

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER HARASSED

Authorities forcibly searched the home of human rights defender Ehisler Vásquez and prosecutors threatened to indict him when he requested information on the reason for the search. This potential criminalization would put his work to defend human rights at risk.

On 10 May at 7am, officers of the Scientific, Penal and Forensic Investigations Corps (Cuerpo de Investigaciones Políticas Penales y Criminalísticas, CICPC, or forensic police force) arrived at the home of **Ehisler Vásquez** in the city of Barquisimeto, Venezuela, and carried out a forced search. Although Ehisler Vásquez confirms that he repeatedly asked what the grounds for the search were, the officers did not respond. Following this, Ehisler Vásquez went to the CICPC offices where they also refused to provide him with an answer as to the grounds for the search. He subsequently went to the Senior Public Prosecutor's office for the state of Lara, where he says that he was informed that charges had been filed against him for damages caused to the Public Prosecutor's Office building several days earlier.

Ehisler Vásquez claims that when he went to the First Municipal Public Prosecutor's office in Lara to verify the grounds for the charges, the prosecutor handling the investigation had apparently confused him with someone else, saying "you are *El Morocho* [Venezuelan slang for 'twin'] (*tú eres El Morocho*). Ehisler Vásquez said that he was not that person and identified himself, providing his full name. The prosecutor confirmed that she had issued the search warrant, but had not charged him with any offence. However she warned him that should there be any incriminating evidence against him, she would act accordingly.

According to the civil society organization Strength, Unity, Justice, Solidarity and Peace (Fuerza, Unión, Justicia, Solidaridad y Paz, FUNPAZ), founded by Ehisler Vásquez, both the search and the opening of an investigation against him are part of a strategy of criminalization and stigmatization of human rights defenders in Venezuela, which puts him at imminent risk of being detained and subjected to an unfair trial.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Reminding the authorities of their obligation to protect Ehisler Vásquez as a human rights defender, so that he can continue to carry out his legitimate work, and protect his family from any act of intimidation or harassment, respecting their rights at all times;
- Requesting clarification of the grounds for the search and the reasons for the investigation, so that he can exercise his legitimate right to defence.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 JUNE 2017 TO:

Ombudsperson

Dr. Tarek William Saab
Defensor del Pueblo
Av. Urdaneta - Frente a El Universal
Centro Financiero Latino, Piso 27
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 5077025
Email: contacto@defensoria.gob.ve
Salutation: Dear Ombudsman / Señor Defensor

Minister of Justice and the Interior

Gen. (Ej.) Néstor Luis Reverol Torres
Ministerio del Interior y Justicia
Avenida Urdaneta Esquina de Platanal
Edificio Interior y Justicia Despacho del Ministro
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 506 1685
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dra. Luisa Ortega Díaz
Fiscalía General de la República
Avda. México, Manduca a Pelelojo,
Edif. Sede Fiscalía General de la República, La Candelaria
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 509 8504
Email: mp@fiscalia.gob.ve
Salutation: Señora Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY ROCÍO MANEIRO, Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 1 Cromwell Road SW7 2HW, 020 7584 4206 or 020 7581 2776, Fax 020 7589 8887, despacho.londres@mppre.gob.ve, embavenezuk@venezlon.co.uk, info@venezlon.co.uk, <http://reinounido.embajada.gob.ve/>

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ehisler Vásquez is a human rights defender, active member and founder of the civil society organization Strength, Unity, Justice, Solidarity and Peace (Fuerza, Unión, Justicia, Solidaridad y Paz, FUNPAZ), a human rights NGO founded by victims of state repression on 15 and 16 April 2013.

On 16 April 2013, Ehisler Vásquez, who was 19 years old at the time, was seriously injured by officials believed to be officers of the Bolivarian National Guard (Guardia Nacional Bolivariana, GNB) in the city of Barquisimeto, in the state of Lara, while exercising his right to peaceful demonstration. When the GNB officers began to repress the protest, Ehisler Vásquez was shot five times with pellets (*perdigones*) which hit him directly in the face, back and legs, leaving his left cheek permanently injured. As a result, he has undergone surgery four times in an attempt to completely recover from these injuries. Ehisler Vásquez has still not fully recovered due to the lack of access to medicine in Venezuela, which is preventing him from continuing with his established treatment. This lack of adequate treatment is seriously affecting his left eye.

It is important note that in four years Ehisler Vásquez has not had access to the case file relating to the investigation into the incident in which he was injured, and the incident remains unpunished.

During his recovery process, in a public statement Ehisler Vásquez coordinated actions alongside other victims of repression in Lara, with the aim of denouncing the serious human rights violations which occurred in the context of the 2013 protests. Subsequently, and thanks to the victims joining forces, FUNPAZ was founded. According to information provided to Amnesty International by the Committee of Relatives of Victims of the Events of February-March 1989 (Comité de Familiares de Víctimas de los Sucesos de Febrero y Marzo de 1989, COFAVIC), FUNPAZ and its members have received several threats via social networks, mobile phones and other mediums, due to their work to defend human rights.

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