



Venezuela - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Wednesday 15 March 2017

Treatment of opposition politicians/others between March 2016 & March 2017

The *European Parliament* in June 2016 states that there:

“...are around 2 000 people in prison, under house arrest or on probation for political reasons...” (European Parliament (8 June 2016) *European Parliament resolution of 8 June 2016 on the situation in Venezuela (2016/2699(RSP))*).

In June 2016 *Amnesty International* points out that:

“...Venezuela’s judicial system has been blamed for being incapable of tackling violent crime and instead focusing resources on criminalizing those who dare to speak up against government policies” (Amnesty International (10 June 2016) *Venezuela: Stubborn politics accelerate catastrophic humanitarian crisis*).

A report issued in June 2016 by the *International Crisis Group* states:

“The opposition-controlled parliament, installed on 5 January, has faced a blanket refusal by the government to approve any of its laws. President Maduro has signed none, and the constitutional branch of the Supreme Court (TSJ) has declared them all either unconstitutional or inapplicable. The court has also deprived the parliament of its other key function, oversight of the executive, by strictly limiting its ability to hold officials to account and, ultimately, to censure them, and eliminating its power to veto emergency decrees. Maduro and other top officials have openly declared defiance of parliament, and the president has come close to explicitly threatening to shut it down. Pro-government crowds outside its building hurl insults at members, occasionally subjecting them to physical attack” (International Crisis Group (23 June 2016) *Venezuela: Edge of the Precipice*, p.7).

In July 2016 *Human Rights Watch* notes in a report that:

“Since May 2016, the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional, SEBIN) and National Guard have detained 21 people on allegations that they were planning, fomenting, or had participated in violent anti-government actions. Most allege they have been tortured or otherwise abused in custody. In several cases, prosecutors failed to present any credible evidence linking the accused to crimes, but courts charged them anyway” (Human Rights Watch (27 July 2016) *Venezuela: Dissidents Allege Torture, Coerced Confessions*).

In August 2016 *Amnesty International* points out that:

“The justice system is regularly subject to interference by the government, especially in cases involving people who have openly criticized the government or where the government believes that the individuals have acted in a way that is contrary to its interests” (Amnesty International (4 August 2016) *Venezuela: Weakened human rights commitments*, p.6).

A document issued in September 2016 by the *Council of the European Union* notes:

“Concerns remained about trials of opposition leaders, independent lawyers and business leaders” (Council of the European Union (20 September 2016) *EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2015 - Country and Regional Issues [Venezuela excerpt]*).

In October 2016 *Human Rights Watch* states:

“Human Rights Watch documented dozens of cases in which Venezuelans reported being subject to acts of intimidation or violence by state agents in response to public criticism of or expressions of concern about the government’s handling of the country’s humanitarian crisis...Human rights defenders reported a climate of intimidation resulting from measures enacted by the government to restrict international funding—which is critical for their work—and repeated, unsubstantiated accusations by government officials and supporters that they were conspiring to destabilize the country. Ordinary Venezuelans were arrested during street protests over food scarcity—some organized and some spontaneous—and reported being subjected to beatings and other mistreatment while in detention. These detentions followed the same pattern as scores of cases documented by Human Rights Watch following a Venezuelan government crackdown on largely peaceful anti-government protests in 2014...” (Human Rights Watch (24 October 2016) *Venezuela’s Humanitarian Crisis*, p.58).

In October 2016 the *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights* states that:

“Throughout 2016, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have followed with great concern the different ways in which the State has imposed serious limitations on pluralism in the exercise of political rights and freedom of expression, both through the application of the law and outside the law. Most notable among these actions are the obstacles that have been imposed by the authorities to prevent Venezuelans from participating in free and trustworthy elections, the gradual suspension of the constitutional powers of the majority opposition Congress, the arbitrary detention and incarceration of opponents and persons who publicly dissent from the government or express their opinions in the media, the repression and undue restriction of protests, the dismissal and threatened dismissal of public employees who make statements or express political opinions against the party in office, campaigns of stigmatism, surveillance, and harassment against human rights defenders and journalists, as well as the continual use of the criminal law and other government controls to punish or stifle the work of the critical press” (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (25 October 2016) *IACHR and Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression Condemn Measures to Shut Down Spaces for Political Participation in Venezuela and Raise Alarm at their Impact on Democracy*).

A document published in October 2016 by the *World Organisation Against Torture* notes that:

“This examination comes right when a number of human rights organizations, including the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and COFAVIC, are denouncing growing restrictions on individual and collective rights in the country” (World Organisation Against Torture (31 October 2016) *Venezuela: No exceptional measure in Venezuela should be upheld at the expense of basic human rights*).

A publication released in October 2016 by *Human Rights Watch* notes:

“Venezuelan authorities have repeatedly abused the justice system’s lack of independence to arrest and prosecute prominent political opponents...” (Human Rights Watch (31 October 2016) *Venezuela: Universal Periodic Review*).

In December 2016 the *International Crisis Group* states in a report that:

“After losing the December 2015 parliamentary elections, the government packed the nominally autonomous Supreme Court (TSJ) with unconditional supporters and has since used it to block all laws and other initiatives by the National Assembly, strip that body of its constitutional powers of oversight and control and, on 5 September 2016, declare all its actions null and void...The government-controlled National Electoral Council (CNE) has been used to delay and ultimately suspend a recall referendum on Maduro’s presidency and to postpone for at least six months elections for state governors which, under the constitution, should have taken place in December. Protests have been met with outright prohibition, roadblocks and repressive policing, as well as deployment of armed civilians who have beaten and shot at demonstrators. Human rights groups say the government holds over 100 political prisoners, while thousands more are subject to various restrictions on their freedom” (International Crisis Group (16 December 2016) *Venezuela: Tough Talking*, p.1).

Human Rights Watch released a report in January 2017 reviewing events of 2016 which included stating:

“Under the leadership of President Hugo Chávez and now President Nicolás Maduro, the accumulation of power in the executive branch and erosion of human rights guarantees have enabled the government to intimidate, persecute, and even criminally prosecute its critics” (Human Rights Watch (12 January 2017) *World Report 2017: Venezuela*).

This report also states that:

“In 2016, the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) detained dozens of people on allegations of planning, fomenting, or participating in violent anti-government actions, including some that were in fact peaceful protests. Many say they have been tortured or otherwise abused in custody, or that they were unable to see their families or lawyers for hours, occasionally days, after arrest” (ibid).

In February 2017 *Amnesty International* reviewing events of 2016 states in a report that:

“Political opponents of the government continued to face imprisonment” (Amnesty International (22 February 2017) *Amnesty International Report 2016/17: Venezuela*).

A report issued in March 2017 by the *United States Department of State* commenting on events of the preceding year states:

“Principal human rights abuses reported during the year included systematic, politicized use of the judiciary to undermine legislative branch action, and intimidate and selectively prosecute critics; indiscriminate police action against civilians leading to widespread arbitrary detentions, unlawful deprivation of life, and torture; and government curtailment of freedom of expression and of the press. The government arrested and imprisoned opposition figures and showed little respect for judicial

independence or generally did not permit judges to act according to the law without fear of retaliation. At times the government blocked media outlets and harassed and intimidated privately owned television stations, other media outlets, and journalists throughout the year using threats, fines, property seizures, arrests, criminal investigations, and prosecutions” (United States Department of State (3 March 2017) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016: Venezuela*).

In January 2017 *Amnesty International* states:

“The most recent wave of arrests of leaders and members of an opposition party point to a systematic pattern of abuses against those who dare to express an opinion contrary to that of the government, Amnesty International said today” (Amnesty International (13 January 2017) *Venezuela: Detentions on the rise amid "witch-hunt" against opposition*).

A report released in February 2017 by *Freedom House* notes that:

“The government continues to escalate its repression of political opponents” (Freedom House (6 February 2017) *Venezuela Sheds Its Democratic Façade*).

This document also states that:

“Venezuelan intelligence officials increasingly act as a sort of secret police, often arresting political or civil society leaders without a court order and in violation of due process” (ibid).

The *Associated Press* in March 2017 states:

“The head of the Organization of American States wants regional governments to suspend Venezuela from the Washington-based group unless general elections are held soon to break a political impasse that he said Tuesday is destroying the country's democracy. OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro made the request in a 75-page report on Venezuela's political crisis, in which he accused President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government of systematically violating human rights and standards of democracy enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to which Venezuela is a signatory” (Associated Press (15 March 2017) *OAS head urges bloc suspend Venezuela over elections*).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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