

# URGENT ACTION

## VENEZUELAN DETAINEES' LIFE AT RISK

**Emirlendris Benítez is a 42-year-old mother and tradeswoman who was arbitrarily detained in August 2018 and subjected to torture. Guillermo Zárraga is a 59-year-old engineer and former oil industry unionist arbitrarily detained in November 2020 and tried for crimes for which there was no evidence. They both suffer from grave health conditions, because of acts of torture, in Emirlendris' case, and inhumane prison conditions. Both individuals are currently unfairly detained in prisons under the responsibility of the Minister for Penitentiary Affairs. We call on her to protect their lives and health and ensure they receive immediate and adequate medical attention.**

### TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 96.23**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

**Celsa Bautista Ontiveros**  
**Minister of Penitentiary Affairs**  
Ministerio del Poder Popular para Asuntos  
Penitenciarios,  
Avenida Venezuela, Edificio Platinum,  
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**Consulate of Venezuela in Boston**  
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Dear Ms. Bautista Ontiveros,

I am deeply concerned for the lives of **Emirlendris Benítez** and **Guillermo Zárraga**, who are unfairly imprisoned in your custody. Guillermo Zárraga is currently held at Yare II Prison waiting for a new trial to begin, in Miranda state, while Emirlendris is serving a draconian and unfounded 30-year sentence at the INOF center at Los Teques, Caracas. Both individuals are in critical need of medical attention.

Emirlendris Benítez's health situation is critical because of the grave human rights violations she has suffered since her arrest in August 2018, including arbitrary detention, torture, gender-based violence, discrimination, unfair trial, and inhumane prison conditions. She has seen her human right to health repeatedly denied by authorities under your responsibility. Guillermo Zárraga has been unfairly detained since November 2020. During his unfair imprisonment, he has suffered severe weight loss, cardiac episodes, and has fainted repeatedly due to malnourishment. Prison authorities are arbitrarily restricting his access to basic needs such as food, medicines, and other basic convenience goods.

Emirlendris Benítez and Guillermo Zárraga should be immediately and unconditionally released. Pending their release, you must guarantee their life, health, and safety. We urge you to urgently grant them access to trusted and adequate medical care.

Yours sincerely,

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Emirlendris Benitez** is a Venezuelan mother, sister, and tradeswomen. On August 5, 2018, Emirlendris was arbitrarily detained on fabricated grounds. Authorities falsely linked her to acts of violence committed against high profile political leaders in Venezuela; an accusation for which there is no evidence and which she has consistently stated that she had no part in. In custody, she was subjected to torture while pregnant. A few weeks after her arrest, she was forcibly transferred to a medical facility and her pregnancy was terminated without her knowledge or consent. The torture she was subjected to left her needing the long-term use of a wheelchair for mobility. In 2022, she was sentenced to a 30-year prison sentence by a partial and politically motivated court. Emirlendris should never have been detained, as it is believed the charges are politically motivated. Furthermore, the draconian sentence against her should be revoked and she must be immediately released.

**Guillermo Zárraga** is a Venezuelan engineer who worked as an operator technician for Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA, the Venezuelan state-owned oil company) at the Cardón Refinery in the Catalytic Complex located in Coro, Falcón state. He was also a leader in the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores (Unique Workers' Union) within that organization. On November 14, 2020, at 3:00 am, he was detained at his home by officers from the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM). According to the indictment by the Public Prosecutor's Office, he has been accused of providing national security information to an American man who had been arrested in September and was believed to be a CIA agent attempting to sabotage the oil industry complex. Guillermo Zárraga was also photographed with Juan Guaido, a prominent opposition leader. This photograph was included as part of the accusation, serving as evidence of Zárraga's intention to support the sabotage.

Prison authorities do not provide detainees with adequate sustenance and drinking water, and Emirlendris and Guillermo Zárraga's families do not have the means to support them in prison. This has led to their severely deteriorated health while in custody.

Since 2020, four reports from the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have thoroughly documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment committed in the country since 2014; as well as the ways in which the justice system serves as a tool for the government's policy of repression, and concluded that these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** January 8, 2023

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

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Emirlendris Benítez and Guillermo Zárraga (them/their)