

## Open letter to Dr Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago

08 October 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned organizations working on Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela, recognize the difficult situation of all governments as they respond to the public health crisis posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We write to you, however, to express our deep concern about the reported [deportation](#) on 18 September of 93 Venezuelans, who were sent back to the grave human rights and humanitarian emergency that they were fleeing. The deportation of asylum seekers runs counter to the basic international law principle of non-refoulement.

As your government may be aware, just two days before this most recent deportation, a [UN-appointed](#) Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela found reasonable grounds to believe that authorities under the command of Nicolás Maduro have committed grave human rights violations that could amount to crimes against humanity.

The UN [report](#), which catalogues evidence of unlawful executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture in Venezuela since 2014, expands on the findings made by other human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, over recent years. The UN experts [found](#) that “high-level authorities had knowledge of and contributed to the commission of these crimes” and that “commanders and superiors knew or should have known about them and did not take measures to prevent or repress them.” In a [press statement](#), the mission called on competent authorities in Venezuela, other national governments, and the International Criminal Court to consider legal actions against those responsible for the violations and crimes.

While we understand that Trinidad and Tobago, like all governments, is struggling to respond to the economic and public health implications of COVID-19, we are deeply concerned that just weeks ago your government also reportedly [deported 165 Venezuelans](#), in violation of Trinidad and Tobago’s obligations under international law, and following statements by the Minister of National Security that people who helped migrants and refugees could face criminalization.

As your government may be aware, most people who return or are deported to Venezuela are placed in quarantine centres, many of which are under the control of the police and the military. These entities have been involved in a policy of repression since at least 2014, and as the UN has indicated in its findings, some of their leaders may be responsible for crimes against humanity.

According to [Amnesty International](#) and Human Rights Watch’s findings, people quarantined in these centres often face unsanitary, overcrowded conditions without adequate food, water and medical care, which may amount to degrading treatment. The appalling conditions likely contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

In many cases, due to an overly elaborate testing protocol and testing delays, Venezuelan authorities are requiring people to stay in quarantine centres for much longer than 14 days

solely to await test results. This is unnecessary from a public health standpoint and inconsistent with WHO guidelines, and it effectively results in arbitrary detentions.

Furthermore, while requiring that all returning Venezuelans be placed in mandatory quarantine facilities, Venezuelan authorities have simultaneously [stigmatized](#) Venezuelan refugees returning from Colombia.

Prime Minister, Trinidad and Tobago's registration process last year went some way to providing Venezuelans with international protection and was an important opportunity for many Venezuelans to start re-building a new life in safety and to contribute meaningfully in a country built on diversity.

In light of the dangerous conditions in Venezuela, we ask you to urgently consider re-opening the registration process to ensure Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago have access to legal status so they can contribute the many skills they have.

We also urge you to ensure Trinidad and Tobago complies with its nonrefoulement obligations, by protecting asylum seekers and others from deportation.

We, the signatory organizations, remain open to dialoguing with your government to help Trinidad and Tobago determine the best routes for upholding its international human rights obligations.

Prime Minister, it remains the responsibility of leaders such as yourself to ensure that the rights of all people are protected, even during a public health emergency. Venezuelans are no exception.

Sincerely,

1. **Caribbean Centre for Human Rights**
2. **CariMAN**
3. **La Casita, Hispanic Cultural Centre**
4. **CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago**
5. **Ryu Dan Dojo Empowerment Foundation**
6. **Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA)**
7. **Acción Solidaria / CIVILIS Human Rights**
8. **Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados JRS - Venezuela**
9. **Acceso a la Justicia**
10. **Monitor Social A.C.**
11. **Comisión Nacional de DDHH de la Federación de Colegios de Abogados de Venezuela del estado Táchira**
12. **FundaRedes**
13. **Provea**
14. **Aula Abierta**
15. **Derechos Humanos con DR, CORP**
16. **Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones**

17. Centro de Derechos Humanos Universidad Católica Andrés Bello
18. Centro de Justicia y Paz – Cepaz
19. Clínica Jurídica de Migrantes y Refugiados de la Universidad Diego Portales
20. Red Jesuita con Migrantes LAC
21. Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados - Oficina Regional LAC
22. Asylum Access Mexico (AAMX)
23. Amnesty International
24. Human Rights Watch
25. Refugees International