

URGENT ACTION

DEFENDER REMAINS IN PROLONGED PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

Human rights defender and Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC) spokesperson Fidel Zavala has been held in pre-trial detention since 25 February 2025 in connection with his support for the La Floresta community. On 11 September 2026, the Fifth Court against Organized Crime extended the investigation phase until 25 August 2027. We call on the Salvadoran authorities to ensure an immediate, individualized review of his pre-trial detention, consider alternatives to detention, guarantee his safety and ensure that criminal proceedings are not used to punish legitimate human rights work.

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

Attorney General, Rodolfo Antonio Delgado Montes

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Dear General Attorney,

I am writing to express my concern about the continued pre-trial detention of human rights defender Fidel Zavala, spokesperson for the organization UNIDEHC, who has been detained since 25 February 2025 in connection with his support for the La Floresta community.

On 11 September 2026, the investigation phase in the La Floresta case was extended until 25 August 2027. If Fidel remains detained until then, he will have spent approximately two and a half years in pre-trial detention without conviction. This further prolongation raises serious concerns, given that pre-trial detention must remain an exceptional measure, and its necessity and proportionality must be regularly reviewed.

I am also concerned about Fidel's safety in detention. He previously denounced torture and other abuses in El Salvador's prison system, and Amnesty International has already raised concerns about the risk of reprisals against him. Authorities must ensure that he is not held or transferred to a place where these previous complaints could put his physical or psychological integrity at risk.

The proceedings have also affected other UNIDEHC members and leaders of the La Floresta community, raising broader concerns about the use of the criminal justice system against people engaged in legitimate human rights work.

I therefore urge the Salvadoran authorities to ensure an immediate, individualized and periodic review of Fidel Zavala's pre-trial detention and consider alternatives to detention; guarantee his physical and psychological integrity and that he is not exposed to reprisals; and ensure that all criminal proceedings against UNIDEHC members and La Floresta community leaders fully respect due process and are not used to obstruct or punish legitimate human rights work.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fidel Zavala is a human rights defender and spokesperson for the UNIDEHC. He was detained on 25 February 2025 in the context of a police operation linked to UNIDEHC's support for the La Floresta community, where more than 200 families were facing eviction and pursuing legal claims over land tenure. More than 20 community members were also detained. Fidel has not been convicted and remains in pre-trial detention.

On 11 September 2026, the Fifth Court against Organized Crime extended the investigation phase in the La Floresta proceedings until 25 August 2027, following the application of a reform to the Law Against Organized Crime. If Fidel and other defendants who remain detained were held until the end of this period, they would have spent approximately two and a half years or more in pre-trial detention without conviction.

The same judicial decision raised further concerns about Fidel's safety. According to the available information Fidel was transferred to the Second Sentencing Court of San Salvador on 10 April 2025 and was not subsequently returned to that prison. The court has requested information about his subsequent transfer and current location. According to Fidel's family, his non-return to La Esperanza was related to risks he faced because of complaints he had previously filed against prison staff. Amnesty International had already warned in April 2025 that his detention there could expose him to torture or other ill-treatment.

The proceedings have also affected UNIDEHC lawyers and spokespersons like Ivania Cruz and Rudy Joya, against whom arrest warrants and subsequently INTERPOL Red Notices were issued. These triggered police action and extradition proceedings in Spain. In November 2025, UN experts expressed concern about their cases in the context of [transnational repression against human rights defenders](#). The Red Notices were subsequently revoked, and both were [granted asylum in Spain in February 2026](#), although the criminal proceedings against them remain open in El Salvador.

On May 2025, UN Special Procedures also raised concerns about Fidel's alleged arbitrary detention and possible criminalization in retaliation for his human rights work. His case takes place in a broader context of restrictions on civic space in El Salvador and concerns regarding the criminalization of human rights defenders and community leaders. The Salvadoran government did not respond within the 60-day period before the communication was made public.

Fidel Zavala's case takes place in the broader context of restrictions on civic space in El Salvador and concerns surrounding the use of the criminal justice system against human rights defenders and community leaders. His continued detention, the prosecution of La Floresta community members and the proceedings against Ivania Cruz and Rudy Joya raise concerns about the potential chilling effect of criminal proceedings on legitimate human rights and community organizing.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 August 2027

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Fidel Zavala (he/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/0735/2026/en/>