

VENEZUELA Juan Bautista Moreno, Human Rights Defender

Juan Bautista Moreno, a human rights defender, could be in imminent danger of "disappearance".

According to information just received by Amnesty International, Juan Bautista Moreno was detained by members of the Venezuelan armed forces at his home in Páez municipality, Apure state, near the Colombian border, on 19 October 1998. He was taken to the military headquarters in Guasdualito, a town in the same state.

Once in detention, the Colonel in command of military operations in the region accused Juan Bautista Moreno of being a member of a Colombian guerilla group operating in Venezuela. The Colonel reportedly also said that Juan Bautista Moreno would "disappear" if anything happened to the Venezuelan soldiers in the region.

Protesting his innocence, Juan Bautista Moreno stated that he was only working to improve the living conditions of the local people. A military officer replied: *Es precisamente el problema* - that is precisely the problem.

Juan Bautista Moreno was released after eight hours' detention. However, concerns for his safety remain. He has previously been the target of threats and has also been arbitrarily arrested before (see UA 170/96, AMR 53/13/96, 1 November 1996, and follow-up AMR 53/14/96, 6 November 1996).

Juan Bautista works in collaboration with the *Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (CODEHUM), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Guasdualito.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Civilians suspected of collaborating with Colombian armed opposition groups operating in Venezuela have suffered serious human rights violations by members of the Venezuelan security forces.

The security forces have set up two military zones (*Teatro de Operaciones*), covering parts of Zulia, Tachira, and Apure states. The constitutional safeguards suspended by President Caldera in 1994, which allow security forces to arrest people and enter private property without warrants, and curtailing people's freedom of movement, have still not been reinstated in these zones. This has led to arbitrary human rights violations by the security forces, with little chance of redress for the victims.

Human rights defenders, political and community activists are increasingly harassed, intimidated and arbitrarily arrested. The arrest of Juan Bautista Moreno is clearly intended to intimidate the local population and to warn them against reporting violations perpetrated by members of the Venezuelan army against human rights organisations.

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

- expressing deep concern over reports that a Venezuelan military commander has threatened Juan Bautista Moreno with "disappearance" during his detention at military headquarters in Guasdualito on 19 October 1998;

- calling on the authorities to undertake all necessary measures to guarantee the safety of Juan Bautista Moreno, and that of all other human rights defenders, particularly those working in the military zones along the Colombian border;
- calling on the authorities to conduct an immediate investigation into his detention and the threats made against him;
- reminding the government of Venezuela of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General

Dr. Ivan Dargo Batyl Gonzalez
Fiscal General de la República
Manduca a Ferrenquín
La Candelaria
Caracas, Venezuela

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: + 58 2 577 2144 (if tone, please say "me puede dar tono de fax por favor".)

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Minister of Defence

General de División (Ej.)
Tito Maglio Rincón Bravo
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Fuerte Tiuna, Conejo Blanco
El Valle,
Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: + 58 2 662 4078

Salutation: Señor Ministro/ Dear Minister

President of the National Human Rights Commission

Dr. Carlos Ponce
Presidente de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos
Palacio de Miraflores
Edificio Bicentenario, Nivel Plaza, Of. 206
Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: + 582 801 39 42

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

COPIES TO:

Sres. Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz
Apartado Postal 17.476,
Parque Central, Caracas, Venezuela

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 17 december 1998.

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."
Article , Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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