

URGENT ACTION

DEFENDER IN PROLONGED PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

Fidel Zavala, spokesperson for the Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC), has been held in pre-trial detention since 25 February 2025 for supporting the community La Floresta from a forced eviction. The authorities had used several delay tactics that had prolonged his imprisonment and obtained an extension of the period of the investigation until March 2026. We call on the Attorney General to stop requesting further extensions of the investigation period.

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 Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC). Mr. Zavala has been held in pre-trial detention since 25 February 2025, after supporting the community of La Floresta against forced eviction.

The investigation phase has been extended until March 2026, prolonging his detention despite the exceptional nature of pre-trial detention under international human rights law and the presumption of innocence. There is a risk that further extensions could keep him in detention without conviction.

I am also concerned about reports regarding prison conditions and the regime to which Mr. Zavala may be subjected. Prolonged detention in restrictive conditions could seriously affect his physical and mental health and undermine his right to humane treatment.

Given his role as a human rights defender and his prior public denunciations of alleged torture and deaths in custody, I am concerned that his prosecution and prolonged detention may amount to retaliation for his legitimate human rights work and may have a chilling effect on other human rights defenders in El Salvador.

I respectfully call on you, as Attorney General, to immediately refrain from seeking further extensions of the investigation period and to urgently review the necessity and proportionality of Mr. Zavala's continued pre-trial detention.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fidel Zavala is a human rights defender and spokesperson for the Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC). On 25 February 2025, he was arrested during a raid on UNIDEHC's offices after supporting complaints linked to the La Floresta community, a group of more than 200 families in San Juan Opico facing eviction and pursuing legal claims over land tenure. More than 20 community leaders were also detained in the same operation.

Following his arrest, several criminal proceedings were initiated against him in 2025. In those related to aggravated fraud, courts ordered definitive dismissals or declared criminal action extinguished after conciliation agreements were reached, or responsibility was not established. He has not been convicted of any of these proceedings.

In the legal action related to La Floresta, he faces charges of unlawful association, illegal commercialization of land, plots, and unlawful practice of a profession. On 13 March 2025, the Fifth Court against Organized Crime ordered his pre-trial detention for six months. The investigation phase was later extended until March 2026. According to available information, the Office of the Attorney General has not carried out court-authorized anticipatory evidence of proceedings. This is currently the only detention order in force against him.

Concerns have been raised regarding inadequate detention conditions at the Isidro Menéndez judicial holding cells, including lack of access to water for several days. His family has reportedly covered his basic needs.

In the same context, arrest warrants were issued against UNIDEHC lawyers Ivania Cruz and Rudy Joya. In 2025, INTERPOL red notices were issued against them but were later revoked for violating Article 3 of INTERPOL's Constitution, which prohibits politically motivated interventions. Despite this, extradition proceedings were initiated in Spain. UN Special Procedures expressed concern that these actions could amount to transnational repression.

On 15 May 2025, UN Special Procedures sent an official communication to the Salvadoran state ([Ref. AL SLV 2/2025](#)) expressing concern about his alleged arbitrary detention and possible criminalization in retaliation for his human rights work. The communication was signed, among others, by the UN Special Rapporteur about human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor. [The Salvadorian government did not respond](#) within the 60-day deadline, and the letter was subsequently made public.

His case takes place within the context of the state of emergency in force since March 2022, under which national and international organizations have documented patterns of arbitrary detention and restrictions on civic space.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 20 May 2026.

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

NAME: Fidel Zavala (he/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/9301/2025/en/>