

His Excellency Bernardo Arévalo
President of the Republic of Guatemala
Casa Presidencial de Guatemala
A, 6A Avenida 4-18, Ciudad de Guatemala
GUATEMALA

July 16, 2024

Dear President Arévalo:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are deeply distressed that award-winning anti-corruption journalist **José Rubén Zamora** remains in prison even though a judge ordered him to house arrest in May 2024. On June 25, the Second Chamber of the Court of Appeals used a procedural formality to grant prosecutors' request to overturn the order, so Zamora will have to remain in detention, where he has been reported to be subjected to solitary confinement and torture. At their awards ceremony in Bogotá on July 5, the Gabo Foundation presented Zamora (in absentia) the 2024 Recognition of Excellence for his tireless fight to "reveal corruption and human rights abuses."

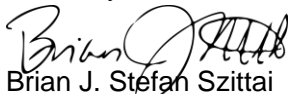
On July 29, 2022, Zamora was arrested on charges (including money laundering, blackmail, and influence peddling) based on a single complaint filed by a former banker who is under investigation for financial crimes. His arrest came five days after local media outlets published strong criticism of various officials of the administration of President Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei Falla involved in corruption. (It is worth noting that on January 17, 2024, the US State Department reported that it "has credible information indicating that Giammattei accepted bribes in exchange for the performance of his public functions during his tenure as president of Guatemala, actions that undermined the rule of law and government transparency." As a consequence, the State Department designated Giammattei "as generally ineligible for entry into the United States due to his involvement in significant corruption.")

The arrest of José Rubén Zamora is part of an intensifying pattern of persecution and criminalization of those working for justice in Guatemala. It is a grave abuse of the criminal justice system to target journalists and public prosecutors who investigate corruption to uphold the rule of law. The judge who ordered the imprisonment of Zamora two years ago said it was because of his work at the newspaper El Periódico, which specialized in anti-corruption reporting. After his arrest in 2022, the assets of the newspaper were frozen, and the newspaper could no longer sustain itself financially. The media outlet, founded by Zamora in 1996, had to close in May 2023.

Because of our concern for the life, freedom, and work of José Rubén Zamora and the freedom of all members of the press, we call upon your integrity and humanity to:

- carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into the charges and imprisonment of José Ruben Zamora and publish the results
- work for the immediate release of José Ruben Zamora while these investigations continue
- provide José Ruben Zamora with protective measures to safeguard his life and work

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai

Co-coordinators


Christine Stonebraker Martinez

copies: Lic. José Alejandro Córdova Herrera, Procurador de los Derechos Humanos ~ via email
Licda. María Consuelo Porras Argueta, Fiscal General de la República ~ via email
Hugo Beteta, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ email, US mail
IACHR: Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Guatemala), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
OACNUDH: Mika Kanervavuori, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (UN) ~ via email
US State Department: Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC ~ via email
US State Department: William Popp, US Ambassador to Guatemala, in care of Angela Melton ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

02 JUL 2024_EIPais_Guatemala

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: