

09 May 2005

Mexico: Prisoner of Conscience must be released

Felipe Arreaga Sánchez, a local environmental activist in Petatlán, Guerrero State, was arrested on 3 November 2004 and charged with a murder committed in 1998.

He is in custody on trial. This is despite overwhelming evidence that the case against him was fabricated in reprisal for his role in the peaceful struggle against excessive logging of local forests, and to deter other environmental activists.

There have been many irregularities in the proceedings against him. Felipe's lawyers have provided evidence that he was somewhere else at the time of the crime. A key prosecution witness has testified in court that a judicial police official and a *cacique* (local political boss) had coerced him into implicating Felipe in the murder. Most recently, an eye witness to the crime fled to the USA reportedly to avoid appearing before court.

The imprisonment of Felipe is unjust and he is being prosecuted to prevent him and other activists from carrying out their legitimate work. His health has also deteriorated during his detention – he suffers from serious back problems.

Amnesty International has adopted Felipe Arreaga Sánchez as a **prisoner of conscience** and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

The new Governor of Guerrero State has recently committed to look into Felipe's case. However, no concrete action has been taken to end this injustice.

Take action!

Urge the authorities in Guerrero State to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of the environmental activist Felipe Arreaga Sánchez.

Dear Governor,

I am writing to you to express my deep concern about the imprisonment and prosecution of Felipe Arreaga Sánchez, a local environmental activist in Petatlán, Guerrero State.

As you already know, Felipe Arreaga Sánchez has been charged with a murder committed in 1998.

I am extremely concerned that criminal charges brought against him are a reprisal for his active role in protests against excessive and illegal logging of forests in Guerrero State and are intended to deter the legitimate activities of other environmental activists.

Overwhelming evidence shows that the case against Felipe Arreaga Sánchez has been fabricated. His lawyers have already provided proof that he was somewhere else at the time of the crime. A key prosecution witness in the case testified in court that he had been coerced into implicating Felipe Arreaga Sánchez in the murder. Also, an eye witness to the crime has fled to the USA reportedly to avoid appearing before court.

Despite this evidence, Felipe Arreaga Sánchez remains in custody on a trial which could result in conviction for a crime he did not commit.

Therefore as the new Governor of Guerrero I ask you to urgently:

- take all necessary steps to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Felipe Arreaga Sánchez and guarantee his safety and that of his family;

- ensure an independent and impartial review of the investigation conducted by judicial police and prosecutors in order to bring to justice those responsible for fabricating evidence and prosecuting Felipe Arreaga Sánchez;
- compensate Felipe Arreaga Sánchez for the malicious prosecution against him and his unwarranted detention;
- ensure a thorough and impartial investigation into the murder committed in 1998.

Yours sincerely,

Governor of Guerrero

Lic. Zeferino Torreblanca Galindo

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