

URGENT ACTION

FREE VENEZUELAN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Javier Tarazona, Director of local NGO FundaREDES, was 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 (Western Venezuela), and charged with inciting hatred, treason and "terrorism". His pre-trial hearing took place on December 16, after more than five months of delays. Javier Tarazona is a prisoner of conscience, having been arbitrarily detained for his human rights work. Tarazona's health has seriously deteriorated due to lack of medical treatment. We urge the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally.

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

President Nicolás Maduro
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Dear Nicolás Maduro,

I am deeply alarmed that prisoner of conscience and human rights defender Javier Tarazona, director of the organization FundaREDES, continues to be detained and subjected to an unfair criminal proceeding. He must be released immediately and unconditionally, in so that he can receive the medical attention and treatment he requires urgently.

FundaREDES monitors, documents and reports human rights abuses committed by non-state actors in border areas of Venezuela. The charge he faces, and for which Javier Tarazona continues to be unfairly detained, appears to be politically motivated as SEBIN (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional) agents detained him without a warrant and the court charged him with "terrorism", both elements of the well-documented pattern of arbitrary detentions. Two other FundaREDES defenders, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García, are also subject to arbitrary criminal proceedings that must be closed immediately.

We urge you to immediately and unconditionally release prisoner of conscience Javier Tarazona, close all criminal investigations into these three human rights defenders, and end the harassment and criminalization of non-governmental organizations 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, Rafael 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 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. On October 26, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios were released from prison under precautionary measures although the criminal proceeding is still open against them.

On December 16, 2021, the preliminary hearing of Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García took place, resulting in the indictment for "incitement to hatred" and "terrorism" against Javier Tarazona, and the indictment for "incitement to hatred" against Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García. Javier Tarazona is the only one of the three defenders who is still detained at the SEBIN headquarters in El Helicoide, Caracas. Javier Tarazona suffers from hypertension, diabetes and sequelae of Covid-19 -which he contracted during his detention- which have not been properly treated by a doctor he trusts and which require immediate and urgent attention.

The local NGO Foro Penal has informed that despite being their trusted defence lawyers, all three human rights defenders facing charges were assigned 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](#). Since their arrest, Foro Penal has requested their legal representation on countless occasions, which was always denied. Their pre-trial hearing was also postponed numerous times.

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: 10 February 2022

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: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/4923/2021/en/>