

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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### **Venezuela: Guarantee rule of law – an urgent task for all**

The crisis in Venezuela is putting human rights in serious danger by undermining the rule of law, declared an Amnesty International delegation today, at the end of a visit to the country.

The delegation, composed of Ignacio Saiz, Rupert Knox and Roddy Brett from the organization's International Secretariat in London, visited Venezuela between 10 and 22 November to monitor the aftermath of the events of April, when dozens of people were killed in a failed coup, and to analyze other aspects of the human rights situation in the country.

"We arrived in the country at a time when the rule of law and observance of human rights faced new threats. The rule of law has been weakened by the climate of impunity, extreme political polarization, the imminent risk of social upheaval, the militarization and politicization of the armed forces and police forces, and the apparent inability of the state to guarantee human rights to its citizens in an impartial and effective way", said the delegation.

"These elements are symptoms of a decomposition of the rule of law that could lead to even more serious human rights violations. Although the government has the primary responsibility for avoiding a deterioration of the crisis, it is the task of all social and political sectors to contribute to achieving this," added Amnesty International.

With regard to its investigation of the April events, the delegation observed that there had been a certain amount of progress. This had led to the arrest of various suspects, while charges had been made against others. However, some deficiencies were observed in the co-ordination between the investigative agencies involved, the lack of co-operation of the Metropolitan Police and the National Guard and the apparent lack of resources and ability to conduct an efficient investigation. Amnesty International will continue to monitor the investigations to ensure that they clarify responsibilities and to see that justice is done.

The delegation also manifested its concern for the series of attacks on journalists, and the lack of an effective response by the authorities.

During the visit, the delegation, also investigated more longstanding human rights violations, especially the alarming number of executions committed by police and para-police groups in various states of the country. In particular, the delegates visited the states of Anzoátegui and Bolívar where it met families of the victims of what were apparently extra-judicial executions by police groups. In the last two years, more than 150 cases have been denounced in the state of Anzoátegui and the number of

executions in Bolívar is also at an alarmingly high level. To date, there has been total impunity for those responsible for these executions, and in many cases, the families and witnesses have received threats. Amnesty International also gathered information on similar situations in the states of Aragua, Portuguesa and Falcón.

In talks with the authorities and non-governmental organizations, the delegation analysed the factors that have prevented effective implementation of the human rights protection provisions set out in the Constitution, including the prolongation of the “transitory regime” and the delay in approving the legislation necessary to regulate key institutions such as the Public Prosecutor’s office and the Ombudsperson.

The delegation highlighted the valuable work carried out by human rights organizations in a difficult and hostile climate and urged the government to investigate the threats registered against some of them immediately and exhaustively and to ensure that these organizations are able to play their legitimate and important role without fear for their own security.

In the light of what had been learned during the visit, Amnesty International urged the Venezuelan authorities to take immediate measures to strengthen the rule of law and protect human rights, including:

- recover the credibility of state institutions by ensuring that those responsible for human rights violations committed during the disturbances of April 2002 and since then are punished;
- end impunity in the states where extra-judicial executions by police bodies have been denounced;
- investigate impartially and exhaustively the threats against journalists and human rights defenders, and show that this type of aggression will not be tolerated;
- ensure that enforcement officials dealing with demonstrations and other disturbances keep strictly to international standards on the use of force set out in the Constitution and that any abuses are rigorously investigated and punished;
- comply with the recommendations made on human rights in Venezuela by inter-governmental organizations such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and United Nations mechanisms.

"We urge both the government and the opposition to seek solutions to the crisis that are constitutional and that emphasize respect for human rights," concluded Amnesty International. The organization made a special point of calling on the media to ensure an impartial right to information and to act with due regard for professional ethics.

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