

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: AMR 53/008/2002**

**13 December 2002**

**UA 362/02**

**Fear for Safety**

**VENEZUELA**

**Jose Antonio Dávila (m)** ]  
**Rafael Fuenmayor (m)** ] **journalists**  
**Luis Alfonso Fernández (m)** ]  
**Fernando Malavé (m)** ]  
**and other journalists and photographers**

---

The four men named above were among a group of journalists reportedly attacked and injured by the National Guard on 3 December. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety, and that of all journalists and photographers in Venezuela.

Since the beginning of a national strike on 2 December by the opposition movement to President Hugo Chávez, both pro and anti-government journalists and media outlets have been the target of threats, intimidation and attack, particularly when covering street demonstrations. According to reports, Jose Antonio Dávila, Rafael Fuenmayor, Luis Alfonso Fernández and Fernando Malavé, along with several other journalists were attacked when reporting on the violent break up of an opposition demonstration in the Chauo district of the capital Caracas. Fernando Malavé received a serious gunshot wound, others were injured by rubber bullets and batons. In the deepening crisis of the ongoing strike, journalists risk further threats and attacks.

On the nights of 8 and 9 December, there were large scale protests by pro-government supporters outside opposition supporting newspapers, TV and radio stations. In a number of incidents around the country on those nights, protesters threatened journalists and attacked the offices of the media. On the night of 8 December, there was also a protest by opposition supporters outside the headquarters of Channel 8, the state TV channel. Shots were reportedly fired, however there were allegedly no injuries.

The news media are both contributors to and have suffered from the political polarization which is undermining the rule of law in Venezuela. Private media outlets are accused of directly encouraging opposition to the administration of President Chavez and of failing to cover events impartially. The coverage of the state run television channel is similarly accused of uncritical support for President Chavez.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Political polarization in Venezuela has threatened to lead to wide scale violence throughout the year. Tension is particularly high at present with the continuing indefinite national strike, now in its 12<sup>th</sup> day, called by the opposition in order to remove President Chavez. The strike has paralysed many sectors of the economy.

On April 11 a similar national strike ended in violence and the death of 20 people, which in turn led to a coup d'état and the temporary removal and imprisonment of President Chavez. On 13 April he was returned to power after wide-scale national and international protests at his unconstitutional removal from power. Attempts to negotiate a solution have continued since then. At present, Cesar Gaviria, the president of Organization of American States is mediating talks between the government and the opposition.

Attacks and threats on journalists have escalated over the last two years with the increasing polarization. President Chavez has repeatedly accused the media of sponsoring efforts to remove him, while the media have accused the president of encouraging attacks by his supporters on the media.

The Inter American Commission on Human Rights has repeatedly issued protection orders (medidas cautelares) on behalf of journalists who have been threatened or attacked.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English and Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of Jose Antonio Dávila, Rafael Fuenmayor, Luis Alfonso Fernández, Fernando Malavé and other journalists working in Venezuela;
- condemning all attacks on journalists and media outlets;
- calling for the authorities to ensure that all journalist can carry out their legitimate work without fear of threat or attack;
- reminding the authorities of their duty to take all appropriate measures to ensure there are no further attacks and to demonstrate that all media workers are entitled to the equal protection of the law;
- calling for prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigations into the attacks and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Hugo Chávez Frías  
Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela  
Palacio de Miraflores  
Esquina de Bolero  
Av. Urdaneta  
Caracas, Venezuela

**Telegram:** Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela

**Fax:** + 58 212 806 3551/3221

**Salutation:** Señor Presidente/ Dear President

Vice-President of the Republic

José Vicente Rangel  
Vicepresidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela  
Palacio de la Vicepresidencia  
Av. Urdaneta  
Esquina de Carmelitas  
Caracas, Venezuela

**Telegram:** Vicepresidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela

**Fax:** + 58 212 863 3938 / 860 3876

**Salutation:** Señor Vicepresidente/ Dear Vice-President

Attorney General

Fiscal general de la República, Dr. Isaías Rodríguez  
Avenida Universidad, Esquina Pele el ojo a Misericordia,  
frente a Parque Carabobo, Caracas, Venezuela

**Fax:** + 58 212 576 44 19

**Salutation:** Estimado Señor Fiscal General/Dear Attorney General

Human Rights Ombudsman

Dr. Germán Mundaraín  
Defensoría del Pueblo  
Bellas Artes comienzo Avenida México frente al Ateneo de Caracas  
Plaza Morelos  
Caracas, VENEZUELA

**Fax:** + 58 212 575 4467 (if a voice answers, say “tono de fax por favor”)

**Email:** gmundarain@defensoria.gov.ve

**Salutation:** Estimado Señor/Dear Sir

**COPIES TO:**

Media Workers' Trade Union

Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa  
Av. Andrés Bello, Casa Nacional del Periodista, Piso 2, Ala B, Oficina B-23  
Caracas, Venezuela

**Fax: + 58 212 793 1996/2883 (if a voice answers, say “tono de fax por favor”)**

**Salutation: Estimado Señor/Dear Sir**

and to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 January 2003.