



## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# Venezuela: Detention conditions of Indigenous people must adhere to international standards

Amnesty International is concerned about the detention conditions and arbitrary transfer of a group of 13 Pemón Indigenous people in relation to an investigation into the events of 22 December 2019 in which a group of retired military personnel allegedly took control of a military base in the state of Bolívar in southern Venezuela.

According to information provided by the defence lawyers belonging to the Venezuelan Penal Forum, this group of Pemón Indigenous people was isolated and held incommunicado for more than 50 days from the moment they were detained. They were not allowed any type of contact with their families or defence lawyers, seriously affecting their right to due process. In addition, it has been reported that there are reasons to believe in the alleged lack of independence of the interpreter provided by the judicial authorities, and that this could have a serious effect in terms of proceeding with a trial with the minimum judicial guarantees.

Furthermore, those detained are being criminally prosecuted by a court with a 'terrorism' jurisdiction without conforming to the constitutional provisions and human rights standards on the obligation of states to respect Indigenous justice systems when crimes are committed in an Indigenous community, as in this case.

Amnesty International has been informed that the group is being held in pre-trial detention in Rodeo II Judicial Prison in the city of Guatire in northern Venezuela. This detention centre is 1,200 kilometres from Kumarakapay (San Francisco de Yuruani), the community of origin. The transfer of the 13 Pemón Indigenous men was carried out on 13 May 2020 and it should be noted that this was not authorised by the judicial authorities responsible for the case. This measure constitutes a disproportionate obstacle for the detained Indigenous people to access the minimum supplies necessary during their detention such as food, water, personal hygiene items, clothes and others that are not currently provided by Venezuelan authorities. In particular, the distance prevents any type of access to living conditions appropriate for their culture.

The inadequate detention conditions, the distance from their community and families, and general detention conditions in Venezuelan prisons indicate that the pre-trial detention of this group of Indigenous people should take place in the vicinity of their community, or in the community itself, in the custody of the community guard, as precedent exists for this in

Venezuela.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities to rectify the detention conditions and implement measures that impact the rights of the Indigenous people to culturally appropriate treatment as little as possible and that they therefore be transferred to serve pre-trial detention in their community. In addition, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of judicial proceedings by Venezuelan courts, Amnesty International calls for this transfer to be carried out urgently in order to avoid further infringement on the human rights of these people.

Finally, the organization calls for due process guarantees to be respected, including access to a trusted lawyer and interpretation into their native language at all stages of proceedings.