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## **Ecuador: Unfair legal procedures and repeated account freezing of human rights and nature defender David Fajardo Torres**

On 26 March 2026, the Financial and Economic Analysis Unit (UAFE) [froze the bank account](#) of human rights and nature defender **David Fajardo Torres**. The UAFE is the authority responsible for preventing and detecting transactions linked to money laundering and other financial crimes in Ecuador. This is the second time that David Fajardo Torres is targeted with this arbitrary measure, which demonstrates a pattern of financial harassment aimed at obstructing his work as a human rights and nature defender and, above all, hindering the work of the organisations that he works for and supports.

[David Fajardo Torres](#) is a lawyer and nature defender based in Cuenca. His human rights work focuses on extractive industries, particularly in the Kimsakocha moors (*paramos*), and connected to the defence of water, the paramos, and collective rights. He is involved in organisational initiatives such as the [Cabildo Popular por el Agua de Cuenca](#) (Cuenca People's Water Council) and [Yasunidos](#), promoting strategic litigation, community education, and social mobilisation in defense of nature rights. His work combines legal action with grass roots work, aimed at protecting key water sources and their ecosystems by strengthening citizen participation in environmental decision-making. In this context, he has played an active role in mass social mobilisation efforts in defense of water in Azuay, including marches and campaigns against mining projects that threaten sensitive ecosystems.

On 26 March, David Fajardo Torres discovered that his bank account had been frozen. After contacting his bank, he was informed that the account had once again been frozen at the request of the UAFE. This is the only official information the nature defender has received to date. In early March 2026, *Cabildo por el Agua de Cuenca* – where David Fajardo Torres is one of the spokespersons - filed a constitutional claim against the new Organic Law on Strengthening Strategic Sectors of Mining and Energy, which was proposed by the Ecuadorian government and adopted in February 2026 under emergency procedures with limited parliamentary scrutiny.

[In September 2025, David Fajardo Torres had already been victim of a similar measure](#) by the authorities. A few days after his participation in a [large-scale march](#) against a mining project in the Kimsakocha *paramo* and in defence of water in Cuenca known as the 'Quinto Río', some of his bank accounts were frozen at the request of the State financial oversight bodies. Local organisations considered this an attempt to intimidate the organisations that had organised the march, including the *Cabildo Popular por el Agua de Cuenca*. Following the freezing of his accounts, the Public Prosecutor's Office initiated legal proceedings against him and filed complaints for alleged unjustified private enrichment and terrorist financing. The judicial proceedings are, to date, still ongoing. In December 2025, [a court reportedly ordered to lift the account freeze](#), reinforcing concerns over the lack of evidence and justification for such a measure.

The freezing of bank accounts of human rights defenders and local organisations has become a recurring practice in Ecuador, implemented without prior notification or due process. The supposed legal basis for this measure is the recently enacted Social Transparency Law, which was also adopted under emergency procedures. Other human rights defenders and civil society organisations have also reported facing similar actions, suggesting an ongoing pattern of collective persecution that subjects defenders to stigmatisation, criminalisation and unjustified restrictions,

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[including legal and financial](#) retaliations. In addition, State authorities have [publicly stated](#) that local civil society organisations are linked to illicit economies, which exacerbates the [criminalisation](#), stigmatisation, and risk of human rights defenders, particularly those working on nature, territorial and indigenous rights.

The situation in Ecuador has raised growing concerns among international human rights organisations, [which have warned of a increasingly shrinking civic space in the country](#). The expansion of security measures, paired with the adoption of new laws and regulatory reforms, has significantly broadened the State's powers of control over civil society operations. The authorities have incorporated criminal, administrative, and financial tools that are being used disproportionately against human rights defenders, restricting the legitimate work of civil society.

Front Line Defenders expresses its grave concern regarding the repeated bank account freeze of human rights and nature defender David Fajardo Torres, as well as the legal proceedings attempting to criminalise his human rights work. The freezing of bank accounts constitutes a serious restriction that affects not only the defender's personal life, but also his ability to continue his work, limiting his access to basic resources and hindering his organisational and legal work. Front Line Defenders asserts that this measure constitutes a form of harassment and criminalisation which seeks, above all, to directly undermine the legitimate work of David Fajardo Torres and organisations he supports, such as Cabildo por el Agua de Cuenca and Yasunidos, in defence of human rights and nature. Finally, Front Line Defenders is concerned that such measures could have a significant negative impact on the wider community of human rights defenders and organisations, creating a climate of fear that could discourage and silence critical voices in Ecuador.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Ecuador to:**

1. Immediately lift the freeze on the bank account of human rights and environmental defender David Fajardo Torres;
2. Cease all acts of judicial or other harassment, including the use of financial measures as a form of reprisal for David Fajardo Torres's human rights work;
3. Guarantee due process and the right to a fair trial for David Fajardo Torres;
4. Refrain from using legal, administrative, or financial mechanisms to criminalise the legitimate defence of water, nature, and human rights in Ecuador, and from making speeches or statements that stigmatise human rights defenders;
5. Publicly acknowledge the legitimate and fundamental role that human rights defenders play in a democratic society and in the protection of the rule of law;
6. Ensure that all human rights and environmental defenders are able to carry out their work without fear of reprisals,