

28 January 2020

## Guatemala: Indigenous human rights defender Julio Gómez Lucas detained

On 26 January 2020, indigenous peoples' rights defender **Julio Gómez Lucas** was detained by police in the municipality of Chiantla, department of Huehuetenango. He is accused of incitement to commit crimes, participation in illegal gatherings and protests, and illegal gatherings of armed persons, assault as well as attempted murder.

[Julio Gómez Lucas](#) is a human rights defender, leader of the Maya Chuj community of San Mateo Ixtatán, and member of Resistencia Pacífica de la Microregión de Ixquisis (Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis), a community movement defending human rights which was formed in response to grave rights violations committed in the name of economic development in Guatemala. The Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis was the [2018 regional winner](#) of the Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

On the afternoon of 26 January 2020, agents of the Specialised Criminal Investigation Division (DEIC) of the National Police detained Julio Gómez Lucas near the entrance to the municipality of Chiantla, department of Huehuetenango. The police followed the truck of the human rights defender before forcing him to stop. They stated that they had heard gunshots in the area and wanted to search his vehicle. He was then detained and transferred to a local DEIC office, without being shown an arrest warrant. The previous day the president of the municipality of San Mateo Ixtatán had visited the area to announce the establishment of a Public Ministry headquarters and a Court in indigenous territory where the presence of the State is not welcomed. The president was also there to show his support for the so-called 'Agreement of Peace and Development of San Mateo Ixtatán'.

On the evening of 26 January, Julio Gómez Lucas was presented before a judge in Chiantla, who informed him that an arrest warrant had been issued against him on 19 June 2018 by Alberto Calmo Ramírez, a judge of the court of first instance specialising in drug and environmental crimes in the municipality of Santa Eulalia, department of Huehuetenango.

At around 4am, Julio Gómez Lucas was transferred to the Centre for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) in Santa Eulalia. On 27 January, the defender was transferred back to the local prison in the city of Huehuetenango.

Julio Gómez Lucas has previously been subjected to attacks as a result of his peaceful human rights activities. In February 2019, he and six of his family members were [kidnapped and tortured](#) by residents of the neighbouring indigenous community of Tz'ununkab, in retaliation for his opposition to a local hydroelectric project. Front Line Defenders has previously denounced the escalation of attacks against the Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis, who have been subjected to killings, [threats, smear campaigns](#) and an [armed attack](#) by the national police force.

Front Line Defenders is concerned by the detention of and charges against Julio Gómez Lucas, which appear to be an act of retaliation for his peaceful activities in defence of indigenous rights. Front Line Defenders further condemns the police violence, threats and killings of members of the Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis, and reiterates its calls on the local and national

authorities to provide the human rights defenders with adequate protection and ensure their physical and psychological integrity, especially given the growing levels of violence in the region.

**Front Line Defenders urges authorities in Guatemala to:**

1. Drop the charges against Julio Gómez Lucas and immediately release him from detention;
2. Initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the false allegations made against human rights defender Julio Gómez Lucas, in order to guarantee his protection and release, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the protection of the members of Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis, guaranteeing their security and physical and psychological integrity;
4. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Huehuetenango and Guatemala are able to conduct their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities without restrictions and free from harassment, threats and retaliation.