

# URGENT ACTION

## VENEZUELA: MASS DETENTION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Between 29 July and 7 August 2024, over two thousand people were arrested for protesting or being seen as critical of the government. Most of the detainees are young people, including at least 105 aged between 13 and 17. At least 16 people with disabilities, such as visual or hearing impairments, remain in detention. Credible allegations of incommunicado detention and denial of legal counsel persist, leading to a high risk of ill-treatment and torture. We urge the authorities to release all those detained for exercising their rights and call on the Attorney General to protect persons who are vulnerable because of their age or because of living with a disability or serious or chronic health condition.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THE MODEL LETTER BELOW**

*Attorney General of the Republic, Tarek William Saab*  
*Edificio Sede Principal del Ministerio Público,*  
*Esquinas de Misericordia a Pele El Ojo Avenida México,*  
*Caracas, Venezuela*  
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Dear Attorney General of the Republic,

*Official reports of the arrest of more than two thousand people for exercising their right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and political participation are appalling. Among them are more than 100 teenagers aged between 13 and 17 and at least 16 people with disabilities who have been victims of this wave of repression. Protest must be protected, not punished.*

*It is extremely alarming that virtually all of these people, including teenagers and vulnerable groups such as young pregnant women, are experiencing a total lack of due process guarantees, such as not being allowed to communicate with their families, denial of representation by trusted counsel, and unjustified transfers to maximum security prisons. It is alarming to learn of the real risks of ill-treatment or even torture faced by thousands of people.*

*These arrests, torture, killings and excessive use of force, carried out arbitrarily and with impunity, are characteristic of a policy of repression that has been in place for years and is aimed at silencing dissent, including protest. It is important to remember that both the UN Fact-Finding Mission and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court have stated that the crimes committed in Venezuela appear to constitute crimes against humanity, for which there is no statute of limitations.*

***We therefore urge you to protect those exercising their right to peaceful assembly, to immediately release all those detained for protesting, and to protect those who are vulnerable because of their age, disability, or serious or chronic health condition.***

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Venezuela has been experiencing a profound human rights crisis for at least ten years. During this time, Amnesty International has reported serious human rights violations, including crimes against humanity, and a complex humanitarian emergency, which have caused more than 25% of the population to flee the country.

On 28 July, Venezuela saw a massive turnout for the presidential elections, despite a pre-election environment characterized by persecution, censorship and threatening discourse. When voting ended, the electoral authorities declared Nicolás Maduro the winner. However, the opposition claimed that this result was not supported by the official polling documents they had collected during the election. The electoral authority has not published official results, as required by Venezuelan law. Since then, mass demonstrations have broken out across the country in support of the opposition. The state authorities have responded with a policy of large-scale repression, including the use of lethal and less lethal force, which has resulted in at least 17 deaths, mostly of young people, including two teenagers; mass politically motivated arbitrary detentions; possible torture of key opposition figures; illegal home raids with excessive use of force; mobilization of pro-government armed groups (*colectivos*) and non-uniformed security forces; and a highly stigmatizing discourse against political activists, human rights defenders and civil society organizations (CSOs). Developments in the country are highly dynamic and volatile, with the number of human rights violations increasing by the day and public statements being issued constantly by all actors, both national and international.

In addition to the mass arrests of protesters between 29 July and 7 August, Amnesty International has noted with concern a dramatic increase in the government's repressive policies, including:

- At least 17 people killed through the use of lethal and less lethal force.
- Credible allegations of arrest warrants being issued against opposition leaders, including the presidential candidate and the head of the opposition.
- Reports of torture committed against at least one senior opposition figure, allegedly to obtain a self-incriminating confession.
- Dozens of illegal home raids with use of force to harass, intimidate and detain activists and protesters.
- Credible reports of widespread deployment of non-uniformed security forces and armed groups using lethal and excessive less lethal force.
- Repeated and continued stigmatization by senior government officials and government-linked authorities against opposition leaders, activists, human rights defenders, protesters and CSOs. Several human rights defenders have been arrested, including Edni López, Kennedy Tejada, Edward Ocariz and others whose identities are being withheld for safety reasons.

The events that are currently unfolding fall within existing patterns of crimes against humanity on a very worrying scale that merits an international response. In this regard, the ongoing investigation by the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court would have jurisdiction to investigate the perpetrators of possible acts of detention, torture, gender-based violence and persecution committed in the context of the elections. All authorities responsible for these crimes, including the chain of command, can and must be brought to justice in impartial and independent courts, with full guarantees of a fair trial.

### **PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Spanish.**

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 27 September 2024.** Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Persons detained for protesting (they, them, their)**

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/8390/2024/en/>