

29 October 2019

Bolivia: Human rights defender Waldo Albarracín subject to police brutality

On 21 October 2019, human rights defender Waldo Albarracín was attacked with tear gas sprayed directly to the face, then received a blow to the head with the same gas cannister. These attacks took place as the human rights defender was protesting peacefully for electoral rights in Bolivia.

[Waldo Albarracín Sánchez](#) is a well established and widely recognised human rights defender in Bolivia. He was the President of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights of Bolivia (APDHB) from 1992 to 2003 and the Bolivian Ombudsman from 2004 to 2010. He is the current Rector of Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in La Paz and President of the National Committee for the Defence of Democracy (CONADE), a civil platform defending political rights.

During the Bolivian elections of 20 October 2019, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) decided to suspend the provisional vote counting system. Subsequently, on 21 October 2019, the Electoral Tribunal resumed the official count, which raised suspicions among civil society groups and sections of the population. As human rights groups began a peaceful vigil outside the premises of the TSE, the police used physical violence to disperse the crowd. In response, Waldo Albarracín and other members of civil society stood their ground and were subsequently attacked with tear gas. Waldo Albarracín received a blow from a gas cannister, causing a mild concussion which incapacitated him for 14 days. Subsequently, he received several insulting and defamatory attacks on social networks.

This is not the first time that Waldo Albarracín has been attacked and received threats because of his work holding the government to account. During his mandate as Ombudsman, he vigorously defended the rights of indigenous peoples and the proper functioning of democracy, denouncing various human rights violations in Bolivia. For this reason, he has been the subject of smear campaigns carried out by high-ranking government authorities, including the current president, Evo Morales, who, during a press conference in 2018, described Waldo Albarracín as ["resentful" and "aligned with the right"](#).

Front Line Defenders condemns the attack on human rights defender Waldo Albarracín for exercising his right to freedom of expression and association. Front Line Defenders also expresses concern about the use of police violence in response to peaceful protests against the electoral system in Bolivia.

Front Line Defenders urges the Bolivian authorities to

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack on Waldo Albarracín, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Immediately take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and safety of Waldo Albarracín, in coordination with him;
3. Refrain from making defamatory statements against human rights defenders in Bolivia;

4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bolivia can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and without restrictions of any kind.