

Ecuadorean judge orders preventive prison for another leftist opposition leader



Quito, November 5 (RHC)-- An Ecuadorean judge ordered preventive prison for the former lawmaker and left-wing opposition leader, Virgilio Hernandez, following the Attorney General's Office accusation of alleged participation in acts of violence during the mass anti-government demonstrations in early October.

"The sole accusation of rebellion should be a fact for everyone to realize that it is a set-up," Hernandez told the press as he voluntarily arrived for the hearing against him.

Judge Julio Arrieta ruled that Hernandez, among other opposition leaders from former President Rafael Correa's party, committed the crime of "rebellion," which is codified in the criminal code as punishable with five to seven years of prison.

This offense is dictated when "a person uprises or performs violent actions that have as their object to ignore the Constitution of the Republic or to overthrow the legitimately constituted government, without affecting the legitimate right to resistance."

“No proof of violent uprising or the existence of alleged armed groups were presented by prosecutors. They only presented tweets and chat conversations. Ecuador is the only country where a person has been jailed over their opinions on Twitter,” the defendant’s attorney, Ramiro Aguilar said after the hearing.

The fact that Hernandez’s personal opinions were used against him to justify the prison sentence, is not only “political persecution” as Aguilar said, but also a violation of the Constitution.

Article 128 states that “lawmakers shall enjoy the jurisdiction of the Court National Justice during the exercise of their functions; they will not be civil or criminally responsible for the opinions they issue, nor for the decisions or acts that they perform in the exercise of their functions, within and outside the National Assembly.”

This is not the first leftist leader to be jailed in recent weeks by Lenin Moreno’s right-wing government with its crackdown on opposition voices.

Back on October 14th, as protests ended with an “agreement” the Governor of the Ecuadorean province of Pichincha Paola Pabon; Former Mayor of Duran Alexandra Arce; lawmaker from the Citizen Revolution movement Yofre Poma; and social leader Christian Gonzalez were arrested in coordinated police raids.

“The serious events that are taking place in Ecuador is very concerning. Two women, leaders within the political opposition are suffering political and judicial persecution,” Argentinian President-elect Alberto Fernandez tweeted prior to the elections. The group is being accused of “destabilizing the nation with foreign financing,” but no evidence has been presented to support such charges.

“Our lawmakers have denounced persecution, death threats, illegal phone tapping, violation of the rights and political harassment,” a statement issued last week by the Citizen’s Revolution party reads.

Meanwhile, on October 14th as the leaders were being arrested, three lawmakers, their partners, and other opposition figures asked for protection at the Mexican embassy, where they’re currently residing. Two days prior to the events, former National Assembly President Gabriela Rivadeneira was granted political asylum in the Central American nation.

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