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## OPEN LETTER TO KEITH CHRISTOPHER ROWLEY PRIME MINISTER OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Dear Prime Minister,

Further to our previous letter, I am writing on behalf of Amnesty International regarding the ongoing registration process of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Trinidad and Tobago.

As detailed in our previous letter, we welcome your government's decision to offer solutions that can help Venezuelans gain legal residency. In the face of massive human rights violations in Venezuela, that may amount to crimes against humanity,<sup>1</sup> we have called on states across the Latin America and Caribbean region to take shared responsibility for providing unrestricted access to international systems of protection, such as refugee status, and to expedite access for Venezuelans to legal residency with appropriate safeguards.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past week we have been monitoring reports on the registration process in Trinidad and Tobago. We have noted the numerous media stories of ordinary Trinidadian and Tobagonian people, and faith leaders, welcoming Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and providing them with food, water, shelter, and access to schools.<sup>3</sup>

We have also noted media reports that indicate that approximately 800-850 Venezuelans have been registering daily.<sup>4</sup> And as of 10 June, with only 4 days left before the registration process closes, thousands of Venezuelans continued to line up outside registration centers.<sup>5</sup>

According to government information, the plan was to register 28,000 Venezuelans between 31 May and 14

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, "Hunger for Justice: Crimes against humanity in Venezuela" (AMR 53/0222/2019); See also: Amnesty International, "Emergency Exit", <http://www.amnistiaonline.org/SalidadeEmergencia/>; Amnesty International, "10 things you need to know about Venezuela's human rights crisis", 4 March 2019, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/02/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-venezuelas-human-rights-crisis/>

Amnesty International, "Urgent Measures: Venezuelans need international protection" (AMR 01/9019/2018)

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, "Urgent Measures: Venezuelans need international protection" (AMR 01/9019/2018)

<sup>3</sup> Newsday, Fisherman helps Venezuelan mate: 'Don't send them back!', 4 June 2019, <https://newsday.co.tt/2019/06/04/fisherman-helps-venezuelan-mate-dont-send-them-back/>; Newsday, Muslims give food to V'zuelans at south registration, 5 June 2019, <https://newsday.co.tt/2019/06/05/muslims-give-food-to-vzuelans-at-south-registration/>; Daily Express, Venezuela crisis: What do you see? By Archbishop Jason Gordon, 10 June 2019, [https://www.trinidadexpress.com/opinion/columnists/venezuela-crisis-what-do-you-see/article\\_cd8d7608-8b0f-11e9-91df-df102a0dfb95.html](https://www.trinidadexpress.com/opinion/columnists/venezuela-crisis-what-do-you-see/article_cd8d7608-8b0f-11e9-91df-df102a0dfb95.html); Also see Vice, Trinidad and Tobago is ignoring its refugee crisis, [https://news.vice.com/en\\_us/article/3kgipn/trinidad-and-tobago-is-ignoring-its-venezuelan-refugee-problem](https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/3kgipn/trinidad-and-tobago-is-ignoring-its-venezuelan-refugee-problem)

<sup>4</sup> Newsday, Hinds: 800 V'zuelans daily at registration sites, 5 June 2019, <https://newsday.co.tt/2019/06/05/hinds-800-vzuelans-daily-at-registration-sites/>;

<sup>5</sup> Newsday, Migrants: 'Venezuela is a bad place', 10 June 2019, <https://newsday.co.tt/2019/06/10/migrants-venezuela-is-a-bad-place/>; Guardian TT, Extend Registration Deadline, 10 June 2019, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/extend-registration-deadline-6.2.859761.18a07f38ed>



June 2019.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, there are an estimated 40,000 Venezuelans in the country.<sup>7</sup>

Amnesty International remains concerned that the registration period is too short to register all the Venezuelans in the country and respectfully requests that your government consider extending the time-frame for registration.

We also remind you that because those fleeing are likely to be refugees, they may not be able to present the documents required as part of the process. We call on authorities not to impose restrictions or conditions that impede access to protection mechanisms.

Finally, the UNCHR has indicated that “the majority” of those fleeing Venezuela need international protection. Your government has stated that when the registration period ends on 14 June, “the enforcement of existing immigration laws will resume”.<sup>8</sup>

We take this opportunity to remind you that even after the registration period ends, Trinidad and Tobago remains bound by its obligations under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Refugee Convention) and its Protocol (1967), to respect the rights of those seeking asylum.

As such, Trinidad and Tobago is required to protect asylum seekers and refugees from forcible return to a country in which their life or freedom may be in danger on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. And any deportation of asylum seekers or refugees or return of those trying to reach Trinidad and Tobago’s shores would be contrary to international human rights law, and in breach of the Conventions which your country has chosen to ratify.

Yours sincerely,

**Erika Guevara Rosas**  
**Americas Director**

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<sup>6</sup> Office of the Prime Minister of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, “Venezuelan Registration Policy Gets Green Light”, Available at: <https://www.opm.gov.tt/venezuelan-registration-policy-gets-green-light/>

<sup>7</sup> Latin America and the Caribbean, “Venezuelan refugees & migrants in the region,” January 2019, Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/68069>

<sup>8</sup> See Venezuelan Refugee Policy, youtube video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJqZFJiDXE4> via the Office of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago