

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE REMAINS ON TRIAL

Darvinson Rojas, Venezuelan journalist and prisoner of conscience for reporting on COVID-19, was conditionally released on 2 April 2020. After spending 12 days arbitrarily detained, Darvinson was charged with 'advocacy of hatred' and 'instigation to commit crimes' and released on bail pending a criminal investigation. Amnesty International considers these charges to be politically motivated in an attempt to silence his reporting on the pandemic in Venezuela and we demand the case against him is closed.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Nicolas Maduro
President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
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Venezuela
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Dear Nicolás Maduro,

I am very concerned about Darvinson Rojas' arbitrary detention and prosecution.

Darvinson Rojas was detained on 21 March after having reported on the spread of COVID-19 in Venezuela. After 12 days being held by the FAES, he was conditionally released on bail on 2 April, unfairly charged with 'advocacy of hatred' and 'instigation to commit crimes'.

In times of a global public health crisis, people's right to freedom of the press is more vital than ever. Journalists, particularly those reporting of the crisis, should be protected, not criminalised.

I demand all charges against Darvinson are dropped immediately and unconditionally, and that all Venezuelan authorities respect and promote the right to freedom of the press and the safety of press workers.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The arbitrary detention and criminalization of Darvinson Rojas occurs in a context of widespread arbitrary detentions made against people critical of the government or claiming their human rights.

Venezuelan authorities have implemented a systematic and widespread policy of repression, including carrying out politically motivated arbitrary detentions, targeted extrajudicial executions, and using military courts to charge non-military with discretionary crimes such as treason or rebellion, towards those who are seen as critical of the government. Human rights defenders and individuals who seek justice for human rights violations have been subjected to targeted attacks and smear campaigns, in an apparent attempt to stifle their human rights work.

The FAES have a particularly dismal human rights record, particularly regarding extrajudicial executions. In January 2019, those targeted were all young men who were or were perceived to be critical of the government and came from low-income areas and their participation in protests had been visible or publicized.

Additionally, the authorities continue refusing to recognize the true scale of the humanitarian emergency and deteriorating living conditions. The population in Venezuela faces severe shortages of food, medicines, medical supplies, water and electricity. By the end of 2019, the total number of people who had fled the country in search of international protection had reached 4.8 million.

In the case of Darvinson Rojas, his reporting on the spread of COVID-19 in Venezuela put him at risk of being victim of the government's policy of repression, given the firm grip authorities under Nicolás Maduro have over information on public health matters and the government's inadequate response to it.

Darvinson was at his home in Mamera, Caracas, with his parents when a group of FAES officers arrived and asked to talk to him, initially with the excuse of an alleged "COVID-19 case." They later asked him to reveal his sources on the information he was making public regarding cases of people infected with the virus in Venezuela. The FAES arrested all of them, and took them to the same detention centre. At the centre, his parents heard FAES officers pushing Darvinson to release information on who his source was on the matter, which also contravenes the principle of source secrecy protected by international law. His parents were released, but Darvinson was moved to another detention centre. After hours of uncertainty his family was able to see him and talk to him on 22 March.

FAES kept Darvinson Rojas in custody for 12 days. He was brought before the court without access to his lawyers of choice and confidence, despite them being present and available at the courthouse. He was accused of 'advocacy of hatred' and 'instigation to commit crimes' and released on bail on the evening of 2 April.

At the time this urgent action was issued, Darvinson's lawyers did not have access to the court files and the court was closed only to reopen a few days later. His lawyers are not yet able to find out the precise conditions under which Darvinson has been released.

Darvinson sent personal messages to Amnesty International expressing his deep gratitude for the campaigning on his behalf and the support and solidarity extended to his family. Amnesty International received reports indicating that authorities had directly responded to the public pressure exerted by our global campaigning.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 15 May 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Darvinson Rojas (he/him/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/2019/2020/en/>