

URGENT ACTION

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL HELD IN VENEZUELA

Richard Blanco, a male local government official from Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, is being detained in a prison in Caracas without any evidence of him having committed a crime. His detention appears to be politically motivated.

Richard Blanco is a Prefect in Caracas – a local government official appointed by the city's mayor. On 22 August, he and hundreds of others in the capital and throughout the country took part in a demonstration against a new education law. The law generated strong opposition from the private education sector and from political opposition parties.

Six days later, Richard Blanco was arrested with 11 of his colleagues, allegedly for inciting violence and injuring a police officer during the demonstration. The 11 others were later released but are still facing trial. However, Richard Blanco remains in custody. According to sources in Venezuela, the evidence against him is solely based on video footage from the demonstration. Amnesty International has seen video footage of Richard Blanco taking part in the demonstration. In these videos there is no evidence of Richard Blanco inciting violence or injuring a police officer.

Richard Blanco has been a prominent member of the opposition party, the Alianza Bravo Pueblo for many years. The party's candidate won the elections for Mayor of Caracas in November 2008, beating the candidate from the ruling party of President Hugo Chavez. Since he became Prefect of Caracas in November 2008, Richard Blanco has been outspoken against what he and his party regard as central government interference in affairs under the Mayor's jurisdiction. Amnesty International is seriously concerned that Richard Blanco's detention is politically motivated.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing serious concern that Richard Blanco has spent four months being detained without any evidence that he has committed a crime;
- urging the authorities to either bring him to trial in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards, or else release him immediately.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 FEBRUARY 2010 TO:

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Tarek El Aissami
Ministerio del Poder Popular para
Relaciones Interiores y Justicia
Av. Urdaneta, Edif. Sede MIJ, Piso 1,
Carmelitas, Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: +58 212 506 1557

**Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear
Minister**

Attorney General

Dra. Luisa Ortega Díaz
Fiscal General de la República
Fiscalía General de la República
Avda. México, Manduca a Pelelojo,
Edif. Sede Fiscalía General de la
República, La Candelaria, Caracas,
Venezuela

Fax: +58 212 509 8504

mp@fiscalia.gov.ve

**Salutation: Señora Fiscal General/
Dear Attorney General**

AND COPIES TO:

Richard Blanco's lawyer

Dr. Negar Granados
Calle la Joya Edf Cosmos Piso 3 Ofc
3C

Chacao Caracas 1060

Venezuela

Email: negargranados@gmail.com

Fax 58 212 2652493

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to sources in Venezuela, the number of protests reported to have taken place in the first eight months of 2009 was nearly double the figure for the whole of 2008. Amidst this unrest members of opposition political parties have been harassed, threatened and intimidated, including being charged with spurious offences. In addition, during demonstrations pro-government supporters and anti-government supporters have used violence. Amnesty International has expressed serious concern that violations against political opponents and the violence used by government supporters is not thoroughly, independently and impartially investigated, that the authorities fail to condemn it and fail to send a clear message that these acts are not going to be tolerated.

In January 2009, pro-government activists carrying iron bars, machetes and firearms forced their entrance into the building of the *Fundacion Ateneo*, a cultural centre in the capital Caracas, to protest against a seminar organised to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of *Bandera Roja*, a left-wing political party opposed to the government. When the assailants attacked people in the building the police failed to intervene. Later in the year, in September, Julio César Rivas, a student and leader of the United Active Youth of Venezuela, a university association, was detained and charged with "organizing armed groups", and remained in a high security prison for four weeks until he was released on bail. He had been protesting against the new law on education.

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