

URGENT ACTION

PARAGUAY: FREE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER

Vidal Brítez was detained on 26 March in Paso Yobái, Guairá as a reprisal for his defence of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The Prosecutor's Office is pursuing alleged acts of serious coercion for an incident in which he did not take part. We are urging the Prosecutor's Office to respect Mr Brítez's procedural guarantees, and drop the charges, resulting in his release.

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

Dr. Emiliano Rolón Fernández

Calle Chile y Avda. Ygatimi

Asunción - Paraguay

Email: comunicaciones@ministeriopublico.gov.py

Dear Dr. Rolón,

I write to you to express my deep concern for the detention and prosecution of Vidal Brítez on 26 March in Paso Yobái. He is a highly regarded leader, who has been defending the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and food for a long time, playing a critical role against pollution in Paso Yobái.

Amnesty International confirmed that the prosecution is related with an incident in which Mr. Brítez did not take part, indicating that his prosecution is nothing but a reprisal for his activism. Family members are concerned about the impact of the detention in his fragile health, given the asthma condition with which he lives.

According to the international law on human rights, all states are obliged to respect and protect the right to defend human rights. Criminalising Mr. Brítez breaches this obligation and creates a chilling effect for other defenders advocating for a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Furthermore, it's Paraguay's international obligation to respect procedural guarantees, and the right to a fair trial.

Therefore, I urge you to drop the charges against Mr. Brítez and respect the right to defend human rights in Paraguay.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Vidal Brítez Alcaraz is a 56-year-old Yerba mate producer and president of the Santa María's Association of Yerba Mate Producers in Paso Yobái. Mr Brítez has played a critical role in fighting for healthy food and denouncing the environmental pollution from mining activities in the region. Paso Yobái, a district located in the department of Guairá, central eastern region of Paraguay, is an area of gold mining exploitation, with transnational mining companies operating in the territory, such as the Latin American Minerals Paraguay Lampa SA and CEMA SA. In 2022, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Marcos Orellana, conducted a mission to Paraguay and specifically [verified the situation](#) in Paso Yobái, noting that "the use of mercury and cyanide in gold mining is causing serious environmental impacts."

This has affected the production of *yerba mate*, a national emblem of Paraguay. *Yerba mate* producers [have denounced](#) the contamination and the negative economic impact they have suffered with the loss of markets for their production. *Yerba mate* producers have filed several criminal complaints for environmental crimes with the regional prosecutor's office in Villarrica, although they have not had results in terms of stopping illegal and polluting practices.

In this context of tension in the locality, on 10 January 2025, [a clash occurred between residents](#). A local resident, dedicated to gold mining, obtained through a precautionary judicial proceeding a court order granting her an easement through the property of another neighbour, a yerba mate producer, opposed to illegal mining activities.

With the assistance of the National Police, trucks loaded with mining waste were forced into the property of the yerba mate producer, in compliance with the precautionary order. The incident resulted in a clash between the residents, mining workers on one side and yerba producers on the other, who allegedly threw stones with slingshots. As a result of this incident, the Public Ministry opened a criminal case in which six members of the Yerba Producers Association were charged, including Mr. Vidal Britez, who was not present at the scene. At that time, he was at his home, with his work staff, located about 5 km from the location where the incident took place.

Vidal's relatives expressed concern about the impact of the detention on the defender's health, given his asthma condition. They believe that the stress associated with detention and poor care can seriously affect him.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 15 May 2025.

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Vidal Brítez (He/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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