

URGENT ACTION

VENEZUELAN PRISON ACTIVISTS THREATENED

Marianela Sánchez Ortíz, a Venezuelan human rights defender with Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP), an organisation which monitors human rights abuses in Venezuelan prisons, has been threatened because of her work. She, her family and OVP's director Humberto Prado are all in danger.

On 12 April **Marianela Sánchez Ortíz** received a letter which warned her to stop working with OVP and **Humberto Prado** and stated that she and her family members are being watched. It read: "Whenever we want, we will get you and where it hurts the most, your family" ("cuando se nos antoje vamos por ti y lo que mas te duele tu familia" [sic]). The letter refers to Marianela Sánchez Ortíz's children, sister and husband, who in 2012 was held at gunpoint in his car by four men and told that his wife should stop complaining about prison conditions and criticizing the government. The letter added: "remember what happened to your husband, 'cause you seem to have forgotten" ("acuérdesese de lo que le paso a su esposo que vemos que ya lo olvido").

The letter arrived a week after Iris Varela, the Prison Services Minister, publicly accused Humberto Prado of organizing protests across Venezuelan prisons, including hunger strikes and self harm strikes to destabilize the prison system in the run-up to the presidential elections, which took place on 14 April. In 2011, the Interior Minister accused Humberto Prado of orchestrating riots. Humberto Prado later received death threats (see UA 202/11, www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR53/006/2011/en).

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to order an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against Marianela Sánchez Ortiz, and her family, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to take, and publicise, effective measures to protect Marianela Sánchez Ortiz, her family and Humberto Prado in accordance with their wishes, and stop the harassment and threats directed at all her colleagues;
- Urging them to publicly recognise the legitimate human rights work of the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons and remind them of their responsibility to ensure the organization can carry out its work without fear of reprisal as established in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 MAY 2013 TO:

Minister of Justice and Interior

Néstor Luis Reverol Torres
Ministerio del Poder Popular para
Relaciones Interiores y Justicia
Avenida Urdaneta Esquina de Platanal
Edificio Interior y Justicia Despacho del
Ministro, Piso 3, Caracas, Venezuela

**Salutation: Señor Ministro/
Dear Minister**

Attorney General of the Republic

Dra. Luisa Ortega Díaz
Fiscalía General de la República
Edificio Sede Principal del Ministerio
Público,
Esquinas de Misericordia a Pele El Ojo
Avenida México, Caracas, Venezuela
Email: ministeriopublico@mp.gob.ve
Fax: +58 212 578 3239

**Salutation: Dra. Fiscal / Dear
Prosecutor**

And copies to:

Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones
Av. Lecuna entre esquinas Cipreses a
Hoyo N.60
Centro Empresarial Cipreses, PH-E
Municipio Libertador
Caracas
Venezuela
Email: ovpsiddhh2002@gmail.com

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 160/12. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR53/004/2012/en

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The human rights situation in Venezuelan prisons is critical. There are reported to be over 48,000 prisoners in a system built for 16,539. Amnesty International is concerned at reports that violence between inmates is rife, and that firearms, explosives, and other weapons continued to be routinely used in prison clashes. In 2012, at least 591 people were killed in prisons. Two riots ended in the killing of 17 and 26 people respectively. The last major riot happened in Uribana prison, Lara state, on 25 January 2013, which ended with 58 people dead and 90 injured.

Name: Marianela Sanchez Ortiz, Humberto Prado

Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 160/12 Index: AMR 53/005/2013 Issue Date: 15 April 2013