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Chile: Judicial persecution of environmental defender Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda in Viña del Mar

On 2 May 2025, environmental defender and member of the citizen movement Un Parque para Las Salinas, **Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda**, was declared guilty in first instance of defamation ('daños a la honra') against the head of real estate project operations of Las Salinas. The real estate company Las Salinas S.A., subsidiary of Copec of the Angelini Group, wants to launch a real estate project on land previously contaminated by petrochemical and agrochemical production. The judicial process began on 28 February 2025. On 6 May, the environmental defender appealed the decision before the Appeals Court of Valparaíso, in Viña del Mar.

[Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda](#) is an environmental defender and member of the citizen movement [Un Parque para Las Salinas](#). As a member of the movement and resident of Las Salinas, he leads advocacy efforts for the creation of a park in Las Salinas, aiming to reclaim the land that had previously been contaminated by oil companies. The defender also reports on the negative impact on the environment and public health caused by industrial pollution, such as by Las Salinas S.A.. Throughout his career, Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda has been a target of persecution, smear campaigns, and harassment in both physical and online spaces.

On 28 February 2025, human rights defender Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda was accused of defamation by the head of real estate project operations of Las Salinas S.A., who argued that a video posted on the social media account of Un Parque para Las Salinas damaged his reputation. The video reports on the negative impact of the company's activities on public health and emphasises the role and responsibility of the head of operations for these repercussions on the local population. As part of a restoration project for the large-scale real estate development, the company is removing soil from a densely populated area using carcinogenic and neurotoxic products. Human rights defenders have denounced the fact that this is taking place without proper state supervision.

The sentence of first instance was issued on 2 May 2025 and orders the removal of the video on social media, arguing that it damages the reputation of the alleged victim. However, the legal defence of Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda argues that the Court failed to consider that the content of the video only refers to his public role as the head of operations and shares information of public interest, without making any reference to his private life.

This defamation case against Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda is not the first legal process initiated by members of Las Salinas S.A.. The defender was also accused of a physical attack against a staff member on 11 March 2025. The submitted evidence was a manipulated video that made it appear as though the defender had attacked the staff member, but a technical analysis concluded that it was a set-up. The Court of Justice consequently dismissed the case. A common feature of these accusations was the alleged victims' request for protection measures, which would prevent Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda from going to the operations site. This restricts his human rights defence work, as he audits, monitors and reports any irregularity or activity by the company causing environmental damage.

Front Line Defenders is also aware of previous harassment and reprisals against other members of the movement Un Parque para Las Salinas in the context of the socio-environmental conflict with Las Salinas S.A.. The case against Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda highlights the trend of increasing restrictions to human rights work in Viña del Mar.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern over the judicial persecution of environmental defender Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda and considers it a reprisal for his work defending the environment and health of the population of Viña del Mar.

Front Line Defenders calls on the Chilean authorities to:

1. Accept the appeal request and drop all charges against environmental defender Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda, as these are due to his work with the movement Un Parque para Las Salinas and environmental activism;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety as well as the physical and mental health of human rights defender Gonzalo Pavez Sepúlveda and other members of the movement Un Parque para Las Salinas so that they can continue their work defending human rights and the environment;
3. Respect the standards provided by the Escazú Agreement, active in Chile since 2022, regarding transparency and citizen participation in environmental matters as well as the protection of environmental defenders;
4. Take all measures to ensure that all human rights defenders in Chile are able to conduct their peaceful and legitimate activities without undue restrictions and without fear of harassment, threats, or retaliation.

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