

URGENT ACTION

VENEZUELAN DEFENDERS UNDER ARREST

Javier Tarazona, Director of local NGO Fundaredes, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García, Fundaredes' activists were arbitrarily detained on 2 July 2021 after attempting to report harassment from security officers at the Attorney General's Office in the city of Coro (West). The three human rights defenders' whereabouts remained unknown for 24 hours. Authorities presented them before a judge who denied legal representation of their choice assigning public defenders. They charged them with terrorism, among other charges. We urge authorities to release them immediately and close all criminal investigations against them.

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

President Nicolás Maduro
Palacio de Miraflores
Av. Norte 10, Caracas 1012,
Distrito Capital
Venezuela.
Tel: +58 212-8063111
Twitter: @NicolasMaduro

Dear Nicolás Maduro,

I am deeply alarmed by the detention of three brave human rights defenders in Venezuela, Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García from the organization FundaREDES. Their arbitrary detention and the ensuing criminal investigations against them must be stopped immediately.

Not only did their detention not comply with legal protections, but their rights to due process were subsequently violated by denying them access to trusted legal representation, making phone calls, notifying their relatives of their whereabouts, and assigning them public defenders they did not choose or trust.

We urge you to release Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, and Omar de Dios García immediately, close all criminal investigations into all four human rights defenders, and put an end to the harassment and criminalisation of civil society in Venezuela.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

FundaREDES is a Venezuelan human rights organization that promotes and defends human rights in the bordering states of Táchira, Apure, Zulia, Falcón, Bolívar y Amazonas. Its work includes documentation and reporting of human rights violations and human rights abuses by non-state actors in these regions. More recently, they have focused on documenting the violence in Apure state, southern Venezuela, in what has been claimed to be a conflict with FARC non-demobilized groups.

According to media outlets, the human rights defenders Javier Tarazona, Omar Tarazona and Omar de Dios García were in the city of Coro in an educational activity with Jhonny Romero, representative of the NGO Mayday Confavidt. The latter works with victims of disappearance and human trafficking in Falcón state. After the event, they went to the Attorney General's office to submit a formal report of harassment by alleged intelligence service and local police agents. Later that day, reports point out that Bolivarian National Intelligence Service's (SEBIN) agents arbitrarily detained four of them, without presenting an arrest warrant. Their arrest was not informed formally to their lawyers and their whereabouts remained unknown during 24 hours after their arrest, when they were brought before a Court with special jurisdiction on terrorism. Authorities released Jhonny Romero on 3 July, before the hearing.

The local NGO Foro Penal has informed that despite being their trusted defence lawyers, the three human rights defenders facing charges were assigned with public defenders, although one Foro Penal member was able to see them and talk to them. Due to the lack of trusted legal representation, it's unclear why they are being investigated, but it is public that they have been charged with instigation of hatred, "terrorism" and treason. Some of these crimes are established in the "Organic Law on Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism". The authorities in Venezuela have commonly used this law to criminalized human rights defenders and humanitarian workers, as the case of [five members of Azul Positivo in January 2021](#).

Nicolás Maduro government has continually harassed, prosecuted and censored activists and civil society organizations working to protect the rights of Venezuelans amidst a humanitarian complex crisis and a deep human rights crisis that is making Venezuelans fled in unprecedented numbers in search of safety and a dignified future abroad. By June 2021, over 5.6 million had fled the country.

All these events are not isolated. Since the beginning of 2021, civil society in Venezuela has reported a new crackdown wave against human rights activists and human rights defenders, mainly focusing on criminalizing international cooperation and attempting to implement [new repressive mechanisms over civil society in the country](#). This new set of repressive attacks have also affected [independent media outlets](#).

Last year, a report from the UN independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment committed in the country since 2014, and concluded that these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 August 2021

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: FundaREDES Human Rights Defenders (them/they)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a