

Argentinean Indigenous Leader Milagro Sala Says Justice Bends to Political Whims in Argentina



Buenos Aires, July 2 (RHC)-- Jailed Argentinean Indigenous leader Milagro Sala, dubbed the first political prisoner of President Mauricio Macri's administration, refuses to testify after more than five months in prison, claiming that justice will only bend to the "whims" of the provincial governor who ordered her arrest.

Sala, founder and leader of the 70,000-member Tupac Amaru political organization, faces charges over the misuse of public funds destined for social housing construction in the northwest province of Jujuy where she was arrested in January. The accusations of fraud were only leveled against her two weeks after her arrest, ordered by Jujuy Governor Gerardo Morales, when the initial charges of inciting violence were dropped.

"They can invent another 2,000 cases against me, but I am not going to respond to this justice that depends in a direct way on the whims of Governor Morales," Sala said in a statement from the Alto Comedero prison in Jujuy.

Former two-term Jujuy governor and Morales' predecessor, Eduardo Fellner, a member of former Presidents Cristina Fernandez and Nestor Kirchner's Justicialist Party, also stands accused alongside Sala in the corruption charges. Morales, on the other hand, is a Macri ally and his Radical party is part of the president's conservative coalition Cambiemos.

Milagro Sala was arrested on in Jujuy on January 16 after staging a month-long sit-in against Morales' neo-liberal policies alongside other activists. Numerous prominent human rights defenders and organizations have slammed her arrest as illegal, calling her a victim of political persecution, and the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention also joined calls for her release.

Charges of inciting crime and turmoil were dropped on January 29, but before she could be released a new warrant was handed down for charges of illicit association, fraud, and extortion. She has remained in prison ever since as investigations continue, barring her from taking up her seat as a representative in Parlasur, the parliament of the South America subcontinental bloc Mercosur.

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