

# URGENT ACTION

## INDIGENOUS LEADER ON HUNGER STRIKE HOSPITALIZED

**The health and life of Mapuche Indigenous spiritual leader Machi Celestino Córdova, imprisoned since 2014 in Temuco, central Chile, is at risk after having spent more than 90 days on hunger strike, which he started in protest after the authorities denied him access to his ceremonial altar.**

**Machi Celestino Córdova** is a spiritual leader of the Indigenous Mapuche people who has been confined in the Prison Compliance Centre of Temuco, Chile, since his conviction in 2014 in connection to the Luchsinger-Mackay case. He is a Machi, who are the highest religious authority of the Mapuche people.

His role as a Machi requires that he periodically visit his *rewe* (or ceremonial altar) to carry out renewal ceremonies, which are essential to guaranteeing the Mapuches' psychic and physical well-being. However, the Chilean Gendarmerie (prison authorities) have denied several times his formal requests for a 48-hour transfer to his *rewe* for these purposes.

In response to this, Machi Celestino Córdova began a liquid hunger strike on 13 January 2018, to demand the authorities grant his request. He was hospitalized in the Regional Hospital of Temuco on the afternoon of 18 April because of his serious health condition. That same day, he announced his intention to begin a dry hunger strike - refusing to consume any liquids - in an effort to force the authorities to recognize his right as a Machi. This situation is extremely worrying due to his complex medical condition.

In its 2016 country visit report on Chile, the United Nations Sub-committee on Prevention of Torture expressed concern about the denial of Mapuche detainees' rights to practice their beliefs in accordance with their worldview by, for example, using ancestral methods to heal ailments, and recommended the Chilean authorities guarantee cultural tradition and customs in accordance with international standards.

### Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to allow Machi Celestino Córdova to visit his *rewe* for the 48-hours he requires, to ensure that his right to observe his spiritual beliefs, cultural traditions and customs is protected;
- Calling on them to review his prison conditions to further facilitate him and other imprisoned Mapuche people the right to live according to their beliefs, customs and culture while they are imprisoned;
- Calling on them to ensure that any and all medical treatment provided to Machi Celestino Córdova is done with his informed consent and wishes, and that no unwanted treatment or force feeding is executed that may amount to torture and other ill treatment.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 MAY 2018 TO:

#### Ministry of Justice and Human Rights

Hernán Larraín Fernández

Morandé 107

Santiago de Chile, Chile.

Tel/Fax: +56 (2) 2674 3100

Email: [srios@minjusticia.gov.cl](mailto:srios@minjusticia.gov.cl)

**Salutation: Dear Minister/ Estimado**

**Señor Ministro**

#### Gendarmerie National Director

Claudia Bendeck Inostroza

Rosas 1264, 4° piso

Santiago de Chile, Chile

Tel/Fax: +56 (2) 2916 3250 / 3251

Email: [patricia.roman@gendarmeria.cl](mailto:patricia.roman@gendarmeria.cl)

**Salutation: Dear Director/ Estimada**

**Señora Directora**

#### **And copies to:**

Amnistía Internacional Chile

Email: [info@amnistia.cl](mailto:info@amnistia.cl)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR ROLANDO DRAGO, Embassy of Chile, 37-41 Old Queen Street SW1H 9JA, 020 7222 2361, Fax 020 7222 0861, [embachile@embachile.co.uk](mailto:embachile@embachile.co.uk), <http://chileabroad.gov.cl/reino-unido>

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 4 January 2013, the elderly couple Vivian Mackay and Werner Luchsinger were killed in an arson attack by a group of individuals that reportedly entered their property in the Araucanía Region. Minutes later, the Machi Celestino Córdova was detained near the scene, and was later accused of homicide under the Chilean Counter-Terrorism Act. In 2014, the judiciary dismissed the terrorist charges and condemned him to 18 years imprisonment for homicide induced by arson.

Since then, the Machi Celestino Córdova has formally requested a transfer several times to visit his *rewe* or altar, a spiritual action essential for all Machi people. The continuous refusal to grant him permission has caused him several physical afflictions and ailments.

Even though there are records of previous cases where the Gendarmerie has granted the transfer to imprisoned Mapuche people, in the case of the Machi Celestino Córdova, the authorities have proved to be reluctant. They have argued that the Chilean Decree on Prisons does not allow such actions, and that the officials' physical safety could not be guaranteed due to the climate of violence in the area where this religious ceremony would take place.

Amnesty International considers this approach to be inconsistent as well as an infringement of international human rights standards as established in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (art. 27); the International Labour Organization Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (art. 5); and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (arts. 11, 12, 31 and 34).

The Mapuche people are an American Indigenous group that inhabits southern Chile and southwest Argentina. They have been fighting in defence of their ancestral lands throughout Chile's history. Even though the State of Chile recognizes the existence of Mapuche territories, their size has been progressively reduced, which has severely increased tensions in those regions such as the Araucanía, where Mapuche people continue claiming the ownership of their territory and the respect to their cultural identity.

UA: 75/18 Index: AMR 22/8251/2018 Issue Date: 19 April 2018