

URGENT ACTION

VENEZUELAN REFUGEES AT RISK

At least 165 Venezuelans have been deported by Trinidad and Tobago in recent weeks. Pushing a xenophobic narrative targeting Venezuelans and associating them with COVID-19, the government announced it will deport Venezuelans who have “entered illegally” and those with legal residency found to be helping them. This fuels a climate of fear which risks pushing people underground and away from health services. We are calling on Trinidad and Tobago to refrain from deporting people in search of protection and to work with partners to find human rights-based solutions for them.

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

*The Honourable Dr Keith Rowley
Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago
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Dear Prime Minister,

I write to you with deep concern over reports that at least 165 Venezuelans were deported from Trinidad and Tobago to their country in recent weeks.

Trinidad and Tobago must guarantee and protect the rights of refugees and people seeking international protection. Millions of Venezuelans are fleeing an unprecedented human rights crisis in their country. They need a life jacket, not to be sent back to a country where they may face torture or other grave human rights violations.

Instead, Venezuelan refugees and those who support them are targeted by xenophobic narratives and accusations of increasing the risks of COVID-19 for Trinidad and Tobago people, justifying procedures of deportation without properly assess the danger that those returned may face in Venezuela.

COVID-19 presents governments with major challenges. However, it cannot used as an excuse to avoid complying with international human rights obligations. Trinidad and Tobago must refrain from deporting people in need of international protection, particularly during this unprecedented pandemic.

I strongly urge the government of Trinidad and Tobago to stop all deportations of Venezuelan refugees immediately, and to work with local NGOs and the UN to find solutions to further protect them.

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Amnesty International received alarming reports that Trinidad and Tobago's authorities deported at least [165 Venezuelans](#) in recent weeks. Amnesty International has expressed concern about the lack of adequate protection for Venezuelan refugees and asylum seekers in Trinidad and Tobago [at least since 2018](#).

In 2019, the authorities registered more than 16,500 Venezuelans who were given temporary visas. However, following the registration process, the government continued to criminalize the irregular entry of migrants and refugees, contrary to international standards; failed to pass national refugee legislation; and continued to return Venezuelans, in circumstances which may amount to *refoulement*.

As the world responds to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and people seek a safe place to shelter, authorities in Trinidad and Tobago continue to deport Venezuelan refugees back to the situation that they were fleeing from.

In a [press conference](#) on 25 July 2020, Trinidad and Tobago's Minister of National Security claimed that "illegal immigrants" and "boat people" and businessmen that "trafficked" them present a potential health risk and issued a hotline number for people to report them. He also said that Venezuelans who registered and were given legal residency and the right to work under the government's so-called "amnesty" process in 2019 who were found to be "harbouring" irregular migrants could have their residency revoked and face deportation. Landlords found to be renting to irregular migrants could also be subject to criminal charges, the minister added.

On 27 July, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service [circulated](#) fliers on Facebook stating that "illegal immigration" could cause a "new wave of COVID-19" and called on people to report "suspicious activity."

Prior to this, local NGO the Caribbean Centre for Human Rights [called](#) on the government to help Venezuelan women and children who may have been trafficked to Trinidad, instead of sending them back, including by giving them access to fair and efficient asylum procedures.

According to [news reports](#), more than two dozen police are under investigation into alleged involvement in trafficking between Trinidad and Venezuela. When Amnesty International visited Trinidad in January 2020, Venezuelan women who identified as trafficking survivors told researchers that police were involved in trafficking networks. This, combined with the criminalization of irregular entry into Trinidad and Tobago, made them fearful to report the perpetrators, creating a culture of impunity for human rights violations.

Amnesty International believes this new threat by authorities to criminalize refugees, and those in some cases helping them, risks pushing people further underground, into hiding, and away from the health services that could protect the entire population from COVID-19.

Trinidad and Tobago remains one of the few Latin American countries to have no national legislation on refugees, meaning in practice that people who apply for asylum or who are granted refugee status have no access to many of the rights granted under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Refugee Convention) and its Protocol (1967), to which Trinidad and Tobago is party.

On August 10, 2020, Trinidad and Tobago held general elections for Parliament. At the time of writing, no changes in the office of the Prime Minister were announced. We will update this Urgent Action accordingly.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English. You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 September 2020. Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Venezuelans refugees at risk (They, them).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A