

URGENT ACTION

DEFENDERS' HOME INVADED, SAFETY AT RISK

Unidentified persons broke into the residence of Venezuelan human rights defenders Yonaide Sánchez and Nelson Freitez. There is concern that this incident is an attempt to stop the legitimate activism they both carry out for human rights.

On the night of 8 May, unidentified individuals entered the residence of **Yonaide Sánchez** and **Nelson Freitez** in Barquisimeto, Lara State, in the centre-west of Venezuela. It seems that nothing was taken during this home invasion, but the perpetrators ransacked the defenders' belongings, and left knives, a pickaxe and a cutting board arranged in a threatening manner.

Amnesty International has been informed that the defenders' home had been broken into on two previous occasions – on 30 November 2016 and 8 April 2017 – also by unidentified individuals who not only ransacked the home, but also stole several personal items and things related to the defenders' human rights work. On both these occasions, the defenders filed reports with the National Guard, but never received any response and to date there is no indication that any investigations have been opened. The defenders also filed a report with the Lara State Prosecutor's Office after the second break-in in April, but have yet to receive any follow-up or response. Following the 8 May break-in, Nelson Freitez and Yonaide Sánchez again filed a report with the Lara State Prosecutor's Office, this time also requesting protection measures to ensure their safety. After over a week without a response, on 19 May the defenders requested a meeting with the Lara State Prosecutor, but have yet to receive an answer.

In the context of growing public demonstrations in Venezuela, Yonaide Sánchez and Nelson Freitez have publicly denounced, on radio and television, the existence of human rights violations, the participation of armed civilian groups in harassing demonstrators, and excessive use of force during the demonstrations. The defenders believe that these break-ins may be an attempt to deter their legitimate work as human rights defenders. These events and the continued impunity for the previous attacks against them put Yonaide Sánchez and Nelson Freitez at risk with regards to their personal safety, and their ability to freely continue their work to defend human rights.

Please write immediately, in Spanish or in your own language:

- Urging the Venezuelan authorities to take all necessary measures, in consultation with Yonaide Sánchez and Nelson Freitez, to guarantee their physical and psychological integrity and that of their family members;
- Calling for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attacks on Yonaide Sánchez and Nelson Freitez's home, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- Insisting that they ensure that all human rights defenders in Venezuela can freely carry out their legitimate activities in defence of human rights without restrictions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 JULY 2017 TO:

Senior State Prosecutor of Lara State
William Guerrero
Antigua sede HELMBANC
Calle 3 con avenida Lara
Sector Nueva Segovia, piso 1,
Barquisimeto, Venezuela
Email: fiscalia022@cantv.net
fsuplara@fiscalia.gov.ve
Salutation: Dear State Prosecutor/ Sr.
Fiscal

Attorney General
Dra. Luisa Ortega Díaz
Sede Principal del Ministerio Público
Esquinas de Misericordia a Pele El Ojo
Avenida México, Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 578 3239
Email: ministeriopublico@mp.gob.ve
Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Dra.
Fiscal

Ombudsman
Tarek William Saab
Av. Urdaneta – Frente El Universal Centro
Financiero Latino, Piso 27
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 507 7025
Email: contacto@defensoria.gob.ve
Salutation: Dear Ombudsman/ Sr.
Defensor

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY ROCÍO MANEIRO, Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 1 Cromwell Road SW7 2HW, 020 7584 4206 or 020 7581 2776, Fax 020 7589 8887, despacho.londres@mppre.gob.ve embavenezuk@venezlon.co.uk info@venezlon.co.uk <http://reinounido.embajada.gob.ve/>

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Yonaide Sánchez and Nelson Freitez are two university professors and prominent human rights activists in Lara state, with high public visibility in the region. Yonaide Sánchez is the Lara state coordinator of the NGO Transparency Venezuela (Transparencia Venezuela), which is dedicated to promoting access to public information and the fight against corruption. Nelson Freitez is a recognized human rights activist, a member of the Gumilla Center in Barquisimeto and of the Assembly of the NGO PROVEA, and the coordinator of the Department of Human Rights of the university Universidad Centro Occidental Lisandro Alvarado. He has been a member of the Committee of Victims against Impunity of Lara State, an organization that has denounced extrajudicial executions by law enforcement and military forces in the region during the years 2000-2008.

The attack on Yonaide Sánchez and Nelson Freitez's residence takes place in the context of a series of pro- and anti-government demonstrations that began in April 2017, and to date there have been 47 deaths, hundreds of people injured, reports of dozens of people who have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, and hundreds of people detained. Barquisimeto, the capital of Lara state, is one of the region's most affected by this violence and excessive use of force, and where defenders have gained high visibility in regional media and public forums, denouncing excesses and human rights violations and abuses in the region by officials, the military and armed civilians.

The defence of human rights has become an increasingly dangerous occupation in Venezuela, where activists are attacked and harassed for criticizing the authorities. The risk and exposure of human rights defenders' work in Venezuela has been denounced to various international human rights protection mechanisms, including the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on the work of human rights defenders, the UN Human Rights Committee, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, institutions that have urged the Venezuelan State to take measures to ensure the ability to defend and promote human rights in the country.

UA: 114/17 Index: AMR 53/6324/2017 Issue Date: 22 May 2017