

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 377/92 Possible extrajudicial executions/health concern

30 November 1992

VENEZUELA: Ernesto LEAL HERNÁNDEZ, 23, student and paramedic  
Atahualpa PERÉZ, 19  
Johnny VERGARA, production assistant for TV company  
Clara ARIZA (female), 38

and more than 63 prisoners from the Retén de Catia prison

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Amnesty International is gravely concerned at reports of the killing of a number of people in circumstances suggesting they may have been the victims of extrajudicial execution. Most of the reported killings were carried out on 27 November 1992, the day that members of the armed forces tried to overthrow the civilian government of Carlos Andrés Pérez for the second time this year.

Initial reports indicate that several civilians were killed by government forces. Ernesto Leal Hernández, a student at the University of Simón Bolívar, was reportedly shot in the back by members of the Metropolitan Police (PM, Policía Metropolitana). Atahualpa Pérez, was reportedly found near the Central University of Venezuela (Universidad Central de Venezuela) handcuffed and with a shot in the head. Clara Ariza was reportedly shot dead by a member of the National Guard (GN, Guardia Nacional) as she left her house in the evening to go shopping. Johnny Vergara, a television production assistant, was reportedly detained and shot dead in the centre of Caracas.

In the Caracas prison of El Retén de Catia, unconfirmed reports indicate that at least 63 and possibly more than a 100 prisoners were killed when members of the Metropolitan Police moved in to quell an attempt by inmates to escape from the prison on 27 November. According to reports, at least 58 prisoners were wounded during the incident. Reports also suggest that policemen were still firing at the prison a day later and on Sunday 29 November, the National Guard is alleged to have entered the prison firing indiscriminately. Families waiting outside the prison for information about their relatives, among them a young boy, reportedly suffered bullet injuries, when members of the Guardia Nacional stationed outside the prison fired at them.

The number of deaths in Caracas alone is estimated to be at least 150. A number of civilians are reported to have died in cross fire between rebel troops and loyal members of the armed forces. Others were apparently killed during bombing raids by those participating in the coup attempt, or were killed by snipers. At least 24 members of the armed forces, both members of the rebellion and those loyal to the government, were reported to have been killed. Some rebel soldiers were allegedly killed after they had given themselves up.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An earlier coup attempt on 4 February 1992 was quickly put down by troops loyal to President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Amnesty International received reports that at least seven people, four of them students, were the victims of extrajudicial execution in the town of Valencia. At the beginning of 1989, hundreds of people died during nationwide disturbances. A number

of them were victims of extrajudicial execution. None of those responsible for these killings, either committed this year, or in 1989, have been brought to justice.

Amnesty International has repeatedly complained about conditions in many Venezuelan prisons that amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Serious overcrowding, the arbitrary use of punishment cells and poor sanitary conditions have prompted protests in a number of prisons. The Retén de Catia is one of the most notorious prisons in Venezuela. It is technically a temporary holding centre, but the majority of inmates have been there longer than a year. Built for 700 inmates, it is said to hold over 4,000 prisoners in conditions that are reported to be appalling.

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**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish, English, French or in your own language:**

- expressing grave concern about reports of extrajudicial executions, including those named above, in the wake of the attempted coup;
- requesting an immediate and impartial inquiry into the events in the Retén de Catia that led to the alleged killing of more than 63 inmates and the wounding of 58 prisoners. Requesting that such an inquiry should look into the allegations that the prison conditions there constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;
- calling for immediate, full and impartial investigations into all these killings, following the guidelines of the United Nations' Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions; and calling for adequate medical care for all the wounded;
- urging that all necessary steps are taken to ensure that the security forces abide by the United Nations' Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Personnel.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) President:

Sr. Carlos Andrés Pérez  
Presidente de la República  
Palacio Miraflores, Caracas, Venezuela  
**Telegrams: Presidente Pérez, Caracas, Venezuela**  
**Telexes: 26429 EXTER VC**

**Salutation: Sr. Presidente /  
Dear President**

2) Minister of the Interior:

Sr. Luis Piñerúa Ordaz  
Ministro de Relaciones Interiores  
Ministerio de Relaciones Interiores  
Carmelitas a Santa Capilla, Caracas, Venezuela  
**Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Caracas, Venezuela**  
**Telexes: 26429 EXTER VC**  
**Faxes: + 58 2 81 57 96**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro /  
Dear Minister**

3) Minister of Defence:

General Iván Jiménez Sánchez  
Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
Fuerte Tiuna, Conejo Blanco  
El Valle, Caracas, Venezuela  
**Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Caracas, Venezuela**  
**Faxes: + 58 2 66 28 829**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro /  
Dear Minister**

4) Attorney General:

Sr. Ramón Escovar Salom  
Fiscal General de la República

**Salutation: Dr. Escovar Salom /  
Dear Dr. Escovar Salom**

Manduca a Ferrequín,  
La Candelaria, Caracas, Venezuela  
**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Caracas, Venezuela**  
**Telexes: 24787 FISGE VC**

5) Governor of Caracas:

Sr. Antonio Ledezma  
Gobernador del Distrito Federal  
Esq. Principal, Frente a Plaza Bolívar  
Caracas, Venezuela

**Salutation: Sr. Gobernador /  
Dear Governor**

**Telegrams: Gobernador Distrito Federal, Caracas, Venezuela**

**Faxes: +58 2 81 46 68**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights organization:

Provea  
Apartado 5156  
Caracas 1010-A  
Venezuela

Daily Newspaper:

El Nacional  
Edificio el Nacional  
Puente Nuevo a Puerto Escondido  
Caracas, Venezuela

and to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Please check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 January 1993.