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Venezuela: Human rights defenders released but charges remain; criminalisation of civil society must stop

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GENEVA (18 February 2021) – UN human rights experts* today welcomed the release from detention of five human rights defenders and members of NGO Azul Positivo but urged Venezuelan authorities to stop the continuous and increasing attacks and intimidation against civil society organisations and journalists.

The five human rights defenders and members of Azul Positivo, who had been detained in Zulia state on 12 January 2021, were released on 10 February but the charges they faced, relating to terrorism, terrorism financing and money laundering, have not been dropped.

“The arrests and criminal charges are part of a pattern of increasing criminalisation of civil society organisations in Venezuela, which already operate under a repressive set of laws and regulations including the 2017 ‘Law Against Hate’ that restricts the exercise of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression, among others,” the experts said.

They said the Government has adopted new regulations in recent months that intensify the pressure on NGOs and restrict their access to international funding, including financial resources needed to address the humanitarian crisis. The experts urged to review these new regulations and prioritise attention to the crisis with a human rights-based approach.

“We urge the authorities to drop the charges against the five human rights defenders of Azul Positivo,” the experts said.

“We call on the authorities to review restrictive laws and practices to ensure compliance with Venezuela’s obligations under international human rights law, and respect and protect the work of civil society, including women human rights defenders.”

The experts have previously engaged with Venezuelan authorities on these issues.

ENDS

The experts: **Clément Voule**, *Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association*; **Irene Khan**, *Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression*; **Mary Lawlor**, *Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders* and **The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls**: **Elizabeth Broderick** (Chair), **Melissa Upreti** (Vice Chair), **Dorothy Estrada Tanck**, **Ivana Radačić**, and **Meskerem Geset Techane**

Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

For more information and media requests, please contact Ms. Marta Franco (mfranco@ohchr.org).

For media enquiries regarding other UN independent experts, please contact Renato de Souza (+41 22 928 9855 [📞](https://www.ohchr.org/en/contact) / rrosariodesouza@ohchr.org).

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