

via fax 011 52 55 5093 4901 Estimado Señor Presidente Enrique Peña Nieto President of the Republic of Mexico	via fax: 011 52 55 5346 0908 Estimada Señora Procuradora Arely Gómez González Attorney General of Mexico
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May 1, 2015

Dear Sir and Madam:

We are very concerned about the continued detention of **Pedro Celestino Canché Herrera**, an independent Mayan journalist, who has been in prison since August 30, 2014 in the town of Felipe Carrillo Puerto in the state of Quintana Roo.

He was arrested for allegedly sabotaging the local water supply. The local manager of the Quintana Roo State water and sewage commission accused Canché of personally directing protesters to block access to the commission's headquarters during a demonstration on August 11, 2014 against increased water bills in the state. Canché denied the allegations and said he had witnesses and evidence that placed him in the city of Cancún on August 11.

Canché has reported on and advocated for many years for local Mayan causes, worked in small local publications, and was an important source for journalists working in the region. A few days before his arrest, he published photos of local protests against water tariff hikes and a video in which he was critical of the governor's policies toward the Mayan population.

In February, Reynaldo Piñón Rangel, the Sixth District Judge of Quintana Roo, ruled that Canché's right to due process had been violated. He said there was no conclusive evidence that sabotage had occurred or that Canché was even present on the days that the events described in the charges were alleged to have happened. However, the judge did not release Canché. He ordered the lower court judge, who had upheld a previous challenge to Canche's imprisonment, to review the case again. Canché's lawyer and the state water commission have both appealed the ruling. The proceedings are ongoing.

During the past decade violence tied to organized crime has made Mexico one of the most dangerous countries in the world for the press. In this context of an already restricted press freedom climate, a critical journalist should not face retaliation and imprisonment by state authorities for reporting on issues of public interest.

Therefore, we **strongly urge** that you

- immediately withdraw all charges against Canché because of the arbitrary nature of the proceedings against him and release him from prison;
- stop using the judicial system to criminalize critical journalists.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

copies: Earl Anthony Wayne, US Ambassador to Mexico ~ via fax: 011-52-55-5080-2834
 Alejandro Estivill Castro, Interim Ambassador from Mexico to the US ~ via fax: 202 728 1698
 Chris Andino, Mexico Desk, US State Dept ~ via email: andinoc@state.gov
 James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Mexico, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3650
 Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3650
 Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email: cidhexpresion@oas.org
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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