

VENEZUELA: AUTHORITIES MUST FREE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ORLANDO MORENO

The Venezuelan state must end the harassment, illegal detention, and criminalization of human rights defenders.

The undersigned organizations condemn the April 25 assault and detention of Orlando Moreno by Venezuelan security forces, the latest in a series of escalating attacks against human rights defenders and organizations by the Venezuelan state.

On Sunday, human rights defender Orlando Moreno was assaulted and detained by agents of Venezuela's Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Investigation Service Corps (CICPC). At the time, he was taking testimony from family members of fleeing Venezuelans who were aboard a vessel that sank en route to Trinidad and Tobago after departing Venezuela late on April 19. According to local sources, 24 people were aboard, four of whom were minors, aged 2, 5, 15, and 17. To date, two to three deaths have been reported, including one child and one adolescent. Seven passengers were rescued and transported to Tucupita to present themselves at the headquarters of CICPC. As of the morning of April 25, their families had received no further information about them.

During a press conference following Moreno's detention, Delta Amacuro State governor Lizeta Hernandez justified his arbitrary arrest on grounds that he had been "instigating hate." Her statement, made before Moreno had appeared in court or was given the opportunity to exercise his rights to present a defense, violates the presumption of innocence. Such statements are typical of the Maduro regime's campaign to stigmatize human rights defenders.

Ongoing monitoring has revealed a pattern of intense and systematic repression, including the criminalization of human rights defenders in Venezuela. We urge the Venezuelan state to end the harassment, illegal detention, and criminalization of human rights defenders. We advocate for the complete and immediate liberation of Orlando Moreno, and we urge the state to provide the families of the accident victims precise information, in compliance with the right to truth, about the tragic events that have occurred.

We express our solidarity with the families of the victims and commit to raising our voices to restore full respect for and recognition of the fundamental rights and freedoms of people in Venezuela.

Signed:

Amnesty International

CADAL

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Civil Right Defenders

Cultura Democrática

Demo Amlat

Due Process of Law Foundation

Freedom House

International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights

International Service for Human Rights

Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe por la Democracia

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

Background

Venezuela's worsening humanitarian crisis has accelerated migration flows. Several ships carrying migrants attempting to flee to neighboring countries have sunk during the past three years, resulting in fatalities. In a single incident in December 2020, 28 Venezuelans lost their lives in similar circumstances on the same route, in an event that Venezuela's prosecutor says is being investigated. However, there have been no conclusions published to date. In 2021, several journalists and human rights activists have been threatened and intimidated for reporting on these kinds of events.