

# URGENT ACTION

## Activist at risk of torture

Fidel Zavala, spokesperson for the Unidad De Defensa De Derechos Humanos Y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC), detained since February 2025, was transferred to Mariona prison on 2 April 2025. He is currently held by guards who he previously denounced for torture and other ill-treatment of people in detention, which puts his life and personal integrity at imminent risk. Zavala's detention took place after a raid by authorities that included the search of UNIDEHC's headquarters and the arrest of more than 20 community leaders. We urge the authorities to guarantee Fidel's and all community leaders' physical and psychological integrity and their right to a fair trial.

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

**President of the Republic, Nayib Bukele**

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Mr. Nayib Bukele,

*I am writing to express my deep concern about **Fidel Zavala**, spokesperson for the Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC), and his recent transfer to Mariona prison. His detention appears to be a direct act of retaliation for his work documenting and denouncing torture and other ill-treatment, deaths, and other abuses in prisons under the national state of emergency. Zavala's testimony has been crucial in exposing these violations, raising serious concerns that his arrest is intended to silence his work and discourage further reporting of state abuses. His recent move to Mariona prison places his life and personal integrity at imminent risk, as he is currently held by guards who he previously denounced for torture and other ill-treatment of people in detention.*

*As you will be aware, UNIDEHC has played a key role in exposing serious human rights violations, particularly those linked to the state of emergency. According to available information, Zavala was arrested shortly after UNIDEHC supported a complaint before the Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos regarding the detention of community leaders from La Floresta, who have been fighting against the forced eviction from their lands.*

*In addition to the detention of Zavala and a raid on the UNIDEHC offices, more than 20 more individuals from La Floresta have reportedly been detained, heightening concerns about increasing repression against those advocating for land rights and community organizing. An alarming series of events, as they appear to be part of a broader strategy to criminalize human rights defenders in the country.*

*Given the gravity of this situation, I urge you to:*

- *Take immediate action to ensure the personal integrity and fair trial rights of Fidel Zavala and all individuals detained after the raid on UNIDEHC's headquarters.*
- *Make sure that their detention conditions are humane and comply with international human rights law and standards, including the Nelson Mandela Rules.*
- *Move Zavala to another place of custody without guards he has previously denounced for torture and other ill-treatment and deaths in detention centers.*

*Furthermore, I strongly urge you to take all necessary measures to ensure that human rights defenders, community leaders, and civil society organizations can carry out their work without fear of reprisals. This includes ending the misuse of criminal law to persecute and criminalize the defense of human rights.*

*Sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fidel Zavala was recently transferred, on 2 April 2025, to Mariona prison, a prison notorious for its torture practices in the 1980s, practices which are being revived in recent years under the State of Emergency. Fidel Zavala has publicly and formally denounced guards at that same prison for torturing and ill-treating inmates. Him being moved to that same prison, puts his life and personal integrity at immediate risk.

Fidel Zavala, spokesperson for the Unidad de Defensa de Derechos Humanos y Comunitarios (UNIDEHC), has played a crucial role in exposing human rights violations within Salvadoran penitentiary centers. In 2024, [he filed a formal complaint against prison authorities](#), including Osiris Luna, the Director General of Prisons, for torture and other abuses committed under the state of emergency.

The community of "La Floresta," located in San Juan Opico, La Libertad, [has been facing eviction threats that could displace over a hundred families](#), many of whom have lived in the area for more than a decade. UNIDEHC has provided legal support to the community in its struggle for land and territorial rights. Currently, the detained community leaders are being prosecuted on charges such as "illicit associations" and other offenses related to their community work. The defense argues that these accusations are unfounded and that the leaders' activities were aimed at legalizing land tenure through established legal processes. [On March 14, 2025](#), the Fifth Court against Organized Crime of San Salvador ordered formal proceedings with six months of provisional detention for Fidel Zavala and all 23 La Floresta's detainees.

The detention of Fidel Zavala and more than 20 community leaders from "La Floresta" is part of [a broader context of escalating state repression](#) against human rights defenders and activists in El Salvador. Since the implementation of the state of emergency in March 2022, authorities have adopted measures that reflect a widespread pattern of state abuse, including thousands of arbitrary detentions, the systematic use of torture and other ill-treatment in detention centers, and hundreds of deaths in state custody.

Since his arrest for alleged "membership of an illicit group", two more charges have been brought against him, both for alleged fraud. One of the recent charges dates back to a case brought against him in 2023 for which he served one year in prison before being acquitted, but which the public prosecutor seeks to be reponed. Amnesty International has not been able to assess the new charges brought against him.

Amnesty International has documented an [increase in state actions](#) that undermine freedom of expression and association, alongside restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly, public participation, and access to public information. The current situation in El Salvador reflects a disturbing trend toward the repression of critical voices and the erosion of civic space, placing at risk the essential work of human rights defenders and their efforts to build a more just and inclusive society.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Spanish. You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 7 June 2025.** Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline

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

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/9100/2025/en/>

## ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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