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Mexico: Human rights defender Cirio Ruiz González arbitrarily detained

On 26 May 2023, human rights defender **Cirio Ruiz González** was arbitrarily detained by the Ministerial Police in the State of Veracruz, Mexico, following accusations by the United Agro Industries of Mexico (AMSA) company that he was allegedly responsible for a fire in one of the company's warehouses in January 2022.

[Cirio Ruiz González](#) is a human rights defender and President of the Regional Council of Coffee in Coatepec, in the State of Veracruz, Mexico. He has been working for more than 40 years as a leader of workers in the coffee sector and has been advocating for the fair trade and fair prices of quality coffee to support labour rights of coffee workers.

The human rights defender Cirio Ruiz González was arrested by the Ministerial Police on the order of the Office of the General Prosecutor of the State of Veracruz when he was working on his farm in the area of Chavarrillo. He has been accused of causing a fire in the warehouse of the United Agro Industries of Mexico (AMSA) company, based in the municipality of Ixhuatlán del Café. The fire occurred on 24 January 2022, during a protest in which Cirio Ruiz González, along with other affected coffee producers, were denouncing the unfair prices in the coffee trade.

In addition to the arrest of the human rights defender Cirio Ruiz González, the former Municipal President of Ixhuatlán del Café, Viridiana Bretón Feito, and three other coffee workers were also arrested. The detainees were taken by strongly armed forces to the La Toma prison in Amatlán, near Córdoba, on 26 May 2023, in high security conditions. On 26 May 2023, they were also taken to the city of Huatusco to give their statements to the authorities. It has also been confirmed that there are four more arrest warrants pending for other coffee workers in the area. On 31 May, at a Court hearing in Huatusco, Veracruz, the judge did not accept the evidence presented by Cirio Ruiz González, which proved that he was elsewhere at the time of the fire. The judge has ordered preventive detention and has sent all the accused workers to trial, without listening to the witnesses that were present.

Various coffee workers have gathered to protest against the arbitrary detention of the human rights defender Cirio Ruiz González due to the AMSA's accusations and have announced their intent to file a criminal complaint against the company on the charge of criminal association.

The detention of Cirio Ruiz González is a result of the criminal charges brought against him by the AMSA. On 24 January 2022, the human rights defender was protesting against the reduction of the price per kilo of cherry coffee from 17 (0.97 USD) to as low as 11 Mexican pesos (0.63 USD) by the AMSA and other companies in front of the Municipal Palace of Ixhuatlán del Café; and later on, the AMSA's warehouse fire happened. The human rights defender, alongside the Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones

Cafetaleras A.C. and the majority of the region's population, has alleged that the fire was started by the company itself with the objective of causing the National Guard to enter and disperse the protesters.

Cirio Ruiz González and other human rights defenders and coffee workers have complained about AMSA's practices in the purchase prices of coffee, which they perceived as putting at risk coffee growers' traditional activities and livelihood, as well as the sustainable practices of shade coffee cultivation that have allowed the conservation of the forest in the area.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the acts of criminalisation and stigmatisation of Cirio Ruiz González and coffee workers in the State of Veracruz, as it believes these are linked to their legitimate and peaceful activity in defence of human rights and the environment. Front Line Defenders reiterates its call for the authorities in Mexico to adopt and implement effective mechanisms and policies that recognise the valuable contribution of the work of human rights defenders to Mexican society. The organisation also recalls the government's obligation to guarantee the personal integrity of all human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mexico to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Cirio Ruiz González as it believes that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Cirio Ruiz González;
3. Initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the false accusations and defamatory statements against the human rights defender Cirio Ruiz González;
4. Guarantee that all human rights defenders, including coffee workers and those exercising their right to peaceful demonstration in Mexico, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.