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El Chapo Sends Urgent Letter to Judge, Claims Denial of Legal Rights in Prison

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Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera has sent an urgent handwritten letter to the federal judge who presided over his case, claiming that he is being blocked from communicating with his newly appointed attorney while held under extreme isolation in a high-security U.S. prison.

Guzmán, the former leader of Mexico’s Sinaloa Cartel, is serving a life sentence at the Administrative Maximum Facility (ADX) in Florence, Colorado. In his letter, written in Spanish and addressed to Judge Brian Cogan, El Chapo alleged that despite official approval, authorities have not allowed any contact between him and lawyer José Israel Encinosa. He

stated that he has been unable to receive calls or written correspondence from the attorney for at least three weeks.

Encinosa was added to El Chapo's legal team in June with the court's approval. However, the inmate insists that the prison has taken no action to enable communication between them. "You ordered (access), but as of today, you haven't been authorized," Guzmán wrote in the note, referring to the judge's prior decision.

Guzmán further claimed that Encinosa has been requesting permission to visit him for nearly ten months, yet his efforts have been repeatedly stalled. According to the letter, two written communications sent by the attorney never reached him.

As a high-risk inmate, Guzmán is detained under Special Administrative Measures (SAMs), which include 23-hour daily confinement in solitary confinement, restricted communication, and severe limitations on visits. The restrictions are designed to prevent contact with criminal networks outside the prison, but Guzmán argues that the current enforcement is denying him basic legal rights.

At present, only one member of his legal team, attorney Mariel Colón, has clearance to meet with him in person. According to reports, even his wife, Emma Coronel, and their twin daughters have been prohibited from visiting, citing security concerns.

Encinosa is now preparing legal motions to secure immediate access to his client and challenge the conditions in which Guzmán is being held. Judge Cogan has ordered prosecutors to respond to the situation by August 18.

This latest development comes after previous complaints filed by Guzmán regarding the conditions inside ADX Florence. In 2023, he submitted a similar handwritten letter criticizing his confinement, including a lack of sunlight and the absence of windows in his cell.

The renewed legal dispute coincides with mounting pressure on the Sinaloa Cartel's leadership. Just last month, El Chapo's son, Ovidio Guzmán López, pleaded guilty in federal court to four criminal counts involving drug conspiracy and leadership of a continuing criminal enterprise. Prosecutors in New York and Illinois allege that after Guzmán's capture in 2016 and extradition to the U.S. in 2019, his sons took control of the cartel's fentanyl operations, generating hundreds of millions of dollars in drug trafficking profits.

As Guzmán continues to serve his sentence in near-total isolation, his legal team is pressing for what they claim is a necessary and overdue step: the basic right to consult with a fully approved defense team member. Whether the court will intervene further remains to be seen.