

# URGENT ACTION

## IMPRISONED MAPUCHE LIFE'S AT RISK

Machi (spiritual Mapuche leader) Celestino Córdova Tránsito completed over 100 days on hunger strike demanding to join his community for the period of a mandatory spiritual retreat. He was convicted and in prison in the city of Temuco for homicide induced by arson in 2014. Authorities failed to dialogue with him and a local Court authorized the possibility of force feeding him. On 10 August, he expressed his intention to enter a dry strike. We demand authorities to urgently initiate a dialogue with Celestino Córdova and abstain from feeding him against his will.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

**Víctor Pérez Varela**  
**Minister of Interior and Public Security**  
Palacio de la Moneda  
Santiago, Región Metropolitana  
Chile  
Email: [plagos@interior.gob.cl](mailto:plagos@interior.gob.cl)

Dear Minister,

*I am writing to voice my concern regarding the risk to the life of machi Celestino Córdova Tránsito, currently convicted and imprisoned in Temuco, who has been in hunger strike for over 100 days demanding measures to ensure his health and religious freedom. His role as a "machi" requires him to be physically close to his land, and the distance is further affecting his health and putting his life at risk.*

*As a mapuche spiritual leader, machi Celestino Córdova is not only protected by general human rights standards, but also specific protections for indigenous peoples', including the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples' rights and the ILO Convention 169. The latter states that preference should be given to penalties other than imprisonment for indigenous peoples.*

*We call on to you to initiate a meaningful dialogue with high-level officials if necessary, looking for effective solutions and protect Celestino Córdova's health and life. At the same time, authorities must abstain from force-feeding machi Celestino Córdova, who has consciously and expressly stated his will is not be fed.*

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since 4 May 2020, machi Celestino Córdova Tránsito started a hunger strike in Temuco (South), together with 8 others Mapuche prisoners in the city of Angol.

He is demanding respect for his rights as a spiritual leader of the Mapuche people, which requires him to have a physical proximity to his land and a specific sacred place, which represents the connection between the earthly and spiritual world. Staying for so long away from this place affects his health gravely, in addition to the effects of the hunger strike. In addition, the risks added by the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered.

All prisoners in hunger strike are demanding the application of ILO Convention 169, allowing prisoners to serve their sentence or pre-trial detention in their lands and not a prison. On July 6, 11 other prisoners started a hunger strike in Lebu, and on July 20, 7 additional Mapuche prisoners began a hunger strike in Temuco, all in support to the initial 9. Of the 27 Mapuche prisoners currently on hunger strike, 19 are on pre-trial detention and have not yet been convicted.

Machi Celestino Córdova is convicted for homicide as a result of arson and has still to serve 10 years in prison.

A decision from the Temuco Court of Appeals allows feeding machi Celestino Córdova even against his will or that of his family. At present such a decision has not yet been executed. He has clearly declared that he does not want to be fed, refusing treatment. This has raised a further concern that he may be force-fed against his will.

His defense filed a petition to the Temuco Court of Appeals to request approval so that he serves his sentence in his land for 6 months, which was denied. This was appealed before the Supreme Court, and a decision is pending.

The Chilean government has dodged their responsibility in this situation, stating that their demands cannot be met under current legislation and took a lot of time to publicly react to the situation. Recent statements from the Minister of Interior said that their main concern is to save Celestino Córdova's life, and seemed to open a possibility of dialogue, but also sparked further fears of a possible force-feeding.

Independent doctors from the Chilean Medical Association (Colegio Médico de Chile) visited machi Celestino Córdova on August 10, 2020, and informed that he is in critical condition and his death mesperaight be imminent. Machi Celestino Córdova has sent an audio message to his spokespeople, saying what he considers to be his farewell message.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Spanish, alternatively English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 25 August 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** machi Celestino Córdova Tránsito (he, him his)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr22/8251/2018/es/>