

25 November 2020

Open letter to Dr Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago

Return of deported children gives your government a second chance

We the undersigned organizations, write to express our relief at the [return](#) of at least 16 children, including a small baby, and an estimated 12 adults to Trinidad following their deportation to Venezuela on 22 November.

We, the undersigned, believe this gives the authorities of Trinidad and Tobago a second chance to uphold its domestic and international obligations to protect the rights of children, and to provide international protection for people seeking safety from danger.

We ask the government to immediately reunite the children with their families, grant them access to apply for asylum, screen to determine if they have been trafficked, and provide medical attention, as should have been done after they were first identified by the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago.

According to initial information available, at least some of the children had family already registered in Trinidad and Tobago with UNHCR, making it even more necessary for the authorities to have granted them access to asylum procedures according to the country's obligations under international law.

According to reports, some [50 children](#) have been deported this year, despite the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires countries to act in the [best interest of children](#), refrain from detaining them according to international [law](#), and [prohibits](#) deporting them to situations where they could face ill-treatment or danger.

In a [press conference](#) held on 24 November, the Minister of National Security seemed to suggest that the children may have been trafficked. This is even more reason for the children and adults to be screened to determine if they may have been victims of trafficking. Indeed, Trinidad and Tobago has obligations under its own [Trafficking in Person's Act](#) to identify potential trafficking victims, and to provide them with protection and reparation.

The Minister of National Security also indicated that children were being held by authorities to protect the population in Trinidad from a risk of COVID-19. We wish to remind your government that many countries have successfully established practices to ensure asylum seekers are exempt from entry bans in accordance with international law while also being screened effectively and given access to medical care. The pandemic [cannot be used as an excuse](#) to deny access to asylum and safety to those who need it most.

As indicated by 25 human rights organizations in a previous [Open Letter](#) to the Prime Minister, Venezuelans are fleeing grave human rights violations that a recent UN-appointed Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela has stated could amount to crimes against humanity. This, combined with an ongoing humanitarian crisis, means Venezuelans will continue to seek international protection/asylum outside their country, even in a pandemic. We reiterate that Trinidad and Tobago must find ways to grant legal residency for Venezuelans through re-opening the registration process, or passing national refugee legislation, which would facilitate its compliance with international law.

Though the entire world is living in complicated times during the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains the obligation of world leaders such as yourself to uphold the rights of all people, including children. As other Latin American countries have done, we ask Trinidad and Tobago to find shared solutions and resources to respond to and help people fleeing Venezuela.

This is Trinidad and Tobago's chance to stand on the right side of history.

Yours sincerely,

1. Acceso a la Justicia
2. Acción Solidaria
3. Amnistía Internacional
4. Asylum Access
5. Aula Abierta
6. Caribbean Centre for Human Rights
7. Centro de Justicia y Paz – Cepaz
8. CIVILIS Derechos Humanos
9. Clínica Jurídica de Migrantes y Refugiados de la Universidad Diego Portales (Chile)
10. Comisión Nacional de DDHH de la Federación de Colegios de Abogados de Venezuela del estado Táchira
11. Derechos Humanos Con DR Corp
12. Families in Action
13. FundaRedes
14. La Casita, Hispanic Cultural Centre
15. Red Jesuita con Migrantes LAC
16. Refugees International
17. Ryu Dan Dojo Empowerment Foundation