

**WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL 

**BERNARDO CAAL XOL  
GUATEMALA**

**JAILED FOR DEFENDING  
A SACRED RIVER**





# WRITE FOR RIGHTS

## 20 YEARS OF WRITING LETTERS THAT CHANGE LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

Twenty years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. Over the following years, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to 4.5 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2020, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. Together, these individuals have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, freeing them from torture, harassment or unjust imprisonment.

This year's campaign channels this support towards people targeted for their peaceful activism, views or personal characteristics. This includes LGBTI activists, environmental defenders and peaceful protesters. These individuals have variously been beaten, jailed, shot at, harassed and intimidated. Through Write for Rights, they will receive individual messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. They and their families know that their situations are being brought to public attention and they are not forgotten.

Alongside the letter writing actions, Amnesty also speaks to those who have the power to change these people's situations, such as politicians in their



Amnesty International Taiwan letter writing event, December 2020.

countries. Write for Rights also gives visibility to these injustices through public events, and garners international attention on social media.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals, and other people and groups in a similar situation, by the country's authorities. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

■ Read about the people we're fighting for: [www.amnesty.org/writeforrights](http://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

■ Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [www.amnesty.org/countries](http://www.amnesty.org/countries)

■ Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R21

## BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity and any limitations. When participants want to take action on a case, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyze and question issues relating to the cases. This methodology allows participants to:

**DEVELOP** key competences and skills

**HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY** to form their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

**TAKE CONTROL** of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

**HAVE THE SPACE** required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.

■ If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

■ Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn>



## YOUR WORDS

## ARE POWERFUL



### ACTIVIST FREED IN SAUDI ARABIA

Nassima al-Sada, a campaigner for women's freedom, was arrested in 2018 for peacefully defending human rights. While in jail, guards beat her and banned everyone – even her lawyer – from visiting her. But thanks to supporters worldwide who wrote a massive 777,611 letters, tweets and more, Nassima walked free in June 2021, and is back with her family and friends.

### FATHER OF THREE REUNITED WITH FAMILY

In April 2018, NGO worker and human rights defender Germain Rukuki was found guilty of a slew of sham charges and sentenced to 32 years in prison in Burundi. He was jailed before getting a chance to hold his youngest child, born just weeks after he was arrested. His family fled the country for fear of reprisals. On 30 June 2021, Germain was finally freed and reunited with his family, thanks in part to the more than 436,000 actions calling for his release.



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### ONE STEP CLOSER TO JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Friends Popi Qwabe and Bongeka Phungula were murdered while heading for a night out in May 2017. Until recently, their families had been distressed by irregularities and delays in the police investigation. However, in March 2021, police revived the case after receiving 341,106 petition signatures from the families' supporters worldwide. The police have completed their investigation and handed over the case to the country's National Prosecuting Authority. "I feel optimistic," said Popi's sister Thembelihle. "I feel like finally, something is about to change."



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## ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



*Amnesty International Benin letter writing event, December 2020.*








## THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed that they are bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

# UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p><b>CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES</b> Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p><b>Article 1</b> Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p><b>Article 2</b> Non-discrimination</p> <p><b>Article 3</b> Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p><b>Article 4</b> Freedom from slavery</p> <p><b>Article 5</b> Freedom from torture</p>
 <p><b>LEGAL RIGHTS</b> Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p><b>Article 6</b> All are protected by the law</p> <p><b>Article 7</b> All are equal before the law</p> <p><b>Article 8</b> A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p><b>Article 9</b> No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p><b>Article 10</b> Right to a fair trial</p> <p><b>Article 11</b> Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p><b>Article 14</b> Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p><b>SOCIAL RIGHTS</b> Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p><b>Article 12</b> Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p><b>Article 13</b> Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p><b>Article 16</b> Right to marry and start a family</p> <p><b>Article 24</b> Right to rest and leisure</p> <p><b>Article 26</b> Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p><b>ECONOMIC RIGHTS</b> Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p><b>Article 15</b> Right to a nationality</p> <p><b>Article 17</b> Right to own property and possessions</p> <p><b>Article 22</b> Right to social security</p> <p><b>Article 23</b> Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p><b>Article 25</b> Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p><b>POLITICAL RIGHTS</b> Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion</p>	<p><b>Article 18</b> Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p><b>Article 19</b> Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p><b>Article 20</b> Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p><b>Article 21</b> Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p><b>CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS</b> Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p><b>Article 27</b> Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p><b>Article 28</b> Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p><b>Article 29</b> Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p><b>Article 30</b> No taking away any of these rights!</p>

## ACTIVITY

CRIMINALIZATION AND  
UNJUST IMPRISONMENT

## KEY CONCEPTS

- Criminalization and unjust imprisonment
- Human rights defenders
- Prisoners of conscience
- Indigenous peoples
- Environmental rights

## ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

This activity examines the work of people who defend territory, land and environmental rights, how they are often criminalized for their work, and specifically how this criminalization takes place in Guatemala. These issues are explained through the case of Bernardo Caal Xol. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write a letter to protest against the treatment of Bernardo and show solidarity with him.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **learn** how human rights defenders are criminalized in Guatemala;
- **understand** the concepts of criminalization and unjust imprisonment;
- **explain** how criminalization and unjust imprisonment relate to various human rights violations;
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign;
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Bernardo Caal Xol.

## 1. INTRODUCING BERNARDO

Optional warm-up exercise: Get participants to answer the two questions below, either quietly on their own or in a group discussion. If done as a personal reflection, ask some of them to share their answers with the group afterwards.

- Why do you think it is important to take care of the water, trees and natural resources in general around the world?
- List two things you do to take care of the planet.

Play the 2-minute video "The Story of Bernardo Caal" at <https://bit.ly/3uLdrXQ>

OR

Hand out **Bernardo's story** (page 15).

Ask participants for their first reactions upon seeing the video/reading the story.

- Who is Bernardo and why is he in prison?
- What happened?
- How are they feeling upon getting to know Bernardo's story?

AGE: 12+

## TIME NEEDED

60 minutes.

You may need additional time for the Take Action section.

## MATERIALS

- **Background information: Human Rights in Guatemala** (page 10)
- **Background information: Right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent** (page 11)
- **UDHR simplified version** (page 5)
- **Handout: Bernardo Caal's story** (page 15)
- **Handout: Sorting Exercise** (page 12-13)
- **Handout: Infographic** (page 14)
- Paper, pens, envelopes (if sending physical letters)
- Optional: Letter templates from [www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/](http://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/)
- Optional: Access to the video "The Story of Bernardo Caal" at <https://bit.ly/3uLdrXQ>

## PREPARATION

- Print and cut the **Sorting Exercise handout** for each group
- Print copies of the other handouts for each participant or group
- Optional: To learn more about Bernardo's case, take this short online course: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/211/criminalization-and-unjust-imprisonment-of-human-rights-defenders-bernardo-caal-in-guatemala>

## FOLLOW COVID-19 MEASURES

Be sure to comply with public health advice in your area during the Covid-19 pandemic. Conduct your activity in a way that ensures the safety of all participants and respects any necessary physical distancing measures.

If you are doing the activity online:

- **Choose** a platform that provides participation and interaction while being secure
- **Adapt** the activity to allow for relevant reflections and debriefing (in small groups)
- **Provide** technical support for participants to allow for good participation.



15 MINUTES

## 2. WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE AT STAKE?

We are now going to look at how Bernardo's story is connected to human rights and violations of human rights. Remind participants of the following statement:

*"It's the government's duty to protect, respect and guarantee our human rights. People have the right to demand a healthy environment, as a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is necessary for the full enjoyment of a vast range of human rights. This means that Bernardo, by defending the environment, is fighting for the protection of human rights. At the same time, now that he has been sent to prison unjustly, some of his own human rights have been violated."*

Divide the participants in smaller groups and give them the **Handout: Sorting Exercise** (page 12-13). Or you can write the different rights on a blackboard or flipchart. Ask them to identify and sort the rights into two categories:

**Category 1: The rights that Bernardo is defending for his community**

**Category 2: Bernardo's rights that have been violated by the authorities**

Each group should discuss how and why these rights apply. Afterwards, come back together and get feedback from the groups on their answers. You can use the following brief explainers in the plenary feedback.

### CATEGORY 1 THE RIGHTS THAT BERNARDO IS DEFENDING FOR HIS COMMUNITY

- Right to a healthy environment
- Right to water
- Right to food
- Right to an adequate standard of living
- Right to consultation and free, prior and informed consent

All of these rights are at stake because of possible harmful environmental interference when governments or companies exploit natural resources. If exploration or exploitation of natural resources occurs on Indigenous peoples' territory, they have the right to be consulted and to provide their free, prior and informed consent first. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is necessary for the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including access to water and food.

### CATEGORY 2 – BERNARDO'S RIGHTS THAT HAVE BEEN VIOLATED BY THE AUTHORITIES

- Right to a fair trial
- Right to liberty
- Right to be free from arbitrary detention
- Right to freedom of expression
- Right to defend human rights

As a defender of the rights of the Q'eqchi' people, Bernardo was criminalized for speaking out against the dam project and demanding a fair consultation and free, prior and informed consent. His treatment has prevented him from fully exercising his right to freedom of expression. Bernardo is now imprisoned without justification or any evidence that he committed a crime, which is an arbitrary detention. During his trial there was no proper investigation of the accusations against him, and he was convicted despite the lack of evidence against him.

## 3. EXPLORING THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Show the **Infographic** (page 14), which summarizes what governments do when they criminalize human rights defenders. Explain that, instead of criminalizing or attacking human rights defenders, or impeding justice for human rights defenders who have been attacked, governments should create a safe and enabling environment in which they can work without fear of reprisals. This includes creating tools to protect their rights.

Bernardo is being criminalized. Based on the information we have seen so far, what do participants think this means? You can pose this as an open-ended question, or quiz them by having participants pick the correct answers from the four options below.





**QUIZ. HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE CRIMINALIZED WHEN: (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)**

1. Others convince or trick them into committing a crime they didn't want to commit in the first place. (Incorrect)
2. **Authorities misuse the criminal justice system to discredit, silence, hamper or imprison those who defend human rights. For example, they may prosecute them and send them to prison based on forged evidence or an unfair trial. (Correct)**
3. They are caught breaking the law and engaging in criminal behaviour. For example, they break into government offices or companies to steal information or destroy contracts. (Incorrect)
4. **Authorities introduce or misuse laws to make certain legitimate behaviours, such as peaceful protest, into a crime. (Correct)**

Ask a few people to share why they chose that answer. Reveal the correct answers.

To reflect more on the topic, discuss the following questions with participants:

- What do you think the authorities should do, instead of criminalizing and attacking (or allowing this to happen to) people who defend human rights related to the land, the territory or the environment?
- What should the government do to protect Bernardo and other human rights defenders at risk in Guatemala?

Explain that the authorities or others sometimes criminalize people, movements or organizations in order to stop them from defending human rights. Then explain how in Guatemala it is very common for those who protect natural resources and the environment to be criminalized. Sometimes they are declared “enemies of development” and are even accused of “terrorism”. Point out that it is important that the government counteracts this, by publicly recognizing the important work of human rights defenders. The government should also make sure that public officials don't make statements that discredit human rights defenders or delegitimize their work, and that they do not misuse the law to silence them.







## 4. TAKE ACTION FOR BERNARDO CAAL XOL



Explain about Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to write letters to support Bernardo Caal Xol. Give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be.

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards, or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

■ If you have time, you can share this five minute introductory video about Write for Rights: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide>

### WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Attorney General of Guatemala using the following contact information.

- Tell the Attorney General something about yourself.
- Tell her what shocks you about Bernardo Caal Xol's case.
- Call on the Attorney General **to take all necessary steps to ensure all charges against Bernardo Caal Xol are dropped and that he is immediately and unconditionally released from prison, since there is no evidence against him.**
- Optional: You can use the letter template available in the letter-writing toolkit at: [www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/](http://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/)

**María Consuelo Porras Argueta,  
Attorney General of Guatemala / Fiscal General de Guatemala,  
Public Prosecutor's Office / Ministerio Público,  
15 Avenida A 15-16,  
Ciudad de Guatemala,  
Guatemala**

*(If sending physical letters, please use a courier company, otherwise send communications over email or social media)*

Salutation: Dear Attorney General

Twitter: @MPguatemala  
Facebook @mpguatemala  
Assistant's email: [carrecis@mp.gob.gt](mailto:carrecis@mp.gob.gt)

### SHOW SOLIDARITY

Encourage the participants to show solidarity with Bernardo by writing to him.

You can give the participants the following guidelines to help them write their letter to Bernardo.

- The letters need not be long: the aim is for Bernardo to feel that many people around the world are thinking about him and support his struggle.
- Please do not share any religious messages. This is to respect Bernardo's own wishes.
- Think about what Bernardo might want to hear at this difficult time.
- Express their solidarity, admiration, encouragement or anything else they feel towards him.

**Bernardo Caal Xol,  
Oficina Regional de Amnistía Internacional,  
Luz Saviñón 519,  
Colonia del Valle,  
Alcaldía Benito Juárez,  
03100, Ciudad de México,  
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Twitter: @BernardoCaal2  
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## HANDOUT

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## GLOSSARY

**Human rights defenders** are people who individually or collectively take peaceful action to defend, protect or promote human rights at the local, national or international level in cities as well as rural areas. A person who uses violence is not a human rights defender.

**Territory, land and environmental rights defenders** are human rights defenders who work to protect and promote the rights to territory, the environment and those linked to access to land. These include Indigenous and Afro-descendant people and communities seeking to have their territorial and other rights and their ancestral lands respected, protected, and guaranteed; peasant farmers who protect their access to land; and people and communities demanding respect for and protection of the environment and/or restitution and compensation for environmental damage in the areas where they live.

**A prisoner of conscience** is someone who has not used or advocated violence but is imprisoned because of who they are (their sexual orientation, ethnic, national or social origin, language, birth, colour, sex or economic status) or what they believe (their religious, political or other conscientiously held beliefs).

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN GUATEMALA

Guatemala is a country in Central America with about 17 million inhabitants, 40% of whom identify themselves as Indigenous. Indigenous people may be descended from peoples that existed before the arrival of other now dominant communities. Indigenous communities have their own livelihoods, language, culture, beliefs and specific social, economic and political systems, which are strongly linked to their land and its resources. They are strongly committed to maintaining these lands and resources for their descendants. Guatemala is home to 22 different Indigenous Mayan peoples. These include the Q'eqchi' people, who live mainly in the mountains of northern Guatemala, in an area called Alta Verapaz. There are about 1.4 million Q'eqchi' people in Guatemala.

## ATTACKS AND CRIMINALIZATION

Human rights defenders in Guatemala and worldwide, particularly those working on issues related to land, territory and the environment, face high levels of violence, stigmatization and attempts to discredit them. This can take the form of threats, intimidation and killings, as well as smear campaigns on social media. These attacks are the work of both state officials and private companies, who try to cast them as enemies of the state who are opposed to economic, political or social development. Many, like Bernardo, also face unfounded legal proceedings aimed at intimidating or harassing them and hindering their human rights work. The justice system is being misused to criminalize them, and criminal investigations against human rights defenders are often based on negative assumptions about what it means to be a community or Indigenous leader. These leaders are also sometimes blamed for the criminal actions of other people in their community or movement during protests and demonstrations.



*In the courtroom, Bernardo Caal, surrounded by the local press, gives a lecture on his legal situation and the alleged persecution of him as a community leader.*



## HANDOUT

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO FREE, PRIOR  
AND INFORMED CONSENT

The right of Indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent is protected in various obligations that Guatemala has signed up to, for example the International Labour Organization's Convention 169, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. According to these documents, in projects that involve an impact on the territory, livelihoods, or traditions of Indigenous peoples, the state must consult and cooperate with them in order to obtain their free, prior, and informed consent before access is granted or any work is carried out on Indigenous peoples' land. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples instructs in Article 32.2 that "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent".

The UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights are a set of guidelines for states and companies to prevent, address and remedy human rights abuses committed in business operations. They specify that companies should identify and assess any actual or potential adverse human rights impacts and that this process should "involve meaningful consultation with potentially affected groups and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate to the size of the business enterprise and the nature and context of the operation" (principle 18). States should simultaneously ensure that companies can be held to account for any business-related human rights abuses (principle 26).

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## HANDOUT

## SORTING EXERCISE



**THE RIGHTS BERNARDO IS  
DEFENDING FOR HIS COMMUNITY**



**RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT**

**RIGHT TO WATER**

**RIGHT TO FOOD**

**RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD  
OF LIVING**

**RIGHT TO CONSULTATION AND FREE,  
PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT**



## HANDOUT

## SORTING EXERCISE

**BERNARDO'S RIGHTS THAT HAVE  
BEEN VIOLATED BY THE STATE****RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL****RIGHT TO LIBERTY****RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM ARBITRARY  
DETENTION****RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION****RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS**

## HANDOUT

## INFOGRAPHIC

HOW GUATEMALA  
CRIMINALIZES  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
DEFENDERS IN 5 STEPS.

## STEP 1

Identify those who oppose or question large projects that use important natural resources on indigenous lands.



## STEP 2

Discredit and accuse these people of being criminals.



## STEP 3

Formally accuse them of having committed a crime.



## STEP 4

Keep the person in jail through questionable procedures and tactics.



## STEP 5

Repeat this process and label all the people who try to defend the land and the environment as criminals.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think the authorities should do, instead of criminalizing and attacking (or allowing this to happen to) people who defend the land?
- What should the government do to protect Bernardo and other human rights defenders?
- What can citizens do to support human rights defenders in Guatemala? In there anything you can do for Bernardo?



## HANDOUT

## BERNARDO CAAL XOL'S STORY

Bernardo Caal Xol (born 1972) is a teacher, a father, a trade unionist and defender of the rights of Indigenous Mayan Q'eqchi' (pronounced "kekchi") people. He is a territory, land and environmental rights defender who has been unfairly imprisoned for more than three years for defending the rights of Mayan Q'eqchi' communities affected by the construction of a hydroelectric project on the sacred Cahabón River in the department of Alta Verapaz, in northern Guatemala.

Since the beginning of 2015, Bernardo has shown his peaceful opposition to the Oxec I and II hydroelectric project. Bernardo and other leaders were chosen by 56 communities in Santa María Cahabón to represent their voices. They asked them to speak out against irregularities and possible human rights violations related to the project. The community also wanted to be consulted by the company in any decisions, something that was not happening.

In retaliation for his actions, Bernardo Caal Xol was subjected to smear campaigns and stigmatization in the press, on television, through flyers and on social media. The public prosecutor's office also opened a criminal investigation against Bernardo for alleged acts of violence that occurred on 15 October 2015 when Bernardo had travelled to the affected area for a meeting with the communities. As a consequence, on 30 January 2018, Bernardo was detained and sent to prison until his trial. Even though there is no objective evidence to support the charges, on 9 November 2018, the Cobán court sentenced him to seven years and four months in prison for the crimes of aggravated robbery and unlawful detention with aggravating circumstances.

Three weeks later Bernardo's lawyers filed an appeal, but the judges did not come to a ruling until two years later, rejecting it and therefore confirming his sentence. As a last resort, Bernardo's lawyers recently filed a cassation appeal with the Supreme Court of Justice. This could take years to be resolved. On 16 July 2020, Amnesty International called for his immediate release and declared him a prisoner of conscience.

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Top and middle: views of Cahabón. Bottom: Photos of Bernardo and his family.



# ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who take injustice personally. We are campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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