



EU-LAT

Advocacy Network
Red de Incidencia

Brussels, October 25th 2018

Open Letter to the European Union on the Criminalization of human rights defender Alejandro Cerezo, Urgent Action for Human Rights Defenders Coordinator (ACUDEH) and a member of the Cerezo Committee Mexico

EU LAT Network has received reliable information about the deportationⁱ of human rights defender Alejandro Cerezo Contreras, who is a beneficiary of protective measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The incident occurred on October 1, 2018, when the human rights defender deplaned from flight CM-137 in Panama City with the aim of continuing his journey to the city of Asunción, in Paraguay, to participate in the Third International Seminar on Protective Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders: Between Commitment and Risk, to be held October 3 and 4. The event was supported with technical cooperation from the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights for South America (UNHCHR), with offices in Paraguay; the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL); and Protection International.

Description of the Incident:

Upon arrival in Panama City, at approximately 1:30 PM, Alejandro Cerezo was asked by an immigration official for his passport. The official then asked Mr. Cerezo to accompany him to a migration office. On the way, Mr. Cerezo attempted to make a call to Mexico on his cell phone, but he was not permitted to use his phone.

Once in the migration office, Mr. Cerezo states, he was interrogated repeatedly about his flight schedule, and above all about his past convictions and about supposed affiliations his parents had to subversive groups. Even with the explanations he provided about his unjust detention in 2001 and his acquittal in regards to all the charges in 2005, Mr. Cerezo was kept in the migration office because, according to the officials, the migration system had received a security alert. According to Mr. Cerezo, the officials alleged that Panamanian law prohibited anyone who had been sentenced from entering the country. They made no explicit reference to a specific law.

The officials maintained that Mr. Cerezo was “retained but not detained”; during that time, they took his fingerprints and conducted an iris scan; they photographed him; they asked for personal identification and contact information, both personal and of the organization, ACUDEH AC; and they made him sign a form that Mr. Cerezo says the officials called “filiación.”

At last, they informed him he would be deported, and they reiterated that he “could not fly or travel across Panama or another country”; and that the information gathered about him would be shared with

“allied countries” so that his access would be restricted. Also, according to Mr. Cerezo, the officials explained to him that to avoid these restrictions he would have to go to the Mexican migration service to clear up the situation and “request a pardon.”

Without legal assistance or consular support and without access to his telephone to communicate at any moment with his family members, around 6:00 PM, Mr. Cerezo boarded a flight returning to Mexico.

It bears mention that Alejandro Cerezo Contreras was detained, tortured, and imprisoned along with two of his brothers, Antonio and Héctor, and two other people in the High Security Prison of the Altiplano, until 2005, when he was exonerated and all charges and released.

Since that date, Mr. Cerezo has worked as a human rights defender in the organization Cerezo Committee Mexico and in Urgent Action for Human Rights Defenders (ACUDEH AC)ⁱ. In 2012, the Cerezo Committee México received the Aquisgrán de la Paz prize as recognition of the organization’s work for the defense of human rights. On that occasion, it was Alejandro Cerezo who received the award in Germany. Likewise, he had problems leaving Mexico on August 31, 2012; he had to wait until the airline had received authorization before he was permitted to board the plane and fly over United States territory. The same occurred on his return. Also, in December of that same year, Mr. Cerezo couldn’t participate in the EU-NGO Forum on Human Rights by not obtaining authorization to board his flight in Mexico City, allegedly because his name was on a list of people prevented from making overflights in United States territory.

Requests:

These incidents are concerning because they limit Alejandro Cerezo’s space to act and represent criminalization and stigmatization of his work. In light of this situation, we ask the European Union to express concern about the aforementioned case and to request the government of Mexico to take the following actions:

- Immediately take appropriate measures to guarantee the safety and physical and psychological integrity of Alejandro Cerezo Contreras and all members of his family and of the Cerezo Committee Mexico.
- Conduct an immediate, exhaustive, and impartial investigation of the incidents and make publicly available the information conveyed to third countries about Alejandro Cerezo and his brothers. Additionally, take steps to make reparations for the harm caused.
- Determine which organism of the Mexican government issued the alert criminalizing Alejandro Cerezo, which provoked his deportation from Panama.
- Request clarification from Panama about the expulsion of Alejandro Cerezo.

ⁱ Urgent Action Comité Cerezo México <https://www.comitecerezo.org/spip.php?article3107>

ⁱⁱ <https://pbi-mexico.org/es/con-quienes-trabajamos/personas-defensoras-y-organizaciones-en-riesgo/ciudad-de-m%C3%A9xico>