

# URGENT ACTION

## FREE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER

**Vidal Brítez was detained on March 26 in Paso Yobái, Guairá as a reprisal for his defense of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The Prosecutor's Office is pursuing alleged acts of serious coercion for an incident in which he did not take part. We are urging the Prosecutor's Office to respect Mr Brítez's procedural guarantees, and drop the charges, resulting in his release.**

### TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter to the government official(s) listed. Use the sample letter below as a guide or use your own words.
- [Click here](#) to report your action(s) on **UA 33.25**. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

**\*Note: This is an email to target action only**

### **Dr. Emiliano Rolón Fernández**

Calle Chile y Avda. Ygatimi

Asunción - Paraguay

Email: [comunicaciones@ministeriopublico.gov.py](mailto:comunicaciones@ministeriopublico.gov.py)

Dear Dr. Rolón,

I write to you to express my deep concern for the detention and prosecution of **Vidal Brítez**. He is a highly regarded leader, who has been defending the right to food and to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, playing a critical role against pollution in Paso Yobái.

Amnesty International is concerned that the prosecution of Mr. Britez is reprisal for his activism. Family members are concerned about the impact of the detention on his fragile health. Mr Britez has a severe asthma condition.

According to the international law on human rights, all states are obliged to respect and protect the right to defend human rights. Criminalizing Mr. Brítez breaches this obligation and creates a chilling effect for other defenders advocating for a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Furthermore, it's Paraguay's international obligation to respect procedural guarantees, and the right to a fair trial.

Therefore, I urge you to drop the charges against Mr. Brítez and respect the right to defend human rights in Paraguay.

Yours sincerely,

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Vidal Brítez Alcaraz** is a 56-year-old Yerba mate producer and president of the Santa María's Association of Yerba Mate Producers in Paso Yobái. Mr Brítez has played a critical role in fighting for healthy food and denouncing the environmental pollution from mining activities in the region. Paso Yobái, a district located in the department of Guairá, central eastern region of Paraguay, is an area of gold mining exploitation, with transnational mining companies operating in the territory, such as the Latin American Minerals Paraguay Lampa SA and CEMA SA. In 2022, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Marcos Orellana, conducted a mission to Paraguay and specifically [verified the situation](#) in Paso Yobái, noting that "the use of mercury and cyanide in gold mining is causing serious environmental impacts."

This has affected the production of yerba mate, a national emblem of Paraguay. Yerba mate producers [have denounced](#) the contamination and the negative economic impact they have suffered with the loss of markets for their production. Yerba mate producers have filed several criminal complaints for environmental crimes with the regional prosecutor's office in Villarrica, although they have not had results in terms of stopping illegal and polluting practices.

In this context of tension in the locality, on January 10, 2025, [a clash occurred between residents](#). A local resident, dedicated to gold mining, obtained through a precautionary judicial proceeding a court order granting her an easement through the property of another neighbor, a yerba mate producer, opposed to illegal mining activities.

With the assistance of the National Police, trucks loaded with mining waste were forced into the property of the yerba mate producer, in compliance with the precautionary order. The incident resulted in a clash between the residents, mining workers on one side and yerba producers on the other, who allegedly threw stones with slingshots. As a result of this incident, the Public Ministry opened a criminal case in which six members of the Yerba Producers Association were charged, including Mr. Vidal Brítez, who was not present on the scene. At that time, he was at his home, with his work staff, located about 5 km from the location where the incident took place.

Vidal's relatives expressed concern about the impact of the detention on the defender's health, given his asthma condition. They believe that the stress associated with detention and poor care can seriously affect him.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Spanish, English, or your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** May 15, 2025

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Vidal Brítez (He/him)