

EXTERNAL

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Arbitrary arrest/fear for safety

30 July 1996

VENEZUELA

Jorge Nieves, human rights defender

Leticia Echenique (f), human rights defender

Amnesty International is alarmed at the arbitrary arrest of Jorge Nieves and Leticia Echenique, members of the *Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (CODEHUM), a non-governmental human rights organization based in Guasdalito, state of Apure, and is seriously concerned about their safety and that of other members of their organization. Guasdalito is within the so-called "*zonas de seguridad fronteriza*", border security zones, where several constitutional guarantees remain suspended and security operations are under the command of the Venezuelan army.

Jorge Nieves and Leticia Echenique were detained on 29 July at the local office of the *Dirección de Inteligencia y Prevención* (DISIP), a police intelligence agency, when they went to enquire about the conditions of detention of Silvano Rivero, who had been held in that office since 28 July. Following their detention, the home of Jorge Nieves was raided without a warrant by the police.

According to the local police, both human rights defenders were detained because their names had appeared on a list of people allegedly conspiring to undermine the security of the state. Reportedly, no charges have been brought against either of them. Amnesty International has well-founded fears for their safety. Earlier this month, representatives of CODEHUM presented a report of human rights violations by the security forces to a visiting Amnesty International delegation. Amnesty International believes that the detention of Jorge Nieves and Leticia Echenique may be in retaliation for this.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International (AI) has expressed increasing concern about gross human rights violations by the Venezuelan security forces in vast areas bordering with Colombia. Between 13 and 21 July, an Amnesty International delegation, headed by its Secretary General, visited the country to present a memorandum addressed to President Rafael Caldera which summarized the organization's concerns over the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, especially in the areas bordering with Colombia, defined as "*zonas de seguridad fronteriza*". During the visit, AI representatives met with several Venezuelan human rights organizations, which support AI's concerns. The human rights defenders participating in that meeting described the increasing pressure they feel and even threats they are suffering from local authorities as a result of their work. Among those present were representatives of CODEHUM, which updated the organization on the sharp increase in serious human rights violations by the security forces, including dozens of recent cases of torture, in Guasdalito and other areas of Apure. They also reported recent incidents of threats against their members by local authorities.

Amnesty International's memorandum was not well received by some authorities.

José Guillermo Andueza, the Interior Minister, accused AI's Secretary General of "defending Colombian interests", and General Raúl Salazar Rodríguez, in charge of military operations in the region, completely refuted AI's concerns.

Amnesty International is extremely concerned that these statements may indicate a lack of willingness by the authorities to stop human rights violations and ensure full investigations about well-documented abuses committed by the

security forces. Moreover, the organization is seriously concerned at the arbitrary detention of human rights defenders working in the region bordering Colombia, who appear to be the last and only recourse of the local population against human rights violations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing alarm about the arbitrary detention of Jorge Nieves and Leticia Echenique, apparently solely as a result of their work as human rights defenders, and your serious concern for their safety;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release, and seeking assurances of their physical integrity and security;
- calling for assurances that human rights defenders, their work and organizations will be fully respected by the authorities, in Guasdalito as well as throughout the rest of the Venezuelan territory;
- urging that full investigations be carried out into the arbitrary detention of Jorge Nieves and Leticia Echenique, and into the threats against other members of CODEHUM, and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO

President of the Republic

Dr. Rafael Caldera
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio Miraflores
 Caracas, Venezuela

Telegrams: Presidente Caldera, Venezuela

Telexes: 21161 MIRAF VC

Fax: + 582 861 0793

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Interior Minister

Ministro de Relaciones Interiores
 Dr. José Guillermo Andueza
 Ministerio de Relaciones Interiores
 Carmelitas a Santa Capilla
 Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: + 582 812 890

Telegram; Ministro Interior, Caracas, Venezuela

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

General Pedro Nicolás Valencia Vivas
 Ministro de Defensa
 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
 Fuerte Tiuna, Conejo Blanco
 El Valle, Caracas, Venezuela

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: + 582 662 8829

Salutation: Sr. Ministro de Defensa / Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Red de Apoyo
 Edif. Caroata, Nivel Oficina 2, Of. 220

Parque Central, Caracas, Venezuela
Tel/fax: (582) 5741949 and 5748005

and to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited
to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Please contact the
International Secretariat, of your section office, if sending
appeals after 10 September 1996.