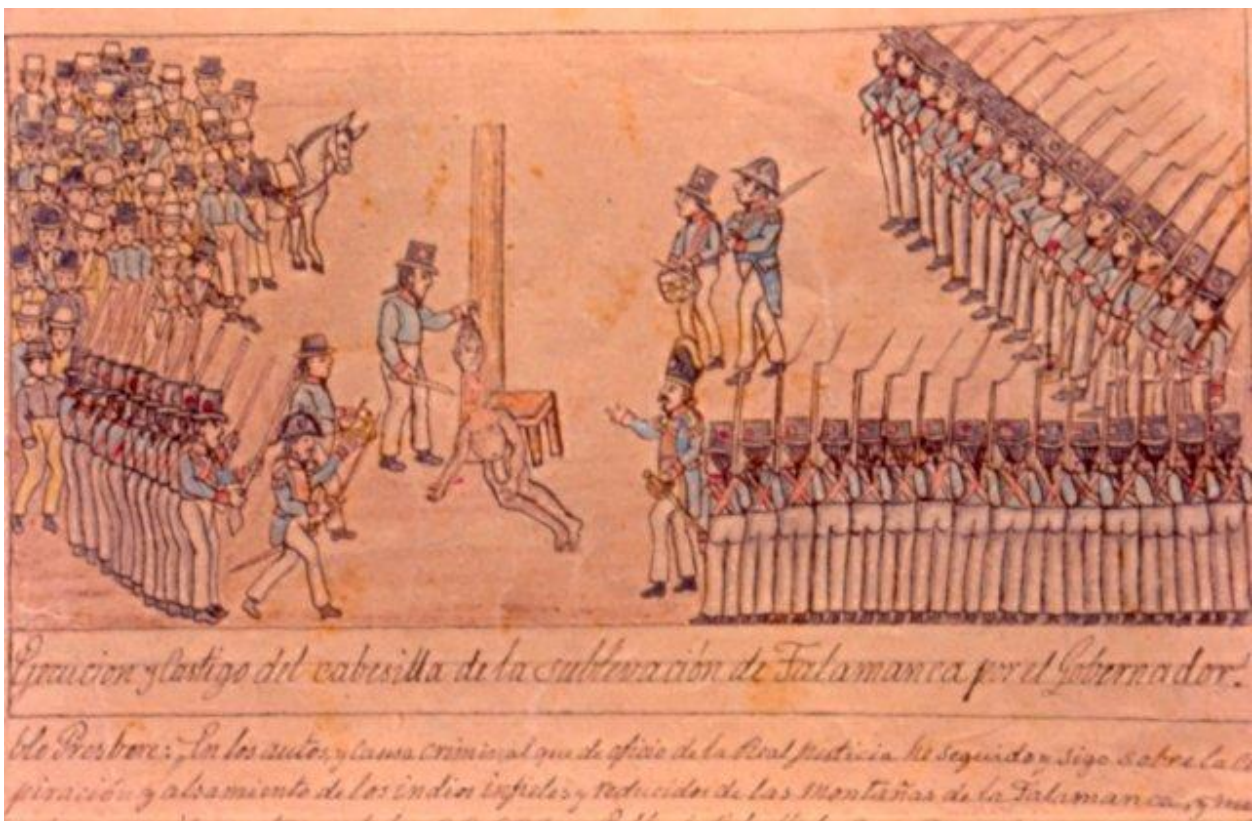
**Additional information: \***

**His death sentence ordered he be taken to the outskirts of town, and tied to a pole, blindfolded and 'ad modem deli is arcabuceado' (latin), decapitated and his head placed on a pole, for all to see.**

See Photos/pictures below (many more are online).

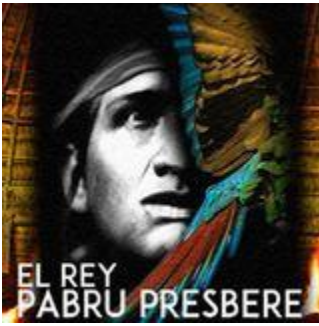


The rebellion



Execution







**4 DE JULIO**

una fecha para conmemorar

**PRESBRE  
PA BLU  
DE SUINSI**

Defensor de la Libertad  
de los Pueblos Originarios

Pablo Presbere



Costa Rica y su historia

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