

# URGENT ACTION

## VENEZUELAN DETAINEES' LIFE AT RISK

Emirlendris Benítez is a 42-year-old mother and tradeswoman who was arbitrarily detained in August 2018 and subjected to torture. Guillermo Zárraga is a 59-year-old engineer and former oil industry unionist arbitrarily detained in November 2020 and tried for crimes for which there was no evidence. They both suffer from grave health conditions, because of acts of torture, in Emirlendris' case, and inhumane prison conditions. Both individuals are currently unfairly detained in prisons under the responsibility of the Minister for Penitentiary Affairs. We call on her to protect their lives and health and ensure they receive immediate and adequate medical attention.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

**Celsa Bautista Ontiveros**  
**Minister of Penitentiary Affairs**

Ministerio del Poder Popular para Asuntos Penitenciarios,  
Avenida Venezuela, Edificio Platinum,  
Urbanización El Rosal, Municipio Chacao,  
Caracas  
Venezuela  
Twitter: @CelsaBautistaO

Dear Ms Bautista Ontiveros,

*I am deeply concerned for the lives of Emirlendris Benítez and Guillermo Zárraga, who are unfairly imprisoned in your custody. Guillermo Zárraga is currently held at Yare II Prison awaiting for a new trial to begin, in Miranda state, while Emirlendris is serving a draconian and unfounded 30-year sentence at the INOF centre at Los Teques, Caracas. The health of both victims of arbitrary detention are in critical need of medical attention.*

*Emirlendris Benítez's health situation is critical because of the grave human rights violations she's suffered since her arrest in August 2018, including arbitrary detention, torture, gender-based violence, discrimination, unfair trial, and inhumane prison conditions. She is not only a victim of arbitrary detention, torture, and an unfair trial, but she has seen her human right to health repeatedly denied by authorities under your responsibility.*

*Guillermo Zárraga has been unfairly detained since November 2020, when he was abruptly taken from his home in the middle of the night. During his unfair imprisonment, he has suffered severe weight loss, cardiac episodes, and has fainted repeatedly due to malnourishment. Prison authorities are arbitrarily restricting his access to basic needs such as food, medicines and other basic convenience goods that made detention bearable.*

***Emirlendris Benítez and Guillermo Zárraga should be immediately and unconditionally released. While they remain in custody of the state, you must guarantee their life, health and safety. We urge you to urgently grant them access to trusted and adequate medical care.***

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Emirlendris Benitez is a Venezuelan mother, sister, and tradeswoman. On 5 August 2018, Emirlendris was arbitrarily detained on fabricated grounds. Authorities falsely linked her to acts of violence committed against high-profile political leaders in Venezuela; an accusation for which there is no evidence and which she has consistently stated that she had no part in. In custody, she was subjected to torture while pregnant. A few weeks after her arrest, she was forcibly transferred to a medical facility and her pregnancy was terminated without her knowledge or consent. The torture she was subjected to left her needing the long-term use of a wheelchair for mobility. In 2022, she was sentenced to a 30-year prison sentence by a partial and politically motivated court. Emirlendris should have never been detained, as it is believed the charges are politically motivated. Furthermore, the draconian sentence against her should be revoked and she must be immediately released.

Guillermo Zárraga is a Venezuelan engineer who worked as an operator technician for Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA, the Venezuelan state-owned oil company) at the Cardón Refinery in the Catalytic Complex located in Coro, Falcón state. He was also a leader in the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores (Unique Workers' Union) within that organization. On 14 November 2020, at 3:00 am, he was detained at his home by officers from the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM). According to the indictment by the Public Prosecutor's Office, he has been accused of providing national security information to an American man who had been arrested in September and was believed to be a CIA agent attempting to sabotage the oil industry complex. In addition to his role as a union leader, Guillermo Zárraga had been photographed with Juan Guaido, a prominent opposition leader. This photograph was included as part of the accusation, serving as evidence of Zárraga's alleged intention to support the sabotage. Despite the fact that Nicolás Maduro's government has released the alleged CIA agent, Guillermo Zárraga remains arbitrarily detained.

Similarly, to Emirlendris, Guillermo Zárraga's family does not have the means to support him in prison, as prison authorities do not provide detainees with adequate sustenance and drinking water, therefore they do not meet their nutritional needs and their health has severely deteriorate while in custody.

Nicolás Maduro's government has continually harassed, prosecuted, and censored activists and civil society organizations working to protect the rights of Venezuelans amidst a complex humanitarian emergency and a deep human rights crisis that is making Venezuelans flee in unprecedented numbers in search of safety and protection. By August 2023, over 7.71 million had fled the country, representing over 25% of the country's total population.

Since 2020, four reports from the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have thoroughly documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment committed in the country since 2014; as well as the ways in which the justice system serves as a tool for the government's policy of repression, and concluded that these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 December 2023**

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Emirlendris Benítez and Guillermo Zárraga (them/their)