

Presidente Nayib Bukele
E-Mail: contacto@president.gob.sv

23.03.2025

Fidel Zaval & further speakers of UNIDEHC

Dear President Nayib Bukele,

I am writing to express my deep concern over the detention of Fidel Zavala, spokesperson for the Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC), as well as the raid on the organization's offices and the home of its director, lawyer Ivania Cruz. UNIDEHC has played a key role in exposing serious human rights violations, particularly those linked to the state of emergency. These events are alarming, as they appear to be part of a broader strategy to criminalize human rights defenders in the country.

According to available information, these actions took place shortly after UNIDEHC supported a complaint before the Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos regarding the detention of community leaders from La Floresta, who have been fighting against the forced eviction from their lands. Following this complaint, at least 20 more individuals from this community have reportedly been detained, heightening concerns about increasing repression against those advocating for land rights and community organizing.

Moreover, the detention of Fidel Zavala appears to be a direct act of retaliation and intimidation due to his work in documenting and denouncing torture, deaths, and other abuses in prisons under the state of emergency. His testimony has been crucial in exposing these violations both nationally and internationally, raising serious concerns that his arrest is intended to silence his work and discourage further reporting of state abuses. His detention places his physical and psychological well-being at serious risk.

Given the gravity of this situation, I urge you to take immediate action to ensure the physical integrity and due process rights of Fidel Zavala and all individuals detained in connection with the La Floresta case.

Furthermore, I strongly urge you to take all necessary measures to ensure that human rights defenders, community leaders, and civil society organizations can carry out their work without fear of reprisals. This includes ending the misuse of criminal law to persecute and criminalize the legitimate defense of human rights.

Sincerely,