

Argentinean Human Rights Activist Milagro Sala Sentenced to Three Years Probation



Buenos Aires, December 29 (RHC)-- Argentinean human rights activist Milagro Sala was sentenced to three years probation Wednesday for "aggravated damage" to a public official after organizing a protest with her popular social organization Tupac Amaru.

The court also sentenced Graciela Lopez and Ramon Salvatierra, members of Tupac Amaru, to three and two years of suspended prison respectively, for aggravated material damages planned against the former senator Gerardo Morales in the northwestern province of Jujuy. Sala was also charged with threatening Morales in 2009, but those charges were dropped.

Sala, who will remain jailed over separate charges, delivered an emotional testimony, calling on the judges "not to be pressured by political power, to dictate what is fair," anticipating the final verdict.

"We have dignified and recovered the culture of work, we have taken thousands of young people out of prostitution, robbery ... it is as if our country is backing down," Sala lamented.

Sala's words were echoed by Bolivian President Evo Morales, who tweeted shortly after the sentencing that he condemned "the criminalization of social protest" -- adding: "You can not silence the voice of the humble."

"She has just been charged with aggravated harm when she has shown in court that she was not at the scene, then accused of being an instigator," said leader of the political coalition Front for Victory, Mara Brawer.

Milagro Sala, who is also an MP of the Mercosur Parliament, was arrested in January during a peaceful protest, but the charges were previously dismissed by a Jujuy court. A higher court took on the case, annulling the previous decision. She also faces charges of alleged fraud, criminal conspiracy and embezzlement of money intended by the government to help the poor.

Several human rights organizations have denounced the government of President Mauricio Macri for the illegal detention of Sala, the Tupac Amaru social organization founder.

The U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled in October that her detention was arbitrary and ordered Argentina's government to free her immediately. However, the Mauricio Macri administration considered the decision non-binding.

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