

# VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY IN VENEZUELA

## CASE OF ALEXANDRA HIDALGO

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



*I thought that it was going to be like when other couples got divorced, the father spends the weekend with the children, the mother works and the following weekend it's her turn to have the children, that's what I thought at that moment.*

*I never imagined what did actually happen... my kidnapping, my being raped by six, seven people, I don't even know how many of them raped me because I was raped repeatedly and there was a moment when neither my soul nor my body could take anymore...*

*You can recover physically but the scars on the soul do not heal. And what I said to you a moment ago, the victims of rape who are dead no longer feel anything but those of us who are still alive, we carry on feeling it. And again as I said just now, that is the cancer of the raped woman.*

*Yes, [my former husband] was there because I saw him... [The judge] finding sufficient convincing evidence linking him to [my abduction and rape]... ordered him to be taken into preventive custody. He was detained for four months. On 22 April [the judge] granted him provisional release... without requiring any kind of bail... There is an arrest warrant out for him... (Alexandra Hidalgo, July 2008)*

On 21 May 2004 at around 4pm Alexandra Hidalgo was kidnapped at gunpoint whilst in her car leaving offices of the Central Bank of Venezuela in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, where she was working as an intern. She was dragged out of her car and bundled into the back of a van. She was then blindfolded and driven to an isolated spot, where she was repeatedly raped and tortured by a group of men, over a period of approximately seven and a half hours. Alexandra recognised her former husband among the attackers.

Less than two months before the attack, Alexandra had obtained a divorce from her husband of fourteen years, Ivan Sosa Rivero, who was at the time a lieutenant-colonel (teniente coronel) in the Venezuelan army. During the marriage, Alexandra was repeatedly abused - physically, psychologically and sexually by her husband. Ivan Sosa Rivero was charged with kidnapping, rape and being accomplice to aggravated vehicle theft in July 2004 and was arrested in December 2004. He was detained for over four months at the Centro Nacional de Procesados Militares de Ramo Verde, a military prison in the state of Miranda, but was never brought before a court. Fourteen court hearings were postponed by his lawyers. In April 2005, he was released conditionally and promptly went into hiding. Following a further court decision another warrant was issued for his re-arrest in June 2005, but he has not been recaptured.

Two of the other five attackers were found guilty of kidnap and rape and sentenced to eight years in prison, in part as a result of evidence obtained by Alexandra from her former husband's mobile phone. Two of the other alleged attackers were found not guilty and another man is also in hiding. Ivan Sosa Rivero was only dismissed from the army in August 2008, despite the charges he faced relating to the attack on Alexandra, and despite having been in hiding for over three years. The reason for his dismissal was given as his failure to respond to charges pending against him by the military.

Alexandra has spoken to the media on a number of occasions regarding her case; she has organized marches in front of the Attorney General's Office and attended meetings in universities to speak about her case. She hopes that by speaking about what happened to her she will raise awareness about violence against women and prevent similar attacks on other women, as well as encouraging women who are abused to report the violations.

Alexandra fears for her own life and the lives of her three children. Although her husband is in hiding, she believes that he is still within the country. Her mother has received threatening telephone calls where she is told that her daughter will be killed. According to Alexandra, the last time Ivan Sosa Rivero approached her and her family was on 7 April 2008, on her son's birthday, when he was seen in the street outside their apartment block in a white car without registration plates. Alexandra says, "I'm afraid that he will take my son away because I have received anonymous phone calls saying that they [the anonymous callers] will come to take him". ("Tengo temor que se lleve a mi hijo ya que en llamadas anónimas me dicen que se lo van a llevar")

#### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Please write letters in Spanish or your own language, making the following points:

- Calling on the authorities to outline the steps they are taking to bring Ivan Sosa Rivero and the other alleged attackers of Alexandra Hidalgo to justice;
- Expressing concern at Alexandra's testimony that Ivan Sosa Rivero has been seen outside her apartment, even though a warrant for his arrest was issued in 2005;
- Alexandra and her family continue to be in danger as they have been subject to threats and harassment through anonymous calls and sightings of Ivan Sosa Rivero – these need to be investigated and protection needs to be provided to Alexandra and her family according to their wishes;
- Under articles 39 – 43 of the Ley Orgánica para el Derecho de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia, adopted in 2007, psychological, sexual and physical violence against women, as well as harassment and threats, are punishable by law. Even though these crimes were committed before this law came into effect, they are still punishable under articles 16 – 21 of the previous law Ley sobre la Violencia Contra la Mujer y la Familia– which the 2007 law replaced

#### PLEASE SEND APPEALS TO:

MINISTER OF INTERIOR RELATIONS AND JUSTICE  
Tareck El Aissami  
Ministro del Poder Popular para  
Relaciones Interiores y Justicia  
Ministerio del Poder Popular  
para Relaciones Interiores y Justicia  
Av. Urdaneta, Esquina Platanal  
Edif. Sede MIJ, Piso 1  
Carmelitas, Caracas, Venezuela

MINISTER OF STATE FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS  
María León  
Ministra de Estado para Asuntos de la Mujer  
Instituto Nacional de la Mujer (INAMUJER)  
Boulevard Panteón, Esquina de Jesuitas,  
Torre Bandagro, Pisos 1, 2, y 3,  
Parroquia Altagracia,  
Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: + 58 (212) 506 1685  
Salutation: Estimado Sr. Ministro

Fax : + 58 (212) 860-8215 / 8213  
Salutation: Estimada Sra. Ministra

#### COPIES TO:

Alexandra Hidalgo  
c/o Casa de la Mujer Juana Ramírez la Avanzadora  
Urb. Calicanto, Calle López Aveledo #11,  
Aptado.2031,  
Maracay-Estado Aragua, Venezuela

Fax: + 58 (243) 2463796

Photo: Alexandra Hidalgo (centre) with staff from the women's NGO *Casa de la Mujer Juana Ramírez la Avanzadora* © AI