

URGENT ACTION

Humanitarian NGO staff are prisoners of conscience

On 12 January, Officers of the Directorate of Military Counterintelligence in Maracaibo (DGCIM) detained staff members from Azul Positivo, a medical and humanitarian NGO in Zulia (Western Venezuela). Johan León Reyes, Yordy Bermúdez, Layners Gutiérrez Díaz, Alejandro Gómez Di Maggio and Luis Ferrabuz, have been charged with financial crimes and 'association to commit crimes'. Amnesty International considers their detention and prosecution to be solely based on the humanitarian work carried out by the NGO they work for, Azul Positivo. They are prisoners of conscience and they must be released immediately and unconditionally.

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

President Nicolás Maduro
Palacio de Miraflores
Av. Norte 10, Caracas 1012,
Distrito Capital
Venezuela.
Tel: +58 212-8063111
Twitter: @NicolasMaduro

Dear Nicolas Maduro,

I am dismayed to learn of the detention of civil society and humanitarian workers belonging to Azul Positivo, by officers in the Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) in Maracaibo on 12 January.

Johan León Reyes, Yordy Bermúdez, Layners Gutiérrez Díaz, Alejandro Gómez Di Maggio, Miguel Guerra Raydan, and Luis Ferrebuz are prisoners of conscience and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Azul Positivo's work as a humanitarian organization is admirable and much needed in Venezuela. Their work must be guaranteed, protected, and celebrated, not criminalized.

I call upon you to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all the staff of Azul Positivo and to end the harassment, prosecution, and censorship of all civil society organizations working to protect the rights of all Venezuelans.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Azul Positivo is a non-governmental organization that since 2004 works to promote inclusion, understanding and treatment to HIV+ patients, as well as transversal issues such as sexually transmitted infections, diversity and sexual violence. Since 2006, they have developed community-based projects in various towns and cities in Zulia State (Western Venezuela). Through their work, they have contributed to the work of state public health entities, such as the National Service of Medicine and Forensic Sciences, the Regional AIDS Programme and the Ministry of Health. They have also been an ally of United Nations System agencies such as UNAIDS, UNHCR and UNFPA, implementing projects on the border with Colombia on sexual and reproductive health.

On 12 January 2021, at approximately 11:30 a.m., a commission of at least 15 officials from the General Directorate of Military Counter-Intelligence (DGCIM) went to the headquarters of the civil society organisation Azul Positivo located in the Aventura shopping centre in the city of Maracaibo to carry out an alleged administrative procedure related to the humanitarian assistance activities that the organization carries out in various communities in Zulia State.

For over 6 hours, the directors and several members of the team were held at their offices and interrogated about their humanitarian work. After this time, Johan León Reyes, Yordy Bermúdez, Layners Gutiérrez Díaz, Alejandro Gómez Di Maggio and Miguel Guerra Raydan, were taken to the DGCIM headquarters, without having access to legal assistance during that time. Later in the day, another worker at Azul Positivo, Luis Ferrebuz was arrested at his home by DGCIM officials. Miguel Guerra was later released.

On 14 January, all five detainees were brought before a court and formally charged with trumped up crimes, namely unlawful acquisition of goods and services, money laundering and association to commit crimes. This attack on Azul Positivo comes at a time of heightened government stigmatization and harassment of other civil society organizations, particularly targeting their international funding. With over 15 years of respected, trusted and impactful humanitarian work, Azul Positivo is highly regarded by international aid organizations and local partners and activists.

Nicolás Maduro's government has implemented a policy of repression and continually harassed, prosecuted and censored activists and civil society organizations working to protect the rights of Venezuelans amidst a humanitarian complex crisis and a deep human rights crisis that has forced Venezuelans to flee in unprecedented numbers in search of safety and a dignified future abroad. By December 2020, over 5.4 million had fled the country.

All these events are not isolated. Since the beginning of January, civil society in Venezuela has reported a new crackdown wave against human rights activists and human rights defenders, mainly focusing on criminalizing international cooperation. This new set of repressive attacks have also affected [independent media outlets](#).

Last year, a report from the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment committed in the country since 2014, and concluded that these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 March 2021
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Azul Positivo Staff (They, them, theirs)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/3528/2021/en/>