

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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OAS Should Press Authorities to Drop Charges

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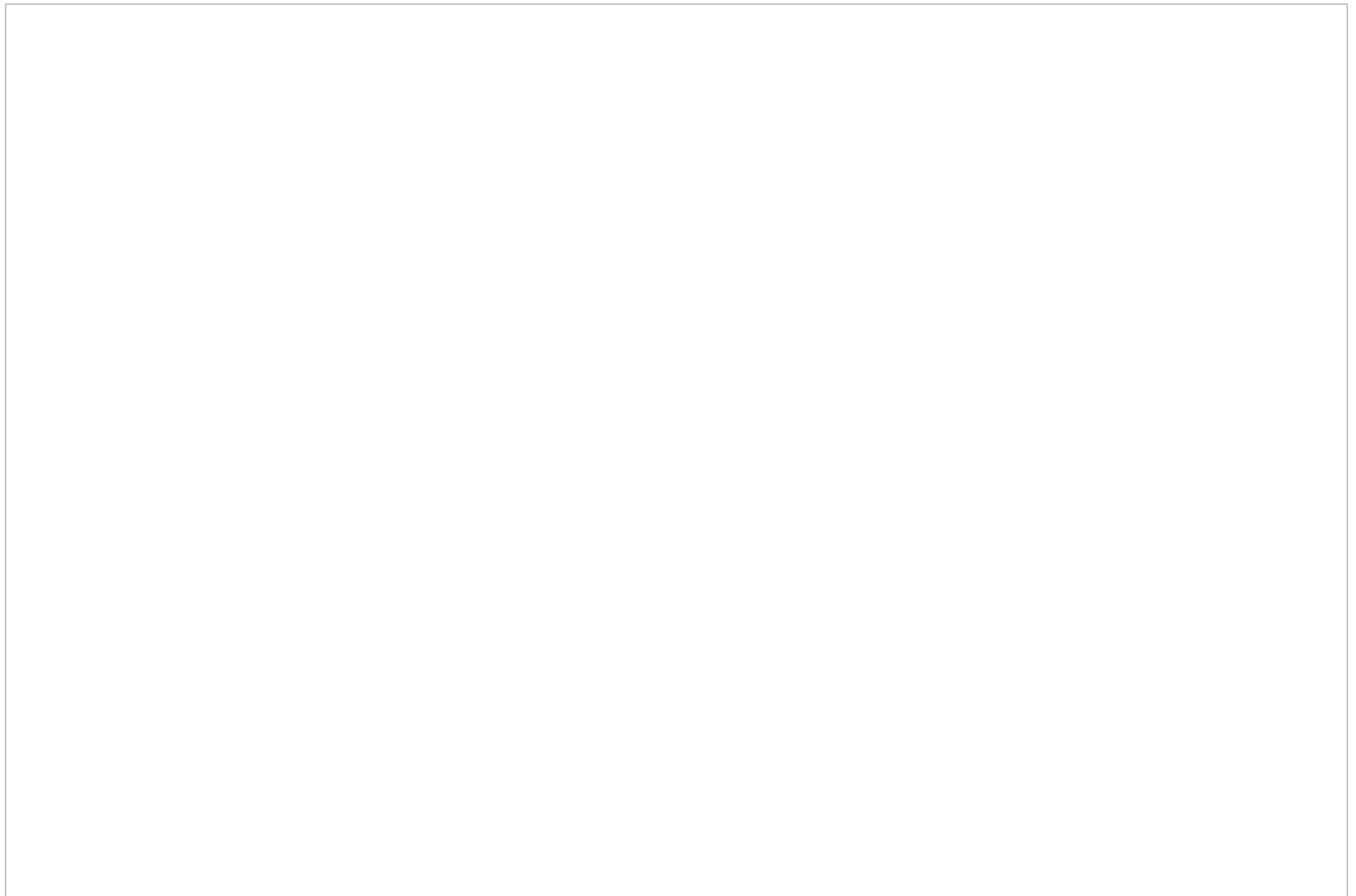
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(Buenos Aires) The Organization of American States (OAS) should press authorities from [Venezuelas](#) Maduro administration to release and drop criminal charges against anyone who has been arbitrarily detained and charged, Human Rights Watch said today. The OAS should also press Venezuela so its authorities investigate allegations that several detainees have been beaten and tortured in custody, and make the results of the investigations public.



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Riot police officers detain a demonstrator during clashes with opposition supporters in a rally to demand a referendum to remove President Nicols Maduro in Caracas, Venezuela, on May 18, 2016. 2016 Reuters

Since May 2016, the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (*Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional, SEBIN*) and National

Guard have detained 21 people on allegations that they were planning, fomenting, or had participated in violent anti-government actions. Most allege they have been tortured or otherwise abused in custody. In several cases, prosecutors failed to present any credible evidence linking the accused to crimes, but courts charged them anyway. In some cases, the evidence included mere possession of political materials, including pamphlets calling for the release of political prisoners.

The Maduro administration speaks about dialogue abroad, while cracking down on political dissent at home, said [Jos Miguel Vivanco](#), Americas director at Human Rights Watch. Without strong regional pressure, the Venezuelan government may well believe that it can get away with brutal and authoritarian punishment for dissent.

All but two of the 21 people detained have been charged with criminal offenses, and nine remain in detention.

In several cases, detainees testified in court that they had suffered physical abuse that could amount to torture, including brutal beatings, electric shocks, and threats of rape or murder. The patterns of maltreatment they describe are consistent with cases Human Rights Watch has documented during the past two years in Venezuela. Some detainees said that they were tortured to coerce them into confessing to crimes, and that SEBIN agents taped their coerced confessions.

Human Rights Watch conducted in-country research in June 2016, and interviewed family members and lawyers as well as one of the people detained, and reviewed key documents in judicial files in several cases, including police records and the direct testimony of 11 detainees, as well as statements by government officials. The 21 cases were from Caracas and Bolivar, Cojedes, and Zulia states.

Most detainees were political activists who said that they were merely involved in political protest and advocacy, such as calling for the release of political prisoners or supporting the recall referendum against President Nicols Maduro. The government linked 10 to an anti-government demonstration in which unidentified people had attacked police officers. Prosecutors asserted that most were caught participating in or preparing to commit acts of violence but did not provide credible evidence to support such assertions. Some testified that they had not participated in the demonstration at all.

Police reports, prosecutors, and judges cited lawful political publications as evidence to charge the detainees, according to judicial files and statements by government officials or supporters. The publications included flyers requesting the release of the opposition leader Leopoldo Lpez, and paperwork to promote a recall referendum. Evidence cited against some included a backpack with the logo of the opposition party Justice First (*Primero Justicia*). One was charged on the strength of information provided by an anonymous patriotic informant, even though the prosecutor said in court that charges would be inappropriate in that case.

Government officials and pro-government politicians routinely announced the charges against many of these detainees before the court had actually made them public, Human Rights Watch said.

None of the 19 detainees who ultimately appeared in court were able to contact a lawyer until minutes before appearing before a judge, which in most cases was after the 48-hour Venezuelan legal limit, detainees families and lawyers said. Two detainees were released without charge and never brought before a judge. One of them testified before a prosecutor that he was held incommunicado for five days at SEBIN offices in Caracas, badly abused, and then freed. The other testified in a written petition filed with a prosecutor that he was released after being forced to sign a blank piece of paper at a SEBIN office in Zulia state.

Ten were detained after an anti-government demonstration in Caracas on May 18. Interior and Justice Minister Gustavo Gonzalez Lpez appeared on TV after that demonstration to say that the government had identified a group of people responsible for destabilizing actions and violence against security forces.

One, Jos Gregorio Hernandez Carrasco, a 20-year old student who participated in the May 18 demonstration, was detained two days later at his work, he said. He was beaten and tortured and finally agreed to sign a confession because his abusers threatened to rape him. The torture included applying electric shocks, covering his head with a plastic bag to choke him, and placing a stick on his rectum and threatening to rape him. Hernandez Carrasco remains in detention and subject to criminal prosecution, despite the fact that the Attorney Generals Office failed to present any credible evidence against him.

Venezuelan authorities have, since February 2014, arbitrarily arrested, prosecuted, and convicted several leading opposition [politicians](#), as well as lesser known activists. [Lpez](#) and others arbitrarily detained during the 2014 anti-government protests remain in detention or subject to prosecution. Since June 2016, the government has also allegedly fired dozens of workers of the customs and tax office nationwide in apparent retaliation for supporting efforts to secure a [recall referendum](#) for President Maduro. Hundreds of other referendum supporters have reportedly been fired in similar circumstances by other government agencies.

The lack of judicial independence in Venezuela has enabled such arbitrary prosecutions and dismissals, Human Rights Watch said. One of the key principles enshrined in the [Inter-American Democratic Charter](#), which was adopted fifteen years ago by the OAS, is the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government. Governments have an obligation to promote and defend that principle, the Charter asserts.

OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro presented a comprehensive [report](#) on May 30, invoking the application of the charter to Venezuela. The report describes in great detail the human rights and humanitarian crisis that the country is facing.

The OAS Permanent Council met on June 23, to evaluate Almagros report. Despite Venezuelas contention that a debate on the report violated its sovereignty, a majority of member countries voted to move forward and evaluate Venezuelas compliance with the charter.

The Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Ministry has [said](#) the government supports dialogue and peace diplomacy, but Maduro has [said](#) that dialogue with the Venezuelan opposition must be without conditions. The opposition has said that, as part of any dialogue, the government must release political prisoners and agree to carry out the recall referendum vote on Maduros presidency in 2016.

If Maduro wants to suspend the ongoing Democratic Charters process, he will have to show concrete results and demonstrate that his government is ending abusive practices, Vivanco said. As part of any meaningful dialogue, OAS member states should press Venezuela to stop jailing its critics and end its crackdown on dissent.

Cases Human Rights Watch Documented

Caracas, May 2016

On May 18, Venezuelan opposition groups organized nationwide demonstrations to urge the National Electoral Council to hold a recall referendum on Maduros presidency. Opposition leaders had submitted a formal request earlier that month for electoral authorities to initiate the recall referendum process. On the morning of May 18, during the demonstration in Plaza Venezuela, Caracas, violent clashes broke out between demonstrators and members of security forces.

In the evening, Interior and Justice Minister Gonzlez Lpez [said](#) on state TV that authorities had detained seven people with links to violent organizations with political objectives. He said they were responsible for violent incidents earlier that day in Caracas, including attacks on security officers. He showed slides of the seven, as well as their names and ID numbers, under the heading Violent agenda of the right. One had confessed, he said, that a group of young men were financed by the security chief of a right-wing legislator of the National Assembly. Another person was detained two days later.

Later that night, Diosdado Cabello, a powerful Chavista politician and former head of the National Assembly, [said](#) during his weekly TV show that the detainees had been paid by ngel Coromoto Rodrguez, the 62-year old security chief of the current opposition National Assembly president, Henry Ramos Allup. Cabello called the security chief by his second name, Coromoto, and said that the detainees were going to be transferred to a high-security prison in San Juan de los Morros, Gurico state. A week later, Cabello played a [video](#) on his TV show of one of the detainees saying that Rodrguez had paid him to participate in violence during the May 18 demonstration in Caracas. Rodrguez was arrested on May 19.

All the detainees except for Rodrguez alleged before the judge that SEBIN agents beat them in custody. Several described violent assaults that could rise to the level of torture under international law. Four told a judge that SEBIN agents used these beatings to extract confessions from them.

Except where otherwise noted, the following accounts are based on the official record of their first court appearance.

Jos Gregorio Hernndez Carrasco, a 20-year-old student who participated in the May 18 demonstration, was detained two days later at the government-owned bank where he worked. He testified in court that SEBIN agents arrived at his office, forced him to resign, and detained him. He alleged that the agents beat him on his way to the SEBIN headquarters in Plaza Venezuela, where they threw a liquid he could not identify into his mouth and eyes.

He said that they beat him again when he said he did not belong to any political party and when he said he did not know several young men whose pictures they showed him. The agents gave him electric shocks, he said, and beat him repeatedly with a stick on his neck and face. They placed a stick on his rectum, threatened to rape him with it, and covered his head with a plastic bag to choke him. They placed a mat on his abdomen, he said, and told him he would not be able to prove the abuses because they would not leave visible marks.

They told him that they would not rape him if he would make a recording saying that he had been detained for demonstrating violently on May 18, he testified, and that the bodyguard of Ramos Allup had paid him to engage in violence. Hernndez Carrasco said he confessed on tape so that they would stop beating me and would not rape me with the stick.

Daniel Eduardo Morales Hidalgo, an 18-year-old university student, said that SEBIN agents detained him around noon as he headed home after school on the day of the demonstration. The metro stop Morales usually used was closed because of the demonstration, he said, and he was arrested as he walked by the SEBIN office in Plaza Venezuela. The agents threw him to the ground, beat and kicked him, shot pepper spray in his face, and took him into the SEBIN offices. Inside, the officers continued to beat him and forced him to say that someone had paid him 1,500 bolivares to commit violence during the demonstration. They threatened that they would continue to beat him if he told anyone he had been mistreated.

Jeremy Antonio Bastardo Lugo, an 18-year-old student, participated in the May 18 demonstration. He said that men in civilian clothes detained him in the afternoon, after the demonstration ended, near Plaza Altamira several kilometers from where the demonstration had taken place. The men covered Bastardos head and took him to a SEBIN office, where he said agents forced him to say that opposition leaders, including Henrique Capriles Radonski and Mara Corina Machado, had paid him, and that he had engaged in violence during the demonstration.

The agents beat him, he said, and threatened to rape him with a stick and shoot him dead. He alleged that the agents also gave him electric shocks and beat him with a bat on his chest, and threatened to abuse his girlfriend. Bastardo said that agents videotaped him, under duress, saying that he had participated in the demonstration to destabilize the country.

Richard Rafael Rendon Macas, a 33-year-old private security guard, said that he was detained while waiting for his wife, who was looking for some paperwork in her aunts apartment near the demonstration. Rendon said he was waiting in the buildings security booth outside the building with another man when police entered, running after demonstrators, and detained him. SEBIN agents allegedly beat Rendon, covered his head, and took him to the SEBIN office in Plaza Venezuela, where they hit him on the back and stepped on him repeatedly.

Luis Antonio Theis Camacho, a 28-year-old artist, said that he was leaving the demonstration when he noticed two elderly people who had been hit by teargas canisters. He stopped, and SEBIN agents detained him. The agents took him to the SEBIN office in Plaza Venezuela, where they hit him on his neck and back, kicked his testicles, and tried to choke him. The agents forced Theis to tape a video about his alleged responsibility for violent acts during the demonstration.

Deivis Gabriel Hernandez, an unemployed 22-year-old who earns tips by guarding cars in front of a store that sells *arepas* near Plaza Venezuela, said that he was standing in front of a store that sells take-out chicken dinners when SEBIN agents detained him. They repeatedly beat Hernandez and told him he was useless.

Yeferson Araguache Valderama, a 25-year-old construction worker, said that he was leaving his job site and was unable to take the metro from Plaza Venezuela because that stop was closed for the demonstration. He was detained around 4 p.m. in front of a nearby shopping mall. The SEBIN agents hit him, asked him if he belonged to a political party, and told him he was being detained for hitting a policewoman. He said the officers fractured his arm.

Angel Coromoto Rodriguez, 62, is security chief for the National Assembly president. Lawyers at his preliminary hearing told Human Rights Watch that officers detained Rodriguez without showing an arrest warrant at a bakery in Parque Central. His prosecution is based on an intelligence report that describes information provided by an anonymous patriotic informant who said that Rodriguez was financing and providing logistical support to violent groups who would pretend to be students during the May 18 demonstration.

Edgardo Prez (pseudonym), a 17-year-old student who was heading for another metro station since the one closest to his university was closed, walked past the entrance to the SEBIN office in Plaza Venezuela, where agents detained him, his lawyer told Human Rights Watch. They beat him and told him, If you think you will get away because you are under age, you're wrong, his lawyer said. They showed Prez a picture of Rodriguez, his lawyer said, and told him that they would harm his family if he did not say that he knew him. Prez was filmed confessing his participation in violence during the demonstration, and Cabello aired the videotaped confession on TV on May 25. Despite a [legal](#) requirement that children under the age of 18 must be given a hearing at a special court within 24 hours of detention, Prez did not appear before a judge until May 20, two days after his arrest. A prosecutor charged him with damaging public property, public incitement to commit crimes, holding explosives, and association to commit crimes, his lawyer said.

A day before the detainees were given a preliminary hearing, all of them apart from Prez and Rodriguez were transferred to a high-security prison called July 26, in San Juan de los Morros, Gurico state, just as Cabello had predicted. Several testified in court that prison guards cut their hair and made them chant, Chavez is alive, the fight continues! The guards allegedly arranged them in a circle and threw teargas bombs inside it, they said, made them squat repeatedly, gave them *arepas* made with flies to eat, and forced them to sleep on a wet floor.

The detainees were not allowed to contact their families or lawyers until they were brought before a judge days after their arrests. After the initial official confirmation on TV that they had been detained, their families and lawyers spent days going from one SEBIN office to another, as well as to nearby National Guard and the Bolivarian National Police bases, in a fruitless effort to learn where they were being held. The families never received official confirmation that they had been transferred to the July 26 prison on May 22. In the case of Hernandez Carrasco, his mother said, SEBIN agents entered their home without an arrest warrant while she was out looking for him, telling neighbors that they were looking for him. The agents stole food, cash, and basic goods such as soap, shampoo, and toothpaste, she said.

On May 23, all of the detainees were brought before a judge. During the hearing, which was suspended that evening and concluded on May 24, Morales, Theis, Rendon, Hernandez, and Araguache were charged with instigation to commit crimes, association to commit crimes, and causing damage to private property with violence. Bastardo and Hernandez Carrasco were charged with the same offenses, and with attempted aggravated homicide and causing physical injury to someone.

Although a prosecutor had initially said that he could not bring charges against Rodriguez, the judge confirmed charges against Rodriguez of instigating hatred, attempted homicide, and association to commit crimes. The judge ruled that only two of the defendants Theis and Rendon should be released pending trial and that the rest should be held in pretrial detention during the investigation, according to judicial files. Prez had already been charged on May 20, and was released then on conditional liberty.

Human Rights Watch reviewed some of the evidence assembled by prosecutors against eight of the detainees, as well as a summary of the evidence presented in the first court hearing to substantiate the charges against them. It was not possible to review Prezs file due to his age.

During the May 23 hearing in which the Attorney Generals Office outlined the evidence against the detainees, a prosecutor said his office would not press charges against Rodriguez given that his detention was not based on a judicial order and he was not caught while committing a crime. The prosecutor said that the detention was based on information that an anonymous patriotic informant had provided to SEBIN agents, and that it was not possible to establish his identity nor who is responsible for what a patriotic informant says, hidden behind an anonymity that is prohibited by the Constitution. The hearing was then suspended overnight.

The following day, the judge said she would press charges against Rodriguez, and stated that she had issued a judicial order for his detention on May 18, after receiving a phone call from another prosecutor requesting his detention. She had made no mention of the existence of any such order, or of a request for such an order, the previous day, according to the court summary of the hearing.

The same prosecutor who said he would not press charges against Rodriguez outlined the evidence he had against all the other detainees. According to the hearings court summary, he alleged that SEBIN agents apprehended all of the detainees in the course of committing criminal acts and that objects such as *miguelitos* objects with protruding nails that are used to puncture the tires of vehicles and slingshots had been seized, but offered no individualized account of what any one of the detainees was alleged to have done or possessed. Beyond this, the prosecutor did not mention any other specific, credible evidence when he presented the charges. His account was also inconsistent with the fact that Hernandez Carrasco was arrested two days after the demonstrations, at his workplace.

The prosecutor claimed that SEBIN agents were conducting patrolling activities when they found each of the detainees damaging private property, and detained them. He did not specify when or under what specific circumstances they were detained. The seized objects showed these citizens had a violent attitude to cause damage to society, the prosecutor said, but did not specify how many of these items

were allegedly found, where they were found, or which of the detainees allegedly was carrying them.

The prosecutor also cited as evidence a YouTube video that had circulated in social media showing violent attacks against police officers. At the hearing, he claimed Bastardo was identifiable in the video. He did not make the same claim about Hernandez Carrasco, but only said he was detained later. Nonetheless, he charged both of them with attempted homicide. The prosecutor also cited interviews that corroborate the video, but he did not specify if the interviews were the coerced confessions taped at SEBIN offices, or with other witnesses.

The detainees were only able to see their families after June 19 after nearly a month in detention said a lawyer with the Venezuelan Penal Forum, a nongovernmental group working on several of their defenses.

Caracas, May 2016 (II)

At approximately 8 p.m. on May 20, about 10 SEBIN agents detained Christian Agustn Manrique Habanero, a 21-year-old student, as he walked toward his girlfriends house in Caracas, Manrique told prosecutors. He testified that the agents pointed a gun at him, asked him his name, and, after he identified himself, covered his eyes with a sweater and forced him into a car.

At the SEBIN office in Plaza Venezuela, agents hit Manrique with a stick, then forced him to kneel, hit him on the back, and shot pepper spray in his face. The agents asked Manrique who was financing his activities and whether he had links to Henry Ramos Allup. They covered his head with a leather hood and drove him around the city, telling him that they would kill him and his family, imprison his girlfriend, and put a stick up his ass. Agents placed a gun inside his mouth and pulled the trigger, he said, but the gun was not loaded.

Manriques family found out that he had been detained when Gonzlez Lpez, the interior and justice minister, [tweeted](#) at 8:26 p.m., that we continue to identify and are in the process of capturing the material authors of fascist actions. The tweet included a photo of Manrique with his full name and ID number, labeling him identified and captured. It linked to a [video](#) accusing Manrique of participating in an attack on a member of the Bolivarian National Police during the May 18 demonstration. The video does not show Manrique attacking the policewoman. It shows him standing by a journalist, presumably at the demonstration, and then standing by Ramos Allup and a young man. That other young man is later shown in separate video footage apparently participating in an attack on a policewoman.

Manriques mother said that during his detention, she repeatedly went to the SEBIN and Bolivarian National Police offices in Caracas, but authorities would not confirm that they were holding her son. She filed a habeas corpus request on May 23, and on May 24, she filed a request that prosecutors open a criminal investigation into the forced disappearance of her son.

Manrique was held incommunicado at SEBIN offices in Caracas until May 25, when he was released without being brought before a judge, his lawyer said.

Zulia state, May 2016

At approximately 3 p.m. on May 4, in Maracaibo, Zulia state, a group of SEBIN officers with their faces covered and without showing an arrest warrant entered the home of Jess David Chirinos Rodrguez, a 23-year-old soldier. The agents awakened Marcos Chirinos, 35, Jesss brother, pointed a gun at him, and forced him, his sisters, and parents outside, Marcos Chirinos said. Soon after, the officers took Jess Chirinos outside, beat him, and asked him about the whereabouts of a woman named Beln.

Jesus Chirinos partner, Beln Carolina Salas Gonzlez, 21, and Kristy Valentina Mavares Paredes, 18, a friend, were hiding inside. The officers found them and detained Jess Chirinos, his brother Marcos, and the two women, and drove them in a Jeep to SEBIN offices in Maracaibo, according to some of the detainees testimony in the judicial record. Marcos Chirinos said he rode handcuffed, with his head covered with a hood tied to his neck with plastic, and officers hitting him.

At the SEBIN offices, the agents asked him which political party he belonged to, and he felt electric shocks to his handcuffs. An agent asked him if he believed in former President Hugo Chvezs ideology. This is a political problem, the agent told him, ...you have to collaborate. The agents only allowed him to leave after he signed a page that was blank except for two signatures of government officials. He was never charged with any crime.

The other three detainees appeared before a judge on May 6, and were charged with unlawfully carrying incendiary objects. The judge ordered their pretrial detention.

The charges against Jess Chirinos, Salas, and Mavares are based on an investigation carried out by SEBIN agents to discover, prevent, and neutralize any threat that runs counter to the supreme interests of the Nation, according to police records. On May 3 the day before they were arrested SEBIN had sent agents on preventive rounds with the purpose of obtaining relevant information linked to *guarimbas*. Government officials and supporters have widely used the term *guarimba* since the start of widespread anti-government demonstrations in 2014 to describe an opposition barricade where violent incidents have allegedly occurred. The frequency of these demonstrations dropped significantly after the governments [crackdown](#) on protesters in 2014.

In Maracaibo, SEBIN believed that destabilizing acts were led by sectors that opposed the executive branch, for the purpose of altering the constitutional order, according to investigation records. Another police record says Salas had participated in violent protests organized by the Venezuelan opposition and in violent incidents that undermined public order, and that she has friendship and family links to opposition party leaders.

Among the evidence that the records say agents found in the Chirinos brothers home are 10 pieces of paper to promote the recall referendum against Maduro and a backpack with a logo of the opposition party Primero Justicia. The records also indicate that agents found bottles and ingredients that could be used to prepare Molotov cocktails and *miguelitos*, which the four detainees say were planted by SEBIN agents.

On May 12, Gonzlez Lpez [said](#) on TV that agents had detected the development of a destabilization plan promoted by sectors of the

Venezuelan right and had gathered strong evidence implicating political leaders of the fascist right. He named several people and showed their photos, including Chirinos, Salas, and Mavares. The minister said they were part of a violent structure with political links and had provided valuable information for the investigation.

On June 20, a prosecutor accused Chirinos, Salas, and Mavares of unlawfully carrying incendiary objects. On July 18, a judge ordered the conditional release of the two women, a lawyer with the Venezuelan Penal Forum told Human Rights Watch. As of July 19, the case against the three remained open, and Chirinos was still in pretrial detention.

Cojedes state, June 2016

At approximately 7 p.m. on June 19, members of the National Guard stopped Francisco Mrquez, 30, and Gabriel San Miguel, 24, activists of the Popular Will (*Voluntad Popular*) political party, as they traveled by car in Cojedes state, on their way to coordinate participation in the validation of signatures for the recall referendum in Portuguesa state, their lawyer said.

The officers detained the men and took them to National Guard Base No. 321 in Cojedes state, where SEBIN agents interrogated them without their lawyers present. They were allowed to see a Popular Will lawyer for only five minutes during their detention, in the presence of National Guard members, their lawyer told Human Rights Watch.

On June 21, Erika Faras, the governor of Cojedes, [said](#) on Twitter that opposition leaders had been detained with money to employ people to generate violence and destabilization. Margaud Godoy, secretary-general of government for the Cojedes state government, [said](#) that the authorities confiscated two boxes from the men containing 2.990.000 bolivares in cash (approximately US\$3,000 at the unofficial, widely used exchange rate); papers with the Popular Will logo; flyers with a picture of Lpez, the opposition leader, that said, #LiberateNow Leopoldo; and two computers that included classified information about an alleged plan to overthrow President Nicols Maduro. The official said that David Smolansky, the opposition mayor of El Hatillo in Miranda state, with whom both detainees worked, was also implicated in a dark and putrid plan of the Venezuelan right. The state office in charge of citizen security [said](#) that the two detainees had committed crimes that included money laundering, financing [terrorism](#), and vandalism.

That afternoon, during a radio and TV broadcast that all stations were required to carry, Maduro [said](#) that authorities had detained some opposition leaders carrying millions of bolivares and accused them of paying groups to generate violence.

In the evening, Mrquez and San Miguel appeared before a judge on [charges](#) of money laundering and public incitement to commit crimes. Their lawyer was able to speak with the detainees and review the judicial file for only a few minutes before the hearing began, their lawyer said. The judge confirmed the charges and ordered their pretrial detention at the Tocuyito prison in Carabobo state, one of the most violent prisons in the country.

After the hearing, Mrquez and San Miguel were not allowed to communicate with their lawyers or family until June 28, when that they met with lawyers for less than an hour and spoke with their families for five minutes by phone. They remained in pretrial detention as of July 19.

Bolivar state, July 2016

On July 5, five university students active in Popular Will Oswaldo Rodriguez, Peter Prez, Carlos Briceo, Alvin Bridgewater, and Sergio Morales met at a bakery in Puerto Ordaz, Bolivar state, to organize the distribution of flyers calling for the release of political prisoners, including Lpez.

At about 5 p.m., a group of SEBIN agents in civilian clothes entered the shop and asked the students for their IDs and cell phones, a lawyer with the Venezuelan Penal Forum, a nongovernmental group defending them, told Human Rights Watch. The students ran away after handing over their IDs and cell phones, but the officers detained Rodriguez and took him to SEBIN headquarters in Puerto Ordaz.

The other four went to SEBIN headquarters to look for Rodriguez. At approximately 9:30 p.m., an officer told them they should come inside to get their IDs and cell phones, but when they went inside, they were detained.

Before the release of any official information regarding the reason for the students detention, a pro-government legislator, Nancy Ascencio, tweeted that Rodriguez had been detained, that he was *guarimbero* that is, someone who mans an opposition barricade and that officials had seized Molotov cocktails.

The detainees were not allowed to speak with their lawyers until they appeared before a judge on July 7. A police report that Rodriguezs lawyers were allowed to review that day alleged that he had been arrested with nine Molotov cocktails, 58 *miguelitos*, and a ski mask. The report accused him of being an organizer and promoter of destabilizing acts and of breaking the constitutional [order] in the state, the lawyer said.

In a hearing on July 8, the prosecutor charged Rodriguez with unlawfully carrying incendiary objects. The prosecutor said he would not bring charges against the other four students, yet the judge confirmed the same charge against all five. On July 11, the five were released pending trial and told to report to the court every 15 days.

El Salvadors Need for Legal Gender Recognition

Cubas Systematic Repression of July 2021 Demonstrators

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