

International manifesto in support of Catalonia's right to freedom as a people

On the 14th of February elections to the Parliament of Catalonia, 52% of Catalans voted in favour of parties that call for Catalonia to become an independent state. This is an irrefutable victory for the Catalan pro-independence movement, after years of mass mobilizations that culminated in the October 1st, 2017 referendum on self-determination. The plebiscite was carried out in support for the creation of an independent state in the form of a republic, winning by a landslide despite the harsh repression exerted by the Spanish police in an attempt to stop it, and which led to more than 1,000 injured, some seriously.

As a result of those events, nine Catalan civic and political leaders were put in pre-trial detention. In October 2019, they were handed down sentences of 9 to 13 years prison for charges of sedition and embezzlement, some for having organized the referendum, and others for calling for peaceful demonstrations. The president of the Catalan government, several members of the cabinet and other elected officials had to go into exile in Belgium, Scotland, and Switzerland.

The 2019 trial of the Catalan pro-independence leaders in the Spanish Supreme Court in Madrid was plagued with serious non-democratic irregularities. Before the sentence was made public, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called for their immediate release and for reparation for their arbitrary detention. Belgian justice recently ruled that the Spanish Supreme Court was not the competent authority to try the Catalan leaders, adding that in Spain “the presumption of innocence is at risk of being abused”. Moreover, several international human rights organizations drew attention to the absence of the principle of contradiction in the trial, the provision of irrelevant evidence to the case during the trial, and the lack of a right to appeal. Several members of the Catalan government and political leaders are still in exile in Belgium and Switzerland.

In response to the disproportionate sentences, mass demonstrations took place in October of 2019, which were severely repressed, leading to a total of 594 wounded (70 of them journalists) and the arrest of 194 protesters, 28 of whom were taken into pre-trial detention.

Since 2017, the ceaseless criminalization of the political will of the people of Catalonia by the Spanish state has led to the prosecution of nearly 3,300 people. A repressive operation against an entire people that involves a violation of fundamental rights such as the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and political representation. This has been condemned by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, several United Nations Member States –in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review– and also non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, the World Organization Against Torture and the World Jurist Association, among others.

The electoral results of the 14th of February elections, where the pro-independence forces have achieved a historic result with an absolute majority in seats, and this time also in votes (52% of

the total), ratify the will of the Catalan people to become an independent state as expressed in the victorious 1st of October 2017 referendum. A claim the international community can no longer continue ignoring.

We, international personalities, activists, intellectuals, and representatives of political and social organizations from various countries have observed the arbitrary actions of the Spanish authorities with concern and express our support for the aspiration of freedom of the Catalan people. For these reasons, the signatories of this manifesto call for a resolution of the political conflict between Catalonia and Spain, based on the following points:

- Respect for the fundamental rights of the citizens of Catalonia, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and political participation and representation.
- Immediate release of all Catalan political prisoners, and an end to the repression and all legal proceedings against activists and political and social representatives of the Catalan pro-independence movement. State authorities must publicly apologize to victims of arbitrary repression, including the exiles. All these victims must receive reparations.
- Respect and recognition of the right to self-determination of the people of Catalonia according to the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as exercised in the October 1st, 2017 referendum.

Signatories:

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, sculptor, activist, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate (Argentina)

Manuel Zelaya, former President of Honduras

Mirta Acuña de Baravalle, co-founder of Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo - Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Argentina)

Nora Cortiñas, founding member of the NGO Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora (Argentina)

Milagro Sala, political prisoner, and leader of Túpac Amaru (Argentina)

Lois Pérez Leira, writer and Executive Secretary of the International of Anti-Imperialist Peoples (Argentina)

Carlos Aznárez, Director of Resumen Latinoamericano (Argentina)

María Torrellas, documentary maker (Argentina)

Norman Briski, actor and playwright (Argentina)

Xavier Lasso, journalist, and former Foreign Minister of the Ecuadorian government (Ecuador)

Nidia Arrobo, economist and activist for the rights of the indigenous people (Ecuador)

Ramiro Díez, journalist (Ecuador)

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Hugo Gutiérrez, constitutive candidate, former parliamentarian for the Chilean Communist Party and human rights activist (Chile)

Alicia Lira Matus, President of the Association of Families of Politically Executed People in Chile (Chile)

Piedad Córdoba, former Senator, human rights defender (Colombia)

Martha Peralta Epiyú, National President of the MAIS Movement and Wayúu attorney (Colombia)

Ati Quigua, Councillor of the City Council of Bogotá and Iku aboriginal (Colombia)

Juan Ursul Solanes, professor at the Autonomous University of Mexico (Mexico)

José M. Murià, historian (Mexico)

Eduardo Osiel Martell Hernández, sociologist (Mexico)

María del Valle Castillo, writer (Mexico)

Joan Baptista Fort Olivella, historian (Mexico)

Henrique do Rosário Macosso Sita, Cabinda pro-independence activist (Mexico)

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Fintan Warfield, Member of the Senate (Ireland)

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Pauline Latham, Member of the Parliament of the United Kingdom (England)

Andrew Rosindell, Member of the Parliament of the United Kingdom (England)

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Chris Bambery, journalist and writer (Scotland)

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Frankfurt's Committee in Support of Rif's Popular Movement (Germany)

Stavanger Committee of solidarity with Latin America (Norway)

Steven Vergauwen, General Secretary of the International Commission of European Citizens (Belgium)

Davyth Hicks, General Secretary of the European Language Equality Network

Michel Huysseune, Professor of Political Science at the Free University of Brussels (Belgium)

Belgian union of Riffians

José Pacheco-Pereira, politician, historian, former Member and Vice-President of the European Parliament (Portugal)

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Thirelli International Organization of Human Rights (France)

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Catalan Commission in Support of the Riffian Popular Movement (Catalonia)