

URGENT ACTION

VENEZUELAN ACTIVIST THREATENED

Venezuelan human rights defender Marianela Sánchez Ortiz has been threatened because of her work examining prisons. She, her family and colleagues are in danger.

Marianela Sánchez Ortiz's husband, **Hernán Antonio Bolívar**, was abducted at gunpoint on 30 May. As he was about to get into his car, two armed men approached and told him to get into the car. Two more men were positioned in front of the car. Once inside, they told him to advise his wife to stop complaining about prison conditions and criticizing the government, or she and her family would regret it because they knew everything about them, where they work, live and where their children study. When they let him go, they told him that they hoped he had understood the message as this was only a warning and next time they would not talk. The men also took from him 3800 Bolivar fuerte, approximately US\$880 cash, an iPad, a watch and other possessions.

The Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons (Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones), where Marianela Sánchez Ortiz works, has criticized the appalling conditions in Venezuelan's prisons for many years. In June 2011, its director, Humberto Prado Sifontes, was subjected to a campaign of intimidation and death threats after he called on the government to peacefully address a riot at El Rodeo Prison.

Please write immediately in Spanish, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to order an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against Marianela Sánchez Ortiz, a member of the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons and her family, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to take, and publicise, effective measures to protect Marianela Sánchez Ortiz and her family in accordance with their wishes, and stop the harassment and threats directed at all her colleagues;
- Urge them to publicly recognise the legitimate human rights work of the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons and remind them of their responsibility to ensure the organization can carry out its work without fear of reprisal as established in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 JULY 2012 TO:

Minister of Justice and Interior

Tareck El Aissami
Ministerio del Poder Popular para
Relaciones Interiores y Justicia
Avenida Urdaneta Esquina de Platanal
Edificio Interior y Justicia Despacho del
Ministro, Piso 3, Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: + 58 212 506 1105 (keep trying)

**Salutation: Señor Ministro/
Dear Minister**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Nicolás Maduro Moros
Ministerio del Poder Popular para
Relaciones Exteriores
Casa Amarilla
Esquina de Principal
Caracas 1010, Venezuela
E-Mail: ministro@mre.gov.ve

**Salutation: Señor Ministro/
Dear Minister**

And copies to:

Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones
Av. Lecuna entre esquinas Cipreses a
Hoyo N.60
Centro Empresarial Cipreses, PH-E
Municipio Libertador
Caracas
Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 483 3725

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The human rights situation in Venezuelan prisons is critical. Violence remained endemic in the chronically overcrowded prisons. In June 2011, clashes between rival gangs in El Rodeo prison led to the deaths of some 27 prisoners. In July 2011, the Minister of Prison Services announced plans to release 40 per cent of the prison population to ease overcrowding. In November, she publicly threatened to dismiss judges who blocked her plans to speed up the trials of prisoners charged with minor offences. There are reported to be over 40,000 prisoners in a system built for 12,500. Amnesty International is concerned at reports that violence between inmates is rife, and that human rights violations committed by the prison authorities are commonplace. National human rights organizations have reported that between 2006 and 2009 over 1,600 inmates died as a result of violence and over 3,100 were injured.

Name: Marianela Sánchez Ortiz (f), Hernán Antonio Bolívar (m)

Gender m/f: Both

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