

SIF regrets the condemnatory sentence against Guatemalan journalist José Rubén Zamora

Democracy depends on an independent media that guarantees the right of citizens to express themselves and be informed

Guatemala, June 14, 2023. Seattle International Foundation (SIF) regrets the six-year prison sentence delivered today for Guatemalan journalist **José Rubén Zamora Marroquín**, which underscores the weakening of democracy and press freedom in Guatemala, only 11 days before the country holds general elections.

A Guatemalan court sentenced the founder and former president of the newspaper elPeriódico to six years in prison plus a fine of Q300,000, equivalent to USD\$39,000, for money laundering. He was acquitted of the accusations of blackmail and influence peddling for which the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) had requested a total sentence of 40 years in prison. Zamora announced that he will appeal the sentence and will seek to bring his case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The former assistant prosecutor, **Samari Gómez Díaz**, accused of revealing confidential information, was acquitted and obtained her immediate release.

Since his arrest on July 29, 2022, Zamora has defended his innocence and has described the case as a political persecution due to the allegations of corruption made by elPeriódico – which was forced to close last May – against the current government. Organizations defending press freedom have pointed out various irregularities and due process violations in the case against Zamora, including the resignation of eight of his defense attorneys and the indictment against four of them for obstruction of justice, beginning to investigate journalists and columnists who spoke out about the case, and recent charges filed by the Public Prosecutor's Office against Zamora for other alleged crimes.

There is a widespread international concern that the case against Zamora could be extended to more journalists from various media outlets and set a grim precedent for any opinion that dissents against the government and its allies.

SIF calls upon the international community, particularly the U.S. Government, to reiterate that **democracy depends on an independent media** and to assess the severity of this case in impacting the rule of law and freedom of expression and press in Guatemala.

It is important that independent journalists, prosecutors and judges who have denounced and investigated corruption enjoy constitutional guarantees so that they can carry out their work without risk of being persecuted, harassed or criminalized. To defend their work is also to defend democracy.