

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AMR 41/1058/2015
23 February 2015

Mexico: Amnesty International concerned over the arbitrary detention of Pedro Canché, Mayan journalist from Quintana Roo

Pedro Canché Herrera, a Mayan journalist, was detained on 30 August 2014 for the alleged crime of sabotage, in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. His case will be reviewed soon by a federal judge to assess the charges that led to his detention. Amnesty International is concerned his detention responds solely to his journalistic work and the exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Pedro Canché was arrested days after publishing footage of a protest by citizens of the municipality of Felipe Carrillo Puerto outside the office of the local water board over increased rates and charges. Pedro has remained for over six months in a municipal prison awaiting sentencing. He has been pointed out by local authorities as the leader of the protest and for inciting others to block the entrance to the local authorities' offices.

Amnesty International is concerned that the criminal justice system is being used to prosecute journalists who are critical of the government. Given the broad interpretation invited by the wording of the offence of 'sabotage' provided in Article 204 of Quintana Roo's criminal code, it is worrying that authorities may use it in an arbitrary manner. The organization has reason to believe that there were arbitrary elements employed by the prosecutor in relation to the charges laid against Pedro Canché Herrera, due to his journalistic activity. These included oversights and irregularities in the criminal investigation and a committal order that lacked sufficient evidence.

According to Pedro Canche's lawyers, the evidence presented by the public prosecutor lacks firm statements to prove he was directly responsible for erecting the blockade outside the water board. The only photographic evidence of the protest shows Pedro taking photos of the event.

The organization is concerned by public declarations from officials from the state of Quintana Roo publicly denying that Pedro is a journalist. In addition, the state's General Attorney has publicly accused him of paying protestors to block the premises of the water board.

Pedro Canche's journalistic work dates back over two decades and is well known

in the state of Quintana Roo, formerly as the editor of print magazines, as well as his current work through freelance and electronic media.

Amnesty International has received worrying information regarding Pedro's health during his time of imprisonment, including delayed medical attention in relation to injuries that appear to have been sustained during the process of his detention. Amnesty International emphasizes the responsibility of state authorities to ensure the health and wellbeing of those under their custody.

Amnesty International considers that Pedro Canché was arbitrarily detained due to his work as a journalist. For this reason, the organization demands that the criminalization against Pedro Canché cease and that any decision taken on this case acknowledges the arbitrary nature of the judicial process.