

# URGENT ACTION

## CRITICS OF VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT DETAINED

**Oswaldo Álvarez Paz was detained on 22 March after he criticized the Venezuelan government on TV. Four other outspoken critics of the government also face fabricated, politically motivated charges and two of them have been in detention for months.**

On 22 March, **Oswaldo Álvarez Paz**, an ex-governor of the State of Zulia, was arrested and charged with “public instigation of criminality” (instigación pública a delinquir) and with “spreading false information” (difundir información falsa). His arrest came after he said on Globovisión TV on 8 March that Venezuela had become a haven for drug trafficking and cited accusations by a Spanish court that the government supports armed opposition groups. Oswaldo Álvarez Paz’s detention is part of a wave of arrests and charges against those critical of the government.

**Judge María Lourdes Afiuni** and **Richard Blanco** are also in detention. Judge Afiuni was arrested on 10 December 2009 and charged with aiding a banker to flee the country. Her arrest came immediately after the President accused her publicly of corruption. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as the UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders and on the independence of judges and lawyers have asked for her immediate release. Richard Blanco, a member of an opposition party was charged with inciting violence and injuring a police officer during a demonstration in August 2009 (See UA 346/09, AMR 53/009/2009).

On 25 March, **Guillermo Zuloaga** was arrested. He is the owner of Globovisión, a TV station known for its critical line against the government and the only TV station whose licence has not been revoked in recent years because of its editorial line. Guillermo Zuloaga was charged with disseminating false information and insulting the President. The same day, **Wilmer Azuaje** was also arrested. Wilmer Azuaje is an opposition member of parliament who is intending to stand for Governor in the state of Barinas. Wilmer Azuaje was accused of insulting a public official and allegedly hitting a woman police officer. Both men were later released but face prosecution.

Amnesty International believes that the charges for all five are politically motivated and are an attempt to silence critics of the Venezuelan government.

**PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY** in Spanish or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to bring Judge Maria Lourdes Afiuni, Richard Blanco and Oswaldo Álvarez Paz to trial in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards, or else release them immediately.
- Urging the authorities to drop charges that are not recognisable criminal offences or fabricated charges brought for political reasons against its critics

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 MAY 2010 TO:

#### Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Tarek El Aissami  
Ministerio del Poder Popular para  
Relaciones Interiores y Justicia  
Av. Urdaneta, Edif. Sede MIJ, Piso 1,  
Carmelitas, Caracas, Venezuela  
**Fax: +58 212 506 1557**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister**

#### Attorney General

Dra. Luisa Ortega Díaz  
Fiscalía General de la República  
Avda. México, Manduca a Pelelojo, Edif.  
Sede Fiscalía General de la República,  
La Candelaria, Caracas, Venezuela  
**Fax: +58 212 509 8504**

**Email: [mp@fiscalia.gov.ve](mailto:mp@fiscalia.gov.ve)**  
**Salutation: Señora Fiscal General/ Dear Attorney General**

#### **And copies to:**

[Amnesty International Venezuela](http://www.amnesty.org)  
CCS182576 Av Venezuela,  
Edif. Venezuela PB Local 5, Casillero  
936  
El Rosal, Caracas 1060  
Venezuela

**Email: [info@aven.org](mailto:info@aven.org)**

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Over recent years the Venezuelan government appears to have established a pattern of clamping down on dissent through the use of legislative and administrative methods to silence and harass critics. Laws are being used to justify what essentially seem to be politically motivated charges, which would indicate that the Venezuelan government is deliberately targeting opponents.

The Inter American Commission of Human Rights has stated that the arrest of Guillermo Zuloaga "evidences the lack of independence of the judiciary and the utilization of the criminal justice system to punish criticism, producing an intimidating effect that extends to all of society." Following the detention of Judge Maria Lourdes Afiuni UN experts said that "Reprisals for exercising their constitutionally guaranteed functions and creating a climate of fear among the judiciary and lawyers' profession serve no purpose except to undermine the rule of law and obstruct justice." In January, after the RCTV and other TV channels were suspended from broadcast the European Parliament stated that "The 'National Telecommunications Commission' should show itself to be independent of the political and economic authorities and ensure equitable pluralism".

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