

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED FOR DEFENDING WOMEN AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Vannesa Rosales is a teacher and women and girls' rights defender in the state of Mérida (West). On 12 October 2020, officers from the Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations Unit (CICPC) broke into her home without a search warrant and detained her, violating due process guarantees. She is now accused of assisting a 13-year-old girl, whose life was in danger, for the interruption of her pregnancy resulting from rape. Vannesa has been under house arrest since 11 January 2021 and her pre-trial hearing is scheduled for 21 July 2021. The Attorney General should drop the charges against Vannesa and release her.

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

**Attorney General
Tarek William Saab**
c/o Her Excellency Mrs Rocío Maneiro
Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
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Dear Tarek William Saab,

I am alarmed by the arbitrary detention and criminalization of Vannesa Rosales, a teacher, social worker and women and girls' rights defender in Venezuela. On 12 October 2020, she was arbitrarily detained after an illegal inspection of her home by CICPC officials.

Vannesa is being accused of inducing abortion to third parties, criminal association and conspiracy for providing information and supporting the interruption of the pregnancy of a 13-year-old at her mother's request. The girl's life was in danger by the pregnancy, and she had been a victim of sexual abuse in Pueblo Nuevo, Mérida.

Since a precautionary measure was issued on 11 January 2021, Vannesa has been deprived of her liberty under house arrest and the preliminary hearing has not yet been held.

Vannesa must not face a criminal trial, and she must be released as soon as possible. Therefore, I demand that all charges against Vanessa are dropped, and if the case remains -unfairly- open, at least, she should face her trial free, as established by international law and standards on pre-trial detention. I also demand that in the meantime, her physical and psychological integrity is guaranteed. Those who peacefully defend human rights in Venezuela should not be criminalized.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Vannesa Rosales' detention occurs in a context of systematic repression and criminalization of human rights defenders in Venezuela. The harassment and stigmatization against those who carry out this work in the country are constant and many are the target of reprisals such as threats, public stigmatization, arbitrary detentions, and attacks on their physical integrity.

Sexual and reproductive rights are severely restricted in Venezuela, whose legislation on this matter is one of the most restrictive in Latin America. The interruption of pregnancy is classified as a crime under the penal code, except in cases where the life of the pregnant person is in danger. Despite repeated calls by national organizations defending sexual and reproductive rights, as well as international organizations, and unions such as the Venezuelan Medical Federation, Venezuela continues to have a legal framework regulating access to abortion which is not aligned with international human rights law and standards and that does not reflect the current reality in the country.

The absence of effective public policies on sexual and reproductive health, the general scarcity of information and contraceptive methods of any kind, the limitations on reproductive health services, and the deterioration of the public health system in Venezuela significantly obstruct the enjoyment and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Many girls and adolescents in Venezuela live in vulnerable situations, in the midst of a fragile economic climate, limited educational opportunities and being exposed to gender-based violence in their social environment. All of this translates into an increase in the adolescent pregnancies, clandestine abortions, maternal mortality and morbidity, and a lower quality of life for women and girls in Venezuela.

In 2014, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) made observations on the Venezuelan legislation on violence against women, girls and adolescents and termination of pregnancy. Among them, it noted its concern over the insufficient measures that address violence against women and girls, and the lack of effective access to justice. Likewise, it warned, "The restrictive legislation on abortion that forces women to resort to unsafe abortion, which often harms the health of the pregnant woman and sometimes causes death," [urging the government to modify its legislation, particularly in cases such as rape and to guarantee the availability of services for the safe termination of pregnancy.](#)

In October 2020, Vannesa Rosales responded to a request for support from a woman and her 13-year-old daughter. The girl was her student and had been raped by a man from her neighbourhood, which had resulted in pregnancy. In a previous medical consultation, the girl's mother had been warned that the pregnancy put her daughter's life at risk.

As part of the irregularities committed since the beginning of the process, the Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations Unit (CICPC) went to the health center where the girl went with her mother to receive post-abortion care. According to the information available, although the CICPC had received the report of the rape and had not carried out any investigation at the moment, it proceeded to take the statement from the girl without legal representation and to establish who had helped her terminate the pregnancy. This illegally taken statement was used to justify the subsequent arrest of Vannesa Rosales.

The girl who Vannesa accompanied in the termination of her pregnancy belongs to a community with limited resources. The pregnancy was diagnosed as risky by a medical provider due to the girl's age. Her socio-economic status made her situation even more precarious. The sexual offender is a fugitive from justice while Vannesa continues to be deprived of her liberty.

Vannesa's case highlights the lack of due diligence on behalf of the state to address acts of violence against women, particularly sexual violence, and ensure women who are victims of sexual violence can access timely and adequate sexual and reproductive health care. On the contrary, women who dedicate their lives to supporting victims and fighting for their rights are being criminalized by the system.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 7 September 2021

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Vannesa Rosales (she, her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a