

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Embargoed until 00:01 GMT 12 February 2015  
Index number: AMR 53/015/2015

## **Venezuela: A year after the protests hundreds of victims of grave human rights violations still awaiting justice.**

A year after Bassil Dacosta, Juan Montoya and Roberto Redman lost their lives during the protests that shook Venezuela in early 2014, nobody has been brought to justice for their deaths.

The Office of the Attorney General claims that Bassil Dacosta was shot dead in Caracas, the capital, by an official from the Intelligence Police, he has been charged and is detained awaiting trial. Juan Montoya and Roberto Redman were also killed in Caracas, apparently by armed civilians most of whom remain at large.

According to official figures, in the days and weeks that followed, a further 40 people, among ten public officials including security force personnel, lost their lives and 878 people, including 600 civilians were injured during mass pro- and anti-government demonstrations.

During the six months of protests, between February and July 2014, hundreds suffered at the hands of the security forces that used excessive force, beat protesters to disperse them, or used torture or other ill-treatment against individuals taken into custody. Gloria Tobón and 21 others in Rubio, Táchira state, were detained on 19 March during a military and police operation. They were kicked, beaten, threatened with death and sexual violence, and were subjected to electric shocks while handcuffed to get them to name the organizers of the protests.

Thousands were detained at the time. According to official figures 3,351 people were taken into custody. Most were released without charge, while 507 people were conditionally released after being charged with crimes such as blockading public roads, arson, causing injury, damage to public property or association to commit a crime. Forty-one individuals, including 27 civilians remain in pre-trial detention today.

Leopoldo López, leader of the opposition party Voluntad Popular, has been in detention since 18 February, charged with, among others, incitement and conspiracy to commit arson and damage to property. Rosmit Mantilla, a member of Voluntad Popular and LGBTI activist detained on 2 May, and lawyer Marcelo Crovato detained on 22 April, are charged with incitement and conspiracy to commit a crime, amongst other offences.

Amnesty International considers the detention of all three to be politically motivated and is calling for their release. The organization fears that the other persons currently in pre-trial custody charged with crimes related to the protests may also be arbitrarily detained.

So far 14 members of the security forces are in pre-trial detention in relation to the death of Bassil Dacosta and five cases of ill-treatment. However, none has been convicted. Public Ministry orders to capture other alleged perpetrators have yet to be carried out. The cases of Bassil Dacosta and others who died at the hands of the security forces last year demand justice. Those responsible for Gloria Tobón's torture, and the ill-treatment of hundreds of others must also be brought to justice.

Like Juan Montoya and Roberto Redman, Guillermo Sánchez died in March 2014 after being beaten and shot by pro-government armed civilians groups in La Isabelica, Valencia. His wife Ghina Rodríguez and two young sons, who were forced to seek refuge in Mexico after receiving death threats, are also still awaiting justice. The authorities must take decisive action to disarm such groups and bring them to account.

A year ago today, thousands exercised their right to peaceful assembly and protested against government policies. The situation rapidly deteriorated and confrontations between protestors, the security forces and armed pro-government groups resulted in thousands detained, hundreds injured, and dozens dead.

It is time for the Venezuelan authorities to redress these grave human rights violations and send a clear, unequivocal signal that people are free to peacefully express their views, including views critical of the authorities, without any fear of losing their lives or their freedom. The message to the security forces has to be that protests are permitted and that the proportional and differentiated use of force may only be deployed when strictly necessary and never against peaceful protesters.