

EXTERNAL

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Torture / Fear for safety

11 August 1997

VENEZUELA Wilfredo Alvarado Baldaggio, community activist
His family
Local residents

Leading community activist Wilfredo Alvarado is reported to have received a series of death threats from police since being released from arbitrary detention in late July 1997. Concern for his physical safety is heightened by allegations that he was severely tortured during his detention. His family and local residents have also been threatened.

Wilfredo Alvarado, President of the *Asociación Pro-Vivienda de Brisas del Turbio I*, the Brisas del Turbio I Pro-Housing Association, was arbitrarily arrested on 16 July in the town of Barquisimeto, Lara State, by members of the *Guardia Nacional*, National Guard. He was taken to a police station in the same street and held in a cell for half an hour before being transferred to the National Guard post in Lomas de León zone. Here, he was taken to a playing field where National Guard members chained him to a tube, tied his hands and feet together and hung him upside down. He was held in this position until midday on 17 July. During this time, he was tortured with electricity on his hands, beaten on his back and other parts of the body and subjected to a mock execution. At no time was he told why he had been arrested. Later the same day, he was transferred to the headquarters of the *Policía del Estado Lara*, Lara State Police, in Barquisimeto where he was held until 22 July. The police chief reportedly threatened to kill him or detain him again.

Since his release, unidentified policemen have threatened to kill Wilfredo Alvarado and death threats have been painted on walls near his home. His family and local residents who campaigned for his release have also been threatened.

As a result of the threats, Wilfredo Alvarado has had to leave Barquisimeto.

Police have subsequently raided homes near Wilfredo Alvarado's looking for him and intimidating local residents.

His detention and the subsequent threats are believed to be linked to a dispute between local authorities and members of the Brisas del Turbio I community over the land they are living on.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has repeatedly complained to the Venezuelan authorities about the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment and about the lack of safeguards provided to people held in preventive detention. By law, police are allowed to hold a detainee in custody for up to eight days before they need be presented to a judge. This is far in excess of what could be considered safe to prevent conditions that facilitate the use of torture. The writ of *habeas corpus* is practically inoperable, and detainees are therefore left almost completely at the mercy of those holding them.

Human rights defenders, political and community activists are increasingly the target of harassment, intimidation, death threats and arbitrary arrest.

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

- expressing concern at the death threats suffered by Wilfredo Alvarado, his family and local residents;

- calling for thorough investigations into the threats and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing serious concern at the arbitrary detention and torture of Wilfredo Alvarado and calling for all those responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:1) Minister of the Presidency

Doctor Asdrúbal Aguiar
 Secretaría de la Presidencia
 Palacio de Miraflores
 Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: +58 2 861 0793

Telegrams: Secretaría de la Presidencia, Caracas, Venezuela

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

2) Attorney General

Dr Iván Darío Badell González
 Fiscal General de la República
 Esquina de Manduca a Ferrenquín,
 Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: +58 2 564 74 61

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Caracas, Venezuela

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

3) Governor of the State of Lara

Dr. Orlando Fernández Medina
 Gobernador del Estado Lara
 Palacio de Gobierno
 Barquisimeto
 Venezuela

Faxes: +58 2 51 312157

Telegrams: Gobernador del Estado Lara, Barquisimeto, Lara, Venezuela

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/Dear Governor

COPIES TO:1) Human Rights Organization

Sres., Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz
 Apartado Postal No.17.476.
 Parque Central
 Caracas 1015-A
 Venezuela

Fax: +58 2 574 1949

2) Human Rights Organization

Sres.
 Asociación Pro-Defensa de los Derechos Humanos
 de Barquisimeto (APRODEH)
 Apartado Postal 675
 Barquisimeto
 Estado Lara, Venezuela
 Puente Nuevo a Puerto Escondido,
 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 27 September 1997.