

URGENT ACTION

VENEZUELAN DEFENDER MUST BE RELEASED

Rocío San Miguel, a well-known human rights defender, was arbitrarily detained in Venezuela on 9 February 2024. Her whereabouts remained unknown until 15 February, constituting a short term enforced disappearance. Her daughter and other family members were also arbitrarily detained on 9 February and later conditionally released on 15 February. Rocío San Miguel and her former partner remain unfairly detained, accused of several alleged crimes, and have been denied access to trusted lawyers. Rocío is detained for defending human rights in Venezuela and Amnesty International calls on Nicolás Maduro to release her immediately and unconditionally and to guarantee her safety.

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

President Nicolas Maduro

*Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela,
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President Nicolás Maduro,

I am writing to express alarm over the continued arbitrary detention of Rocío San Miguel. Not only was she subjected to short-term enforced disappearance for five excruciating days, but she continues to be unfairly held in 'El Helicoide', a detention centre of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) in Caracas, Venezuela. Since her detention on 9 February 2024, she has been repeatedly denied access to her trusted legal representation and the authorities have withheld family visits until Rocío's daughter was allowed a first visit on 18 February.

While we welcome the conditional release of her daughter and other family members, they should have never been arrested in the first place and so the charges against them should be immediately dropped. Similarly, Rocío, her former partner, and all those arbitrarily detained for political reasons, including human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Javier Tarazona should be released without conditions or delays.

We demand the immediate and unconditional release of Rocío San Miguel. While Rocío remains arbitrarily detained, we call on you to guarantee her safety and that she has immediate access to her lawyers of choice, as well as family visits without undue restrictions.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Rocío San Miguel is a nationally and internationally renowned lawyer, professor and human rights defender from Venezuela, holding dual Spanish and Venezuelan citizenship. She is the current president of Control Ciudadano, an NGO that is recognized for its investigations and monitoring of human rights issues linked to public security and the work of the armed forces. In the context of the arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of Rocío San Miguel, several people from her family environment were also detained, including her daughter, Miranda Díaz San Miguel, two brothers, Miguel Ángel San Miguel Sosa and Alberto San Miguel Quigosos, Miranda's father, Víctor Díaz Paruta, and Rocío's former partner, Alejandro González Canales. All of them, except for Rocío and Alejandro, were conditionally released on 15 February.

After five days of enforced disappearance, Rocío's whereabouts were disclosed by the authorities, who confirmed she was in the custody of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) and that she was being held at 'El Helicoide' detention centre in Caracas. Rocío's legal representation confirmed that her daughter, Miranda, had been allowed to visit her mother on 18 February, who relayed her mother's reiterated claims of innocence for the crimes she'd been accused of. According to the Attorney General, Rocío was brought before the Second Special Court with jurisdiction over terrorism and was accused of treason, conspiracy, terrorism, and association [to commit crimes], amongst others.

On 15 February, the Venezuelan government announced it was suspending the activities of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Venezuela, signaling a concerning escalation in the country's attempts to evade international scrutiny and accountability. This decision came soon after the OHCHR expressed concern regarding the detention of Rocío San Miguel, noting that "her whereabouts remain unknown, potentially qualifying her detention as an enforced disappearance." The announced suspension also took place a day after the publication of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food's report on his recent visit to Venezuela.

For years, Amnesty International has denounced the use of politically motivated arbitrary detentions as part of a policy of repression implemented by the government of Nicolás Maduro against people who may be considered critical towards the government. These arbitrary detentions are part of a widespread and systematic attack against the population of Venezuela and could constitute crimes against humanity. In addition to politically motivated arbitrary detentions, short and long-term forced disappearances have also been part of the Venezuelan government's policy of repression. This practice has been documented and denounced by the UN Working Group on Forced or Involuntary Disappearances, as well as by the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela.

Human rights defenders are at a constant risk of harassment, attacks and arbitrary detention. Human rights defender, prisoner of conscience and director of local NGO Fundaredes, Javier Tarazona, remains in detained since July 2021 and is facing unfair criminal charges solely for defending human rights in Venezuela. We call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Nicolás Maduro's government has continually harassed, prosecuted and censored activists and civil society organizations working to protect the rights of Venezuelans amidst a complex humanitarian emergency and a deep human rights crisis that is making Venezuelans flee in unprecedented numbers in search of safety and protection. By November 2023, over 7.72 million people have fled massive human rights violations in Venezuela, representing over 25% of the total population of the country.

Since 2020, three reports from the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have thoroughly 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; as well as the ways in which the justice system serves as a tool for the government's policy of repression, 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: 15 April 2024

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Rocío San Miguel (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: [Venezuela: Venezuelan human rights defender and her family arrested - Amnesty International](#)