

REMEMBRANCE



Guillermo Elías Cumsille Garib (1938–2021): Stalwart of Chile’s Palestinian Community

Compiled by Rashid I. Khalidi

THE EMINENT CHILEAN PALESTINIAN ACADEMIC and community leader Guillermo Elías Cumsille Garib passed away in Santiago on 30 June 2021. Cumsille’s family hails originally from Beit Sahour, and it is part of a vibrant and active Palestinian Chilean community of several hundred thousand people, which is probably the largest body of Palestinians outside of the Arab world. Most are descended from immigrants who came to Chile in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from Bayt Jala, Bethlehem, and Beit Sahour and have made generous contributions to the well-being of their hometowns and to the Palestinian people in general.

Cumsille was a much-respected leader of the Palestinian and Arab communities of Chile, serving as the director of the Circle of Chilean Arab Professionals and as one of the heads of the Palestinian Club and the Palestinian Sporting Club (Club Deportivo Palestino), a leading Chilean soccer club founded in 1920 that wears the Palestinian national colors. He was vice president of the Palestinian Federation of Chile and president of the Chilean Arab Institute of Culture.

A distinguished academic with a background in sociology and economics, Cumsille taught at the University of Chile in the years leading up to the U.S.-backed military coup in 1973. His career was interrupted by the repressive tactics of Augusto Pinochet’s right-wing dictatorship, which he actively opposed, and he was only allowed to return to his academic work nine years later. With the return of democracy in 1990, Cumsille resumed his career as a much-loved faculty member at the University of Chile’s schools of sociology and journalism. He published extensively and directed more than three hundred research projects, focusing primarily on public opinion and electoral politics. His articles and research have been widely disseminated in national and international journals and at conferences.

Cumsille was an outstanding representative of his people’s ability to overcome adversity, and of dedicated service to his community. Much mourned by his family and his community in Chile, he will be missed by many more.