

Venezuelan human rights defenders receive threats of passport revocation in the margins of the UN

The Venezuela human rights defenders Julio Henríquez from Refugee Freedom Program, Alonso Medina Roa from Foro Penal, Laura Louza from Acceso a la Justicia and Mercedes De Freitas from Transparencia Venezuela, received a threat during the side event “Human Rights and Democracy in Venezuela,” which took place on June 6, 2017 in Room XXI of the Palais des Nations, the seat of the U.N. Human Rights Council.

Once the event had finished, Mr. Damiani, an officer of the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations in Geneva, alongside with Andrea Días Bolívar, also an officer of said Mission, approached the aforementioned defenders and threatened them with recommending the revocation of their passports once they return to Venezuela.

This threat corresponds with a recent practice of the Venezuelan government of revoking the passport to parliamentarians, journalists and militants of political parties, as a reprisal mechanism.

There have been prior threats by the Venezuelan government against human rights defenders for their cooperation in special proceedings and treaty bodies, including members of Transparencia Venezuela and Foro Penal. In fact, in October 2016, acts of reprisal against Mercedes De Freitas and Alfredo Romero, from Foro Penal, were reported to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Andrew Gilmour.

A threat of this nature in the margins of the United Nations, by members of the permanent mission of Venezuela, is unacceptable. Especially considering as well that this country is a member of the UNHRC and, as such, must “prevent and refrain from all acts of intimidation or reprisal against those who (...) Seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the United Nations” (A/HRC/24/L.17/Rev.1).

Cooperation with bodies of the human rights system is a fundamental right established on the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and it is an obligation from the State of Venezuelan to guarantee its exercise.

The behavior of Damiani was reported before the U.N. Human Rights System, including the Presidency of the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights to prevent reprisals against human rights defenders cooperating with the system.

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