

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST REPORTING ON COVID-19 JAILED

On 21 March 2020, journalist Darvinson Rojas was arrested by the Special Action Forces (FAES) of the National Police (PNB), in an apparent attempt to silence his reporting on the spread of COVID-19 in Venezuela. Darvinson live-tweeted when officers came to his house in Caracas claiming there was a “COVID-19 case” and had to take him in for questioning. There is no evidence of this being the case, nor would it justify his arrest, detention and prosecution. Darvinson is in FAES’ custody, who have an appalling record of committing grave human rights violations. We demand his immediate and unconditional release.

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

Nicolas Maduro
President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
Palacio de Miraflores
Av. Nte. 10, Caracas 1012, Distrito Capital,
Venezuela
Tel: +58 212-8063111
Twitter: @NicolasMaduro

Dear Nicolas Maduro,

I am very concerned about Darvinson Rojas’ arbitrary arrest and detention.

Darvinson Rojas was detained on 21 March after having reported on the spread of COVID-19 in Venezuela. He has since been held by the FAES, although the charges against him have not been disclosed.

In times of a global public health crisis, people’s right to freedom of the press is more vital than ever. Journalists, particularly those reporting of the crisis, should be protected, not arrested.

I demand Darvinson’s immediate and unconditional release, and that all Venezuelan authorities ensure the protection of the right to freedom of the press and the safety of press workers.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The arbitrary detention, criminalization and unfair conviction of Darvinson Rojas occurs in a context of widespread arbitrary detentions made against people critical of the government or claiming their human rights.

Venezuelan authorities have implemented a systematic and widespread policy of repression, including carrying out politically motivated arbitrary detentions, targeted extrajudicial executions, and using military courts to charge non-military with discretionary crimes such as treason or rebellion, towards those who are seen as critical of the government. Human rights defenders and individuals who seek justice for human rights violations have been subjected to targeted attacks and smear campaigns, in an apparent attempt to stifle their human rights work.

The FAES have a particularly dismal human rights record, particularly regarding extrajudicial executions. In January 2019, those targeted were all young men who were or were perceived to be critical of the government and came from low-income areas and their participation in protests had been visible or publicized.

Additionally, the authorities continue refusing to recognize the true scale of the humanitarian emergency and deteriorating living conditions. The population in Venezuela faces severe shortages of food, medicines, medical supplies, water and electricity. By the end of 2019, the total number of people who had fled the country in search of international protection had reached 4.8 million.

In the case of Darvinson Rojas, his reporting on the spread of COVID-19 in Venezuela put him at risk of being victim of the government's policy of repression, given the firm grip authorities under Nicolás Maduro have over information on public health matters and the government's inadequate response to it.

Darvinson was at his home in Mamera, Caracas, with his parents when a group of FAES officers arrived at his home and asked to talk to him, initially with the excuse of an alleged "COVID-19 case", and later asking him to reveal his sources on the information he was making public regarding cases of people infected with the virus in Venezuela. The FAES arrested his parents with him, and took them to the same detention centre, where they were able to hear that FAES officers were pushing Darvinson to release information on who his source was on the matter, which also contravenes the principle of source secrecy protected by international law. After his parents were released, he was taken to another detention centre, and after hours of uncertainty his family was able to see him and talk to him on 22 March.

At the time this urgent action was issued, Darvinson had not been brought to a court to establish the charges and grounds of his detention, and his lawyer believes this is not going to happen within the legal deadline of 48 hours after his detention.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 4 May 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Nicolás Maduro (he/him/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a