

VENEZUELA

Fear for the safety of the transgendered community in Valencia, Carabobo State (UPDATE ON URGENT ACTION UA 247/00, AMR 53/09/00)

Summary

Amnesty International has learnt that members of the transgendered community in Valencia, Carabobo State, Venezuela, continues to be harassed and jailed in conditions which may constitute ill-treatment.

According to information obtained by Amnesty International, on 20 September 2000, four transgendered people were detained by police officers belonging to the Parroquia Catedral Command. José Ramón Colmenares Vásquez known as Estrella de los Angeles Alvarez Vásquez, Reinaldo Mora Márquez known as Nicole Mora Márquez, Henderson José Pereira Mejías known as Agatha Josefina Pereira Mejías and Darwin Alexis González known as Luna González, were held in incommunicado detention for two days in the Carabobo Police Headquarters, during which they were not provided with food or drinking water.

The family of one of the detainees filled a legal complaint before the Venezuelan Public Ministry against the High Commander of the Police in Carabobo State, and Prefect of Valencia Municipality.

*Furthermore, on 3 October, one of the main Venezuelan newspapers, *El Nacional*, published an article denouncing that on 29 September two more transgendered people, Ronnie Aquino and Julio César Dorante, were detained and were being held in incommunicado detention in the Police Headquarters. Dorante may be also a witness to the murder of Dayana*

last July (see below). Another witness to this event is reportedly being harassed and threatened by the police.

Background information

On 29 July 2000, José Luis Nieves, a transgendered person known as Dayana, was killed in the city of Valencia, Carabobo State, in circumstances that suggest she was the victim of an extrajudicial execution.

On 9 August, two of Dayana's young, transgendered friends, were reportedly detained by Carabobo Police. They were forced to get undressed in the street and were severely beaten. They were then held in incommunicado detention and were not allowed access to a lawyer, to medical attention or to their families. They were freed some days later.

According to Amnesty International's information, transgendered people are frequently harassed by police in Valencia. Police abuse transgendered people by forcibly cutting their hair and nails. Police sometimes detain them and force them to perform sexual acts in return for release. If they refuse, police will dump them semi-naked at some distance from the city in order to humiliate them. When they are detained, they are reportedly held in incommunicado detention in extremely poor conditions (sleeping on the floor and given inedible food).

Amnesty International's action

On 18 August 2000, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action, UA 247/00, AMR 53/09/00, which was widely distributed, showing concern for these events and for the safety of the transgendered community in Valencia city.

Many organizations inside and outside Venezuela took part in the action, including the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Aids Service Organizations (LACCASO).

Amnesty International has been informed that following the publication of the Urgent Action, Venezuelan NGOs have received further information on the situation suffered by sexual minorities in other parts of the country.

On 24 August 2000, *El Nacional* newspaper published an article using the information given by AI in the Urgent Action together with an interview with the Commander of the Carabobo Police in which he is reported as saying that the police detain "prostitutes" because there is a Governor's decree prohibiting prostitution. He also recognizes that there is a police officer involved in the murder of Dayana and that this person was transferred to another command where he is at the disposition of the courts.

Furthermore, in an interview published by the Valencia newspaper *Notitarde* on 6 October 2000, the same Commander states that the police officer involved in the case is a corporal of the state police and that he remains on active service. He also adds that: "homosexuals and prostitutes should be where they have to be: in a brothel or doing a real job".

By October 2000, Amnesty International has not received information that this officer has been charged in connection with this crime.

TAKE ACTION

Please send
Amnesty International by 19 October 2000
airmail letters in Spanish or your
own language (until 31 January
2001):

AI Index: AMR 53/13/00