

URGENT ACTION

VENEZUELAN REFUGEES PERSECUTED AND DEPORTED

On 17 March, police and immigration officers arbitrarily detained 14 Venezuelan refugees (three women and 11 men) at a shelter in La Paz, Bolivia. They had participated in a peaceful demonstration at the Cuban Embassy against human rights violations in Venezuela on 15 March. Officers took them to an immigration office, interrogated them and accused them of “conspiracy” and “political activities in exchange for money”, violating their right to due process. That same day, six of them were arbitrarily deported to Peru, which was the entry point to Bolivia. The remaining eight, who had applied for asylum, were released but five subsequently fled to Peru fearing further persecution. Those released who remain in Bolivia currently fear persecution and arbitrary deportation. According to local organizations and witnesses, many were ill-treated and threatened by police officers. Urge the Minister of Government to stop persecuting and arbitrarily deporting Venezuelan refugees in need of international protection.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Minister of Government, Mr. Carlos Romero
Av. Arce esq. Belisario Salinas N° 2409, La Paz, Bolivia
Phone: + 591 2 2440466, +591 2 2120002
Twitter: @MindeGobierno, @CarlosGuRomero

Minister Romero,

On 17 March, police and immigration officers arbitrarily detained 14 Venezuelan refugees at a shelter in La Paz, accusing them of “conspiracy actions and participating in political activities that affect public order in exchange for money”, without due process and judicial guarantees. Then six of them were arbitrarily expelled from Bolivia to Peru.

According to local organizations and witnesses, many of them were ill-treated and threatened by police and, five of them fled to Peru, fearing further persecution. Both those who were deported and those who fled are currently exposed to abuse and crime at the Peru-Bolivia border. Those released who remain in the country fear further persecution and arbitrary deportation to places where their lives or freedoms could be at risk.

All people –including irregular migrants, regular migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees– have the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, due process and judicial guarantees, and to not be subjected to ill-treatment, collective expulsion or refoulement. Any state is forbidden from transferring anyone to a place where they would be at real risk of serious human rights violations.

We urge you to stop arbitrarily detaining, persecuting and expelling Venezuelan refugees in need of international protection.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to an official statement by the Ministry of Government, on 17 March, police and immigration officers carried out a raid at a shelter (Casa del Migrante de la Pastoral de Movilidad Humana) in La Paz, Bolivia, detaining 14 Venezuelans residing in Bolivia under an "irregular [migration] status". Officers took the Venezuelans to a General Immigration Directorate office to be interrogated in relation to their migration status and their alleged participation in a demonstration at the Cuban embassy on 15 March. The Minister of Government claimed that they all allegedly confessed to being involved in "conspiracy actions and participating in political activities that affect public order in exchange for money". Eight of them who had applied for asylum were released, while the remaining six were immediately and arbitrarily deported to Peru.

According to local organizations and witnesses, the detention at the shelter was collective, carried without a warrant or a present competent authority, and officers threatened and pointed guns at the refugees during the raid. The refugees were never taken before a judicial authority, did not have access to a lawyer and were interrogated without a present lawyer representing them and, in consequence, were not allowed to prepare their defence. Officers also did not give them the chance to challenge their deportation.

Additionally, during the approximately 10-hour detention, refugees did not receive food and were forbidden to use a toilet without an officer escorting them. This raises questions about whether police or immigration officers used ill-treatment and threats to extract confessions.

On 19 March local organizations reported that five of the released refugees fled to Peru fearing further persecution, given that the Minister of Government publicly accused them and that the police retained their identity documents.

The fact that six of them were accused and deported collectively that same day and that they were not allowed to challenge their deportation, violates international law and suggests that the decision was arbitrary because it lacked an objective analysis of the individual circumstances of each one of them.

In addition, one of the refugees was an Indigenous Pemon man from the *Kumarakapay* community in Venezuela and did not speak Spanish. During the interrogation, he was not assisted with translation and therefore was not informed of the charges against him and was not able to defend himself. The *Kumarakapay* community was forcibly displaced to Brazil by the Venezuelan army between 22 and 24 February 2019. Therefore, its members are likely in need of international protection.

In recent years, Venezuela has experienced a serious humanitarian crisis and mass human rights violations. In such circumstances, people forced to flee Venezuela are likely to require international protection under a framework of respect for human rights. Regardless of their legal status in the host country, they have, among others, the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, due process and judicial guarantees, and to not be subjected to ill-treatment, collective expulsion or refoulement. Please check Amnesty International's public statement called [Urgent measures: Venezuelans need international protection](#) on 3 September 2018, and a [quote on Twitter](#) on 18 March 2019.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 8 May 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Venezuelan refugees (they/them)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

And copies to:

Attorney General

Dr. Juan Lanchipa Ponce
Office of the Attorney General
Address: Calle España N° 79 Esq. San Alberto
La Paz, Bolivia
Twitter: @FGE_Bolivia

Conduct an immediate, through and impartial investigation into the alleged human rights violations that occurred during the detention and deportation of these Venezuelan refugees on 17 March and bring those responsible to justice.

Ombudsman (Defensora del Pueblo)

Mrs. Nadia Cruz
Address: Calle Colombia N° 440
entre Héroes del Acre y Gral. González
La Paz, Bolivia
Twitter: @DPBolivia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. CHARGE d’AFFAIRES: Miss Giovanna L. Vidal Sejas, Embassy of Bolivia, 106 Eaton Square SW1W 9AD, 020 7235 4255 Ext 100, Fax 020 7235 1286, embol@bolivianembassy.co.uk, www.bolivianembassy.co.uk **Please check with your section before sending appeals after the above date.**

Please note that we would prefer you to send Twitter messages (since they are public and immediate) to both accounts. Nevertheless, letters and phone calls are also useful.