

PUBLIC

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Ill -treatment/Fear for safety

6 September 1999

VENEZUELA

James Miles]
Paul Loseby]

British citizens

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of British prisoners James Miles and Paul Loseby, who have reportedly been beaten and threatened by prison guards who demanded money from them in Yare I prison, Valles del Toy, 60km from Caracas.

On 27 August 1999 James Miles and Paul Loseby were woken at 6.30 am by two prison guards; they had been sleeping in a cell on the ground floor, which is reportedly safer than the first floor, where they normally sleep. The guards took them upstairs to a room off the main corridor, and asked them for money, in front of other inmates. When they said they did not have any money, the guards told them to take their trousers down and said they would be beaten if they did not pay. They refused, and repeated that they did not have any money. The prison guards then put guns to their heads and stripped them. They were both beaten with a *peinilla*, a type of sword with a flat blade about 90cm long and 15cm wide. James Miles suffered bruises and welts; Paul Loseby was bleeding, and was subsequently seen by two doctors, one from the prison and the other independent.

The two men immediately called the British embassy from the public telephone in the jail. An embassy official arrived and a formal complaint was made to the prison governor. The governor told them that unfortunately he did not know who the prison guards were who had carried out the attack, and that he could not find them.

Since then James Miles and Paul Loseby they have been verbally threatened by the prison guards. They say that in the overcrowded prison inmates are regularly killed, attacked or threatened by other inmates and prison officials.

On 2 September riots broke out in both Yare I and Yare II jails. One inmate was killed and another injured. By evening inmates had almost total control of both jails. It had been expected that under the new *Código Orgánico Procesal Penal*, Organic Penal Code, introduced in July 1999, prisoners who had been held without charge for more than two years would be released, and the riot was reportedly organised as a protest when this did not happen.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has been concerned for a number of years that prison conditions in Venezuela constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (see *The Eclipse of Human Rights*, AMR 53/07/93). Violence is endemic, and conditions are harsh, with severe overcrowding, the use of punishment cells, inadequate food, deplorable sanitary conditions, lack of proper medical care and security measures, and a lack of rehabilitation programmes. The authorities have acknowledged the grave situation in many prisons but have done nothing effective to address it.

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

- calling for a prompt, full and independent investigation into the beating and intimidation of James Miles and Paul Loseby, and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice;
- calling for measures to be taken to ensure the safety of the two men and for them to receive adequate medical care as necessary;
- calling for a full investigation into prison conditions at Yare I and Yare II Prisons, Valles del Toy, Miranda State.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Venezuela

Coronel Hugo Chávez Frías
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Salutation: Señor Ministro

Director of Prisons

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Ministerio de Justicia
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Salutation: Señor Director

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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 31 October 1999.