

17 December 2020

Colombia: Arbitrary detention against peasant human rights defender Teófilo Acuña

On 15 December 2020, peasant human rights defender **Teófilo Acuña** was arbitrarily detained by police officers in the municipality of Barranco de Loba in the department of Bolívar.

[Teófilo Acuña](#) is a defender of the rights of peasant communities, who throughout his life has exercised widely recognised social leadership in the departments of Cesar, Magdalena and Santander. He is the spokesperson and co-founder of [Congreso de los Pueblos](#), the [National Agrarian Coordinator – CNA](#) and coordinator of [Cumbre Agraria, Campesina, Étnica y Popular – CACEP](#), all of which are organisations that promote peasant rights. Teófilo Acuña also founded and served as the leader of the [Federación Agrominera del Sur de Bolívar - FEDEAGROMISBOL](#), where he represented thousands of peasants who depend on agriculture and small-scale gold mining. Since 2005, Teófilo Acuña has been leading the dialogue between the National Government and the productive and social sector to agree on rural development planning.

At around 4:45 pm on 15 December 2020, Teófilo Acuña was arbitrarily detained in a police operation at the entrance to the municipality of Barranco de Loba Sur Bolívar, while he was on his way to participate in a workshop with the Development and Peace Program of Magdalena. The arrest warrant, requested by the Prosecutor's Office 174 of Santa Marta which specialises in criminal organisations, links Teófilo Acuña to an investigation for the fabricated crime of "Aggravated rebellion. Teófilo Acuña's detention comes after the Congreso de los Pueblos has presented several complaints to the authorities regarding the arbitrary prosecutions and judicial harassment against members of agricultural social movements.

The arbitrary detention of Teófilo Acuña is just the latest in a series of judicial harassments against the defender and forms part of a constant and growing trend. On 26 April 2007, when the defender was representing the FEDEAGROMISBOL, he was [arbitrarily detained](#) by members of the Nueva Granada anti-aircraft battalion of the V Brigade of the Colombian Army at the FEDEAGROMISBOL office in the urban area of Santa Rosa south of the Bolívar department. Prior to his arrest, the defender was on his way to a meeting with representatives of the national departmental and municipal governments and leaders of southern Bolívar, all of whom are members of the development planning negotiations. The process against Teófilo Acuña for the alleged charge of "aggravated rebellion" was dismissed by the 28th Simití Sectional Prosecutor in the [absence of probative grounds](#).

The detention of Teófilo Acuña is not an isolated case. Front Line Defenders has [previously denounced](#) arbitrary detentions of other members of Congreso de los Pueblos. In the last two days, within the framework of the recent complaints filed by Congreso de los Pueblos, two other defenders affiliated to the organisation have been arbitrarily detained. In the early morning of 16 December 2020, the National Police, the Prosecutor's Office and the SIJIN, detained human rights defender [Rober Daza Guevara](#) in the municipality of San Pablo, department of Nariño. The human rights defender is also the spokesperson at CIMA and the CNA. Furthermore, on 15 December 2020, [Adelso José Gallo](#), member of CNA and a recognised defender of the peasant community, was detained in Villavicencio, Meta. The three defenders are spokespersons in the dialogue with the National Government within the framework of Decree 870 of 2016 between CACEP and the national government, and are being linked by the Prosecutor's Office 174 of Santa Marta to an investigation for the fabricated crime of "aggravated rebellion".

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned at the series of judicial harassments against Teófilo Acuña, as well as other human rights defenders of the peasant communities, as it believes that

their arbitrary detentions are part of a broader strategy of intimidation against human rights defenders which seeks to discourage their legitimate work in Colombia.

Front Line Defenders urges the Colombian authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Teófilo Acuña and drop all charges against him as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the systematic judicial harassment against Teófilo Acuña, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Teófilo Acuña as well as of the members of Congreso de los Pueblos in constant consultation with them;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Colombia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.