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Dear High Representative,

Dear EU Foreign Ministers,

THE EU MUST ACT ON VENEZUELA'S HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS

Ahead of the informal Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 29 August, Amnesty International is writing to urge you to take robust and unified action for human rights in Venezuela.

Venezuela has suffered a deep human rights crisis for many years, marked by grave human rights violations and possible crimes against humanity, and an ongoing complex humanitarian emergency. To date, this critical situation has led to more than 7.77 million [people leaving Venezuela](#) in search of protection, a number that represents more than 25% of Venezuela's total population, with 1.4 million people fleeing the country between May 2022 and August 2023 alone.

Fueled by the impunity of those suspected of criminal responsibility, this human rights crisis continues to the present day.

Following the presidential election of 28 July 2024 and the announcement of the contested and unpublished results, the Venezuelan state authorities have [increased](#) their policy of repression at a widespread scale, including mass politically motivated arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and reports of torture. Amnesty International has received reliable reports of the use of lethal and excessive less lethal force by public officials and pro-government armed groups resulting in at least 17 people killed; illegal home raids with excessive use of force; deployment of ununiformed security forces, and a strongly stigmatizing discourse against political activists, human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In Venezuela, civil society organizations, victims' groups and other human rights defenders have faced ongoing [targeting](#) by the government. Many are currently arbitrarily detained, including Javier Tarazona, Rocío San Miguel, Carlos Julio Rojas, Kennedy Tejeda, Edward Ocariz, Henry Gómez and others. The attacks, stigmatization, and other forms of harassment against civil society organizations and human rights defenders are due to these stakeholders' activities supporting victims, pursuing justice, and denouncing human rights violations.

Most recently, on 15 August, the Venezuelan National Assembly [passed](#) the "Law for the Control, Regularization, Operations and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations", known as the "anti-NGO law", in a continued effort to [clamp down](#) on human rights and civil society organizations in the country. As part of a wider crackdown, this law blatantly violates freedom of association and the right to participate in public affairs, and jeopardizes the very existence of community, humanitarian and human rights organizations with ambiguous articles, which could be used to apply excessively harsh penalties and even arbitrarily outlaw organizations *en masse*.

Such acts are not new in Venezuela, and the present increase in the scale and gravity of international crimes and human rights violations being committed against Venezuelans demands immediate action by the European Union (EU) and its member states.

Since the July elections, the EU has [spoken out](#) for the "conditions of the Venezuelan people to exercise their civil and political rights", calling on the authorities to "put an end to arbitrary detentions and repression against members of the opposition and civil society, and release all political prisoners." The EU has also [highlighted](#) the importance of the Venezuelans' right to protest and [urged](#) the "Venezuelan authorities, including security forces, [to] fully respect human

rights, including freedom of expression and of assembly” and to “put an end to repression and violent rhetoric against members of the opposition and civil society.” In the most recent statement of 25 August, the High Representative [calls on the Venezuelan authorities](#) to “respect the right of all Venezuelans to peacefully demonstrate and freely express their political opinions without fear of reprisal. They must refrain from using excessive force, end the repression and harassment of the opposition and civil society, and release all political prisoners. Human rights violations must be thoroughly investigated and those responsible held accountable.”

The EU and its member states have also consistently supported the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) established by United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC). Established in October 2019, the FFM is [mandated](#) to investigate “extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment since 2014” and later expanded to include gender-based violence, all with a view to “ensuring full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims”. Its first two reports concluded there are enough reasons to believe [crimes against humanity](#) have been committed in Venezuela, and that the judiciary has been a tool for their commission and impunity. With its mandate renewal pending in September, the FFM remains a vital mechanism to improving the human rights situation in Venezuela, deterring further escalation in the commission of possible crimes under international law, documenting violations that have already occurred and remain unpunished, and playing a critical role for future accountability efforts.

In this spirit, at the forthcoming informal FAC, Amnesty International urges you to urgently take action for human rights in Venezuela at this critical moment:

- **Engage with the Venezuelan authorities up to highest level to:**
 - End their policy of repression and all human rights violations including arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture, excessive use of force by security forces and attacks and stigmatizing discourse against political activists, human rights defenders and civil society.
 - Immediately and unconditionally release [Javier Tarazona](#), [Rocío San Miguel](#), Carlos Julio Rojas, Kennedy Tejada, Edward Ocariz, Henry Gómez and [all others](#) who are arbitrarily detained for political reasons.
 - Retract all bills attacking civic space, including the recently passed “anti-NGO law”.
 - Collaborate with international scrutiny and accountability mechanisms.
- **Issue updated Council Conclusions with a sustained, strategic response to the escalating human rights and ongoing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and strongly reaffirm EU and member state commitments to human rights and accountability** for violations in the country.
- **Provide full support to Venezuelan human rights defenders and civil society** and unequivocally affirm their important work, including in public statements. In parallel, redouble EU support for the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in the country, in particular the right to protest.
- **Support the resolution to renew the Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela** at the forthcoming 57th session of the UN Human Rights Council, including through high-level outreach and timely engagement with third countries.
- Likewise, **throw EU weight behind the ongoing investigation of human rights violations by the International Criminal Court** (ICC) prosecutor, including for all [action](#) by the ICC in response to the present increase in the scale and gravity of violations being committed against Venezuelans.
- **Act for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region and in the EU**, guaranteeing, as a matter of urgency, access to international protection and forms of complementary protection. Complementary protection and regularization measures cannot become substitutes for refugee status; where states choose to use these, they must guarantee that programs comply with the criteria of legality, accessibility and protection of rights, including non-*refoulement*.

Thank you in advance for your action for human rights and accountability in Venezuela.

Yours sincerely,



Eve Geddie
Head of European Institutions Office and Advocacy
Director
Amnesty International



Valentina Ballesta
Deputy Director of Research
Americas Regional Office
Amnesty International