

52 International organizations demand an end to political persecution against Fidel Zavala

December 16, 2024– As human rights, religious, and international solidarity organizations from various countries across the globe, we call for an end to the political persecution of Fidel Antonio Zavala Pérez by the government of El Salvador.

On July 17 of this year, Zavala courageously denounced corruption, medical neglect, physical abuse, torture, and deaths at the hands of the state that he witnessed in El Salvador's prisons. Zavala was held in pre-trial detention for thirteen months on charges of business fraud, for which he was subsequently found innocent and freed. Since his release, he has become a leading voice among formerly incarcerated people against abuses by the Bukele regime. Now, El Salvador's Attorney General is pressuring for his case to be re-opened in an attempt to silence him as a prominent whistleblower.

As the spokesperson with El Salvador's Community and Human Rights Defense Unit (UNIDEHC) Zavala has given video interviews on national and international news channels, detailing what he witnessed in multiple prisons throughout his detention. Zavala, through UNIDEHC, is the first person to bring a lawsuit against the General Director of Prisons and the directors of the La Esperanza and Santa Ana prisons. The lawsuit, delivered to the Attorney General's office, details his experiences as a witness to widespread human rights abuses during the thirteen months in which he was incarcerated.

Currently, the government is carrying out a smear campaign against Zavala on official social media channels and through government aligned newspapers by publishing claims about alleged crimes for which a court has already absolved him. This attempt to defame and discredit Zavala and UNIDEHC makes abundantly clear the politically motivated nature of this case.

Zavala has already completed a judicial process during which the Third Sentencing Tribunal of San Salvador absolved him of all criminal charges. We therefore condemn the reopening of Zavala's case following his months of outspoken leadership through UNIDEHC and the smear campaign that has accompanied this unjustifiable action.

In light of these facts, we join the calls from Salvadoran social movement and civil society groups for the Salvadoran government to:

- Close the criminal process against Fidel Antonio Zavala Pérez;
- End the media campaign aimed at discrediting Zavala;
- Investigate the abuses that Zavala and others have witnessed in El Salvador's prisons.

The undersigned organizations reiterate our solidarity with Fidel and the countless other social movement leaders facing political persecution and intimidation at the hands of the Nayib Bukele government. We recognize that this case is part of a pattern of attacks against movement leaders who speak out against Bukele government officials and their policies, and we will continue to work to end the unjust criminalization of human rights defenders and others who courageously speak out.



Signing Organizations:

United States

1. Alma de Izote
2. American Association of Jurists, New York/Puerto Rico
3. Cal-Nev Philippine Solidarity Task Force
4. Cambridge United for Justice with Peace
5. Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN)
6. Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
7. Colectivo La Chiltota Rebelde
8. Denver Justice and Peace Committee
9. Haiti Action Committee
10. InterReligious Task Force on Central America
11. Isthmic Solidarity Project
12. Latin American Working Group
13. Los Siempre Sospechosos de Todo
14. National Lawyers Guild, Los Angeles Chapter
15. Portland Central America Solidarity Committee
16. Provincial Council Clerics of St. Viator
17. Resistencia Comunitara
18. Rochester Committee on Latin America
19. Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Institute Justice Team (Hermanas de la Misericordia - Equipo de Justicia)
20. Solidarity-US
21. US-El Salvador Sister Cities
22. Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective - Honduras

Latin America

23. Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos, Chile
24. Congreso de los Pueblos, Colombia
25. Equipo Jurídico Pueblos, Colombia
26. Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo SJ" (CSMM), Ecuador
27. Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Ecuador
28. Colectivo Juvenil Pro Derechos Humanos "Herbert Anaya", El Salvador
29. Mesa de Línea Férrea, El Salvador
30. Movimiento de Solidaridad Social, El Salvador
31. Movimiento Universitario de Pensamiento Crítico, El Salvador
32. Movimiento de Víctimas del Régimen (MOVIR), El Salvador
33. Salvadoreños Construyendo Memoria, El Salvador
34. Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC), El Salvador
35. Comité de Solidaridad con El Salvador en México, México
36. Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos Limeddh, México
37. Mexicanos Unidos, México, Ciudad de México
38. RedContactoSur, Uruguay

- 39. Red Internacional de Cátedras, Uruguay
- 40. Organizacion venezolana de Juristas, Venezuela

Canada

- 41. Asociacion Salvadoreña - Canadiense de Mujeres (ASCADEM)
- 42. Asociación Salvadoreña Canadiense de Ottawa y Región de la Capital Nacional (ASCORCAN)
- 43. FMLN-ALCALDES Canada, Canada SK
- 44. Nación Salvadoreña en el Exterior, Canadá SK y Estados Unidos

Europe

- 45. Centro di ricerca ed elaborazione per la democrazia, Italia
- 46. Frente Intercontinental Ventana de la Lucha Popular Salvadoreña, Suecia
- 47. Ongd AFRICANDO, España
- 48. Ventana al Sur, Alemania
- 49. Informationsgruppe Lateinamerika, Austria
- 50. Medico international schweiz, Suiza

Australia

- 51. Philippines Australia Union Link, New South Wales, Australia
- 52. Robert Graham and The Landing, Western Australia, Australia