

## PUBLIC STATEMENT ON GUATEMALA

### Past Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression on UN and OAS

#### demand the immediate release of José Rubén Zamora

*Latin America, June 28, 2023* As Defenders of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression and as Past Special Rapporteurs of the UN Human Rights Council and of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) , we believe that it is our duty to raise our voices and publicly denounce as an extremely serious violation to the right of an independent and free press with the recent Guatemalan Court decision that condemns Mr. Jose Rubén Zamora to six years in prison for supposed criminal charges.

Mr. Zamora, President and Founder of elPeriódico, promoted investigative journalism, access to public information, and transparency in Guatemala. The daily journal ElPeriodico is considered one of the most critical voices shining a light on corruption scandals and manipulation of the justice system by the current authorities.

None of the criminal charges against Zamora were proven in Court. Furthermore, all of his defense lawyers also suffered criminal persecution and initially were jailed and are still subject to trial.

The prosecutor has appealed the Court's verdict on six years sentence requesting a term of forty years for the journalist. According to him, the fact that Mr. Zamora made critical statements about himself, as Special Prosecutor, and of the Attorney General was an "offense toward state authorities". This is reminiscent of past times when criminal courts would establish the crime of contempt as an offense to the authorities.

In addition, to amplify the chilling effect, six journalists and three columnists of elPeriódico have been put under criminal investigation for writing about Mr. Zamora's trial, under charges of "creating obstacles to the justice system".

We must severely question the Public Ministry's policies and the general attitude of prosecuting and harassing journalists based on their investigations and publications that allow Guatemalan citizen access to information. These intimidation acts happen in the midst of general elections and severely erodes the credibility and legitimacy of the whole electoral process.

We call upon all those who believe that freedom of expression and, in particular, freedom of the press is essential for a true democracy and as well as the exercise of a fundamental Human Right to raise your voices requesting the State of Guatemala cease all prosecution of journalists and social communicators, especially community journalists in rural areas and immediately release José Rubén Zamora.

**Signed by:**

**Ex Rapporteurs of Freedom of Expression**

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