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Mexico: Decision to prosecute indigenous human rights defender condemned

Amnesty International has condemned the Mexican authorities' decision to pursue charges against human rights defender Raúl Hernández for a murder he did not commit, after a state prosecutor today decided to continue the case against him.

The State Attorney General's Office of Guerrero upheld murder charges against Raúl Hernández, despite unreliable and fabricated evidence. The judge presiding over the case is expected to decide on his innocence or guilt within days.

"The decision to pursue fabricated murder charges against Raúl Hernández is part of a systematic campaign by the Mexican authorities against members of this Indigenous community standing up in defence of their people's human rights" said Kerrie Howard, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Americas Programme.

Amnesty International has been campaigning for Raúl Hernández's release since November 2008 when he was adopted as a Prisoner of Conscience.

Raúl Hernández was wrongfully arrested and charged for the murder of Alejandro Feliciano Garcia on 1 January 2008 in the village of El Camalote, Guerrero State. However, eyewitness testimonies, stating that Raúl Hernández was not present at the time of the murder, were not taken into account.

During the criminal enquiry, the judge carried out an investigation of the crime scene, which confirmed that the eyewitness evidence, claiming that Raúl Hernández was present at the time of the murder, is unreliable and unfounded.

Amnesty International believes the case against Raúl Hernández has been brought by the authorities in reprisal for his legitimate activities promoting indigenous rights through the Me'phaa Indigenous Peoples Organisation (OPIM) and for exposing abuses committed by local political bosses, the military and the authorities.

The southern state of Guerrero is home to about 116,000 Me' phaa Indigenous People, and has one of the highest levels of marginalisation and some of the lowest indicators of human development in Mexico, according to local human rights organization Tlachinollan Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña.

OPIM was founded in 2002 to defend and promote the rights of the Me' phaa Indigenous People.

"Authorities have often misused the judicial system to punish those who promote respect for the rights of marginalized communities and dare to speak up about abuses. It is high time Raúl be released" said Kerrie Howard.

Amnesty International has documented a pattern of harassment and intimidation against members of Indigenous rights organizations in Guerrero state, such as the OPIM over a number of years.

Amnesty International activists all over the world have been campaigning for Raul's immediate and unconditional release, so he can continue his work defending the rights of his community.