



Reference: AMR 34/4409/2021

María Consuelo Porras
Fiscal General
Ministerio Público de Guatemala
Lomas de Gujjarro, Edificio Lomas 15 avenida
15-16 zona 1, Barrio Gerona
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

México, 7 July 2021

RE: SIGNATURES CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF BERNARDO CAAL

Dear Attorney General María Consuelo Porras,

On behalf of Amnesty International, I am writing to share with you that 27957 people worldwide have signed the following message demanding the Attorney General of Guatemala to take all the steps needed to immediately release Bernardo Caal Xol and to investigate those who handled Bernardo's case leading to his unjust imprisonment:

Bernardo Caal Xol lost his freedom over three years ago. He is unjustly in prison for protecting the land and rivers in the department of Alta Verapaz in northern Guatemala.

In 2015, Bernardo Caal Xol, a member of the Mayan Q'eqchi community, peacefully opposed the construction of two hydroelectric projects which endangered the sacred Cahabón River. Bernardo, among other leaders, denounced irregularities in the project, including the lack of prior and informed consultation with indigenous peoples who inhabit the area.

In retaliation, Bernardo suffered smear campaigns and stigmatization in the press, television, through flyers, and on social media. This quickly turned into a criminal investigation accusing Bernardo of alleged acts of violence.

In November 2018, the Cobán court sentenced him to 7 years and 4 months in prison despite the lack of evidence to support the accusations against him.

Now a prisoner of conscience, Bernardo is facing years in jail when he should be free to continue to protect nature. Changing Bernardo's story is changing our future.

Bernardo's situation reflects the major challenges faced by those who fight for climate and environmental justice in Guatemala. It also reflects the historical racism and dispossession of Indigenous peoples' territories in Guatemala. His detention is emblematic, since it clearly shows how human rights defenders, especially Indigenous peoples, are criminalized.

One year after Amnesty International named Bernardo Caal Xol prisoner of conscience, the Guatemalan authorities have it in their hands to change Bernardo's story, and to take a step towards counteracting these major human rights challenges that the country faces.

Sincerely,

Erika Guevara Rosas
Americas Director