

06 June 2019

Mexico: Cristobal Sánchez and Irineo Mujica detained on fabricated charges

On 5 June 2019, migrant rights defenders **Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez** and **Irineo Mujica** were unfairly detained in Mexico City and Sonora, respectively, on fabricated charges of human smuggling.

[Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez](#) is a Mexican human rights defender who has worked on migration issues for the past 15 years. He founded the Migrant Culture Collective, where he assists the passing migrant caravans in accessing humanitarian aid such as shelters. He has also collaborated with the Iberoamerican University in Mexico City and the University of Columbia in New York on academic research projects related to migration.

[Irineo Mujica](#) has defended human rights for more than fifteen years, promoting migrants' rights and immigration reforms in both Mexico and the United States. He is the director of Pueblo Sin Fronteras in Mexico, an organisation working in Mexico and the US to promote and protect the rights of migrants. He has also founded seven migrant shelters in Mexico, documented human rights abuses committed against migrants by the authorities and organised crime, and accompanied a number of migrant caravans.

On 5 June 2019, around 3pm, Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez was detained at gunpoint by six men in plain clothes who identified themselves as members of the Judicial Police. He was not presented with an arrest warrant. The detention took place outside his house in Xochimilco, Mexico City. This is not the first time Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez has been detained due to his human rights work. In 2011, he was detained in Tapachula when documenting human rights violations against migrants, and in [February 2019](#), when assisting a migrants caravan in Mexico City.

On the same day, around 2pm, Irineo Mujica was also detained when leaving his family business near the Mexican border with the United States in Sonoyta, Sonora. He was handcuffed by three police officers in plain clothes, who forced him to walk around the block restrained. The human rights defender was later taken to Hermosillo, Sonora, which is nearly 430 kilometres away.

Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez and Irineo Mujica are expected to be transported anytime to a detention center in Tapachula, Chiapas, close to the Southern border of Mexico with Guatemala, to be tried by the Federal Criminal Justice Center of the State of Chiapas, where charges were made against them. Their arbitrary detention and fabricated charges of human smuggling are closely linked to a smear campaign against the work of human rights defenders who provide humanitarian assistance to migrants.

On recent occasions, Irineo Mujica and members of Pueblo Sin Fronteras have received a number of death threats via phone calls, text messages and social media. Irineo Mujica has also suffered an attempted arson attack on his house and vehicle, and has been unjustly arrested and detained while denouncing police abuse and participating in peaceful protests. He has been the target of death threats and intense criminalisation campaigns by both Mexican and United States authorities, including being listed in a [secret database](#) forming part of a joint surveillance effort by the United States and Mexican authorities against journalists and human rights defenders working on migration issues. As a result of the harassment he has been facing, Irineo Mujica has been admitted into Mexico's Mechanism of Protection for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

Front Line Defenders remains extremely concerned about the detention, criminalisation and harassment of Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez and Irineo Mujica, as they are believed to be solely motivated by their peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders also condemns the increased targeting of human rights defenders and organisations assisting migrants in Mexico.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez and Irineo Mujica, as it believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Drop all charges against Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez and Irineo Mujica, and cease any further judicial harassment against them;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security, and integrity of Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez and Irineo Mujica;
4. Ensure that the treatment of Cristóbal Sánchez Sánchez and Irineo Mujica, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
5. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats and arson attack against Irineo Mujica, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
6. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Mexico, especially those protecting the rights of migrants, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including police and judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (2): *"The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director