

PUBLIC

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UA 99/98

Fear for safety / Fear for Torture

27 March 1998

VENEZUELA Sicso Torbello Cordero

Zulay Villegas Díaz (wife of Sicso Torbello Cordero)

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There are serious concerns for the safety of Sicso Torbello Cordero and his wife, Zulay Villegas Díaz, after he was reportedly beaten by police and both were issued with death threats.

Sicso Torbello Cordero, a member of the *Casa de Amistad con Cuba*, Cuban Friendship House, was detained on 20 March 1998 by members of the *Policía Técnica Judicial* (PTJ), Judicial Technical Police, in the city of Barquisimeto, Lara State, allegedly in connection with a robbery. He was taken to a police station in Las Calderas, the industrial part of Barquisimeto, and held incommunicado until 23 March, when his wife and his lawyer were finally allowed to see him. He told them that during interrogation about his political activities, he had been beaten and threatened with death by members of the PTJ.

On 25 March 1998, his family received anonymous, threatening phone calls and were told that if they reported the matter to human rights organisations or lawyers this would make things worse for Sicso Torbello Cordero, and that Zulay Villegas Díaz would be killed.

Sicso Torbello Cordero remains in detention in the police station of the PTJ and has not been charged. Amnesty International is concerned that he may be at risk of suffering further ill-treatment.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at the level of human rights violations carried out by police forces in Venezuela. The organisation has documented scores of cases where victims have been targeted because of their political or human rights activism (see UA 267/97, AMR 53/10/97, 11 August 1997; and follow-up AMR 53/02/98, 10 March 1998).

Amnesty International has repeatedly complained to the Venezuelan authorities about the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment, and about the lack of safeguards provided to people held in preventive detention. Police are allowed by law to detain people in custody for up to eight days before they are brought before a judge. This far exceeds what could be considered safe in terms of preventing conditions which facilitate the use of torture. Under the current system, detainees are left almost completely at the mercy of those holding them. Amnesty International believes the principal reason for the persistence of torture in Venezuela is the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:**

- urging that immediate measures be taken to guarantee the safety of Sicso Torbello Cordero and Zulay Villegas Díaz;
- requesting that a thorough investigation be conducted into the reported beating of Sicso Torbello Cordero by alleged PTJ agents, and also the death threats made to Zulay Villegas Díaz, and calling for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern at the level of human rights violations carried out by members of the police on political and human rights activists in Venezuela.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of the Presidency

Doctor Asdrúbal Aguiar  
Secretaría de la Presidencia  
Palacio de Miraflores  
Caracas, Venezuela

**Telegrams: Secretaría Presidencia, Caracas, Venezuela**

**Faxes: + 58 2 861 0793**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

Attorney General

Dr Iván Darío Badell González  
Fiscal General de la República  
Esquina de Manduca a Ferrenquín,  
Caracas, Venezuela

**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Caracas, Venezuela**

**Faxes: + 58 2 564 74 61**

**Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General**

Governor of the State of Lara

Dr. Orlando Fernández Medina  
Gobernador del Estado Lara  
Palacio de Gobierno  
Barquisimeto  
Venezuela

**Telegrams: Gobernador Estado Lara, Barquisimeto, Venezuela**

**Faxes: + 58 51 312157**

**Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Organization

Sres., Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz  
Apartado Postal No.17.476.  
Parque Central  
Caracas 1015-A  
Venezuela

Human Rights Organization

Sres. Asociación Pro-Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
de Barquisimeto (APRODEH)  
Apartado Postal 675  
Barquisimeto  
Estado Lara, Venezuela

and to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 May 1998.