

VEPPEX

Political Persecution Continues in Venezuela

Insufficient Scope of the Amnesty, Continued Detention of Political Prisoners, and Obstacles to the Return of Exiles

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Central conclusion: The release of some individuals and the enactment of an amnesty law have not dismantled the machinery of persecution. Hundreds of people remain deprived of liberty for political reasons, deaths in State custody have been recorded, and exiles continue to lack effective guarantees for return. Host countries must maintain or grant international protection and asylum while the risk persists.

Executive Summary

VEPPEX presents this report to draw the international community's attention to the continuation of political persecution in Venezuela. The releases from prison and the Amnesty Law for Democratic Coexistence, enacted on February 19, 2026, were relevant but incomplete measures. They did not bring full freedom to every person detained for political reasons, close all criminal proceedings related to the exercise of fundamental rights, or establish adequate guarantees of non-recurrence.

As of July 27, 2026, Foro Penal recorded 379 political prisoners: 353 men and 26 women; 219 civilians and 160 military personnel; 157 convicted and 222 not convicted. Military personnel represented approximately 42.2% of all documented cases. This figure alone demonstrates that neither democratic normalization nor a comprehensive amnesty can be said to have occurred.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) warned that implementation of the amnesty was limited. In contrast to the official figure of more than 8,000 beneficiaries, civil society documented that only 186 people were actually released through application of the law; other releases remained subject to precautionary measures or ongoing proceedings. The IACHR also recorded applications that were denied, appealed, or still pending, and noted that termination of the law's implementation left numerous claims unresolved.

Persecution is not limited to imprisonment. It includes enforced disappearances or unknown whereabouts, incommunicado detention, torture and ill-treatment, denial of medical care, deaths in custody, criminal proceedings without due process, surveillance, threats, political disqualifications, and forced exile. The inability of figures such as Maria Corina Machado and Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia to return safely confirms that political space remains severely restricted.

In figures updated through July 27, 2026, Foro Penal reported 21 people who had died in State custody. The continuation of politically motivated detentions, the risks to the life and physical integrity of those imprisoned, and the absence of independent investigations reinforce the conclusion that general conditions do not exist for the safe return of people who fled persecution.

Immediate request: VEPPEX calls for the full and unconditional release of all political prisoners; independent investigation of deaths in custody; publication and verification of lists related to the amnesty; closure of politically motivated cases; guarantees for the return of exiles; and international protection or asylum in host countries while the risk persists.

1. Purpose, Scope, and Methodology

This report has four objectives: to document that political persecution continues; to assess the actual scope of the 2026 amnesty; to identify representative cases of people who remain detained or disappeared; and to describe the lack of conditions for the safe return of exiled leaders and citizens.

The information was cross-checked against publications by the IACHR/OAS, the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, Amnesty International, Foro Penal, and international

news agencies. Figures and procedural statuses change rapidly; the list included here is therefore illustrative rather than exhaustive and has a cutoff date of August 1, 2026.

2. Continuation of Political Persecution

The continuation of persecution can be seen in the persistence of legal instruments and institutional structures used to criminalize dissent. In March 2026, the UN Fact-Finding Mission stated that the legal instruments used for years as a basis for political persecution remained fully in force and recalled that it had documented 135 arbitrary detentions between September and December 2025.

The IACHR, for its part, has denounced continuing practices of enforced disappearance, torture, prolonged incommunicado detention, and denial of medical care. It has also emphasized the lack of judicial independence and the use of the justice system as an extension of the Executive Branch. These practices have an impact extending beyond their direct victims: they intimidate relatives, journalists, human rights defenders, community leaders, opposition members, and members of the Armed Forces.

- Arbitrary detention and prolonged pretrial detention without trial.
- Charges for serious offenses - such as terrorism, treason, or conspiracy - in proceedings lacking adequate safeguards.
- Incommunicado detention, restrictions on visits and access to counsel, and concealment of information regarding a person's whereabouts.
- Torture, ill-treatment, isolation, and lack of adequate medical care.
- Open proceedings, house arrest, and precautionary measures that prevent these cases from being characterized as full freedom.
- Threats and risks that force leaders, defenders, journalists, and activists to remain outside the country.

The Military Dimension of Persecution

Political persecution has also consistently targeted members of the Armed Forces. As of July 27, 2026, Foro Penal counted 160 military personnel imprisoned for political reasons, approximately 42.2% of the 379 recorded cases. Although some service members were released during 2026, a considerable number remained imprisoned, including officers subjected to lengthy detention, allegations of torture, deteriorating health, or continued confinement after completing their sentences.

VEPPEX considers it especially concerning that the amnesty failed to comprehensively resolve the situation of military political prisoners. The continuation of these cases sends a message of intimidation to members of the armed institution who dissent, report wrongdoing, or invoke their constitutional duty.

Deaths of Political Prisoners in State Custody

The death of people detained for political reasons is one of the gravest indicators of continuing repression. In figures updated through July 27, 2026, Foro Penal recorded 21 deaths in State custody. In May, the IACHR had documented at least 18 cases and specifically named Reinaldo Araujo, Lindomar Amaro, Alfredo Javier Diaz Figueroa, and Víctor Hugo Quero Navas.

These deaths occurred amid repeated allegations of torture, incommunicado detention, untreated illness, delays in hospital transfers, and concealment of information from relatives. In the case of Victor Hugo Quero Navas, his family searched for information for months and learned only belatedly that he had died while under State control and had been buried without timely notice.

The State has a heightened obligation to protect the life and physical integrity of every person in its custody. VEPPEX calls for prompt, independent, and impartial investigations; full delivery of case files and medical reports to the families; identification of individual responsibility; and urgent measures to prevent further avoidable deaths.

International implication: Deaths in custody, together with torture, disappearance, and denial of medical care, contradict any claim that the conditions that caused political exile have disappeared.

3. The 2026 Amnesty: Partial Progress, Exclusions, and Lack of Transparency

The Amnesty Law for Democratic Coexistence was enacted on February 19, 2026. Although it enabled releases and created legitimate expectations among families, its implementation revealed a substantial gap between official announcements and independent verification.

Indicator	Verified data	Institutional assessment
Political prisoners as of 07/27/2026	379	The amnesty did not secure the universal release of people detained for political reasons.
Releases from 01/08 through 04/20	768	Release from prison does not necessarily amount to full freedom or closure of the case.
Releases attributed to the amnesty	186 (24.21%)	Most releases during the period were not recorded as a direct result of the law.
Applications reported to the IACHR	777	There was substantial demand for individualized review and redress.
Denied / appealed / pending applications	322 / 96 / 434	The figures reflect exclusions, litigation, and lack of resolution; categories may overlap depending on procedural timing.

Methodological note: sources distinguish among full freedom, release subject to conditions, and formal application of the amnesty. VEPPEX recommends that these categories not be combined without reviewing their definitions and cutoff dates.

The IACHR requested public, verifiable access to lists of people who remain deprived of liberty, those prosecuted for political reasons, amnesty beneficiaries, and the status of their cases. This transparency remains essential to determine who was actually freed, who remains subject to restrictions, and who was excluded.

4. Illustrative Cases of People Who Remain Detained or Disappeared

The following cases were selected because recent documentation is available from international bodies, specialized organizations, relatives, or the media. They do not constitute a complete list of the 379 political prisoners recorded by Foro Penal or the 160 military personnel deprived of liberty for political reasons.

Name	Profile / situation	Recent verified information
Emirlendris Benitez	Civilian; detained since 2018 and sentenced to 30 years.	In July 2026, Amnesty International reported that she remained detained and needed urgent medical care; her case includes grave allegations of torture and deteriorating health.
Maria Auxiliadora Delgado	Civilian; detained with her husband in a case linked to the so-called 'Drones II' case.	Amnesty International identified her among those who remained arbitrarily detained after the amnesty.
Juan Carlos Marrufo	Italian-Venezuelan engineer; husband of Maria Auxiliadora Delgado.	Amnesty International confirmed in July 2026 that he remained detained and required adequate medical care.
Oswaldo Jose Cheremo Carrasquel	Civilian; detained in Guarico since October 21, 2022.	Foro Penal reported on July 30, 2026, that he had spent more than three years in pretrial detention awaiting trial.
Manuel Antonio Sanchez	Community leader; detained since August 27, 2025.	The IACHR granted precautionary measures in June 2026 because of serious risks to his life, physical integrity, and health, lack of medical care, and restrictions on visits.
Daniel Enrique Echenagucia Vallenilla	Venezuelan and Italian citizen; detained since August 2, 2024.	The IACHR granted precautionary measures in June 2026 because of inadequate conditions, communication restrictions, alleged assaults, and lack of medical care.
Jorgen Guanares	Victim of an alleged enforced disappearance.	Amnesty International stated on July 14, 2026, that his fate and whereabouts had remained unknown since August 2024.
Brig. Gen. Hector Armando Hernandez Da Costa	Brigadier General; detained since August 2018 and held at Rodeo I.	In July 2026, his daughter reported that he remained imprisoned and urgently required hospital transfer and specialized medical care. His case is covered by IACHR precautionary measures and longstanding allegations of temporary disappearance, torture, and serious due-process violations.
Lt. Col. Igbert Jose Marin Chaparro	Army Lieutenant Colonel; detained since March 2, 2018.	He completed his original sentence of seven years and six months in September 2025 but remained deprived of liberty in a new case. In April 2026, his amnesty application was reported denied.

Name	Profile / situation	Recent verified information
Capt. Juan Carlos Caguaripano Scott	Captain in the Bolivarian National Guard; detained since August 2017.	Reports from January and March 2026 confirmed that he remained imprisoned. His relatives have alleged torture, including beatings and electric shocks, and demanded his release after nearly nine years in detention.

Warning: The absence of a name from this list does not mean that the person's case has been resolved. The documented universe includes hundreds of civilians and military personnel, including foreign nationals, convicted persons, and people who have not yet been sentenced.

5. Forced Exile and the Absence of Guarantees for Return

Political exile remains a direct consequence of persecution. A person may be formally out of prison and yet still not be free to return when threats, arrest warrants, political disqualifications, criminal proceedings, control by security agencies, or the absence of verifiable international guarantees persist.

The continuation of civilian and military political imprisonment, deaths in custody, legal instruments used for criminalization, and the lack of judicial independence prevent any conclusion that the causes of exile have ended. Accordingly, the mere enactment of a partial amnesty or the holding of political negotiations must not be used to presume that Venezuela now offers conditions for safe return.

Maria Corina Machado: She left Venezuela in late 2025 after remaining in hiding. During 2026, she repeatedly expressed her intention to return. Reuters reported on July 31 that she remained outside the country; attempts to return in connection with the June emergency did not materialize. Her case symbolizes the lack of adequate guarantees for return and full political participation.

Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia: He has remained in exile in Spain since September 2024, after seeking asylum amid persecution and personal risk. His continued absence affects the exercise of his political rights and representation of the electoral mandate claimed by the opposition.

Antonio Ledezma: Former Metropolitan Mayor of Caracas, now based in Madrid after escaping house arrest. His continued residence outside the country represents a generation of leaders who lack reliable conditions to return without risk of reprisals.

VEPPEX emphasizes that return must be voluntary, safe, dignified, and accompanied by verifiable guarantees. General political statements are not enough: arrest warrants and politically motivated cases must be lifted, rights restored, protection provided against arbitrary detention, international monitoring mechanisms established, and rapid response channels created for threats.

Duty of Protection of Host Countries

VEPPEX urges countries hosting Venezuelan exiles to assess their protection and asylum claims individually, fairly, and with sensitivity to current conditions. While persecution, arbitrary detention,

torture, deaths in custody, and the absence of guarantees for return continue, these countries must avoid decisions based on a general presumption of political normalization.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the principle of non-refoulement prohibit sending a person to a territory where they may face persecution, torture, or other serious or irreparable harm. UNHCR recalls that an asylum seeker must not be expelled or returned before their claim has been examined through a fair procedure.

- Maintain, renew, or grant international protection, refugee status, asylum, or other applicable humanitarian pathways under each country's laws.
- Suspend forced returns where risks of political persecution, arbitrary detention, torture, or reprisals exist.
- Consider the persistence of political imprisonment, deaths in custody, and the exclusion of numerous affected people from the amnesty as contextual evidence.
- Guarantee individualized procedures, access to representation, and an effective opportunity to present evidence of risk.
- Do not treat travel or a temporary return as automatic proof that every person in exile can return safely and permanently.

6. Consequences for the Democratic Transition

The simultaneous existence of political prisoners, disappeared persons, released individuals with open cases, and leaders unable to return reveals that coercive structures remain active. A genuine transition cannot be measured only by announcements, selective releases, or the opening of negotiations. It must be evaluated through verifiable and sustainable results.

1. Full release of every person detained for political reasons, without conditions that perpetuate punishment.
2. Closure of criminal cases used to criminalize dissent and restoration of political and civil rights.
3. Independent investigation of torture, disappearances, deaths in custody, and denial of medical care.
4. Dismantling of the intelligence, judicial, and coercive mechanisms used to persecute opposition members and critics.
5. Safe return of exiles, with international monitoring and individualized guarantees where necessary.
6. Free elections with impartial authorities, participation without arbitrary political disqualifications, and freedom of the press.

7. VEPPEX Requests

To the United States Department of State

- Make the full release of all political prisoners and the safe return of exiles mandatory benchmarks for any normalization process or relaxation of measures.

- Require nominal, verifiable, and auditable lists of detainees, released persons, amnesty beneficiaries, rejected applications, and cases that remain open.
- Prioritize medical cases, people held incommunicado, disappeared persons, and beneficiaries of international precautionary measures.
- Systematically consult victims, relatives, and Venezuelan human rights and exile organizations.

To the Organization of American States and the IACHR

- Maintain special monitoring of Venezuela and request visits to detention centers with unrestricted and confidential access.
- Publicly monitor precautionary measures and the individual implementation of the amnesty.
- Promote a regional mechanism to document barriers to return, threats, and reprisals against exiles.
- Reiterate that release must be immediate, unconditional, and accompanied by the closure of politically motivated proceedings.

To Countries Hosting Venezuelan Exiles

- Maintain or grant international protection and asylum where an individualized assessment determines a risk of persecution, torture, arbitrary detention, or other serious harm.
- Strictly respect the principle of non-refoulement and refrain from carrying out returns based solely on announcements of openness, amnesty, or dialogue.
- Recognize that the structural conditions that caused the exile have not changed sufficiently, verifiably, and sustainably.
- Create urgent review mechanisms for defenders, military dissidents, journalists, leaders, victims' relatives, and other particularly exposed individuals.

To Journalists and News Media

- Distinguish among amnesty, release from prison, full freedom, house arrest, and final closure of a case.
- Update the status of every named person before publication and state the cutoff date for all figures.
- Do not allow official announcements to replace independent verification with relatives, lawyers, and specialized organizations.
- Keep human stories, detention conditions, and obstacles preventing the return of exiles visible.

8. Conclusion

VEPPEX recognizes the value of every release and every family reunion. However, such progress does not justify declaring political persecution over. As long as even one person remains imprisoned, disappeared, subjected to criminal proceedings for dissent, or prevented from returning because

guarantees are lacking, the democratic debt will remain outstanding. Deaths in State custody aggravate that responsibility and demonstrate that political imprisonment can become a direct threat to life.

The 2026 amnesty did not cover all affected people, and its implementation lacked the necessary transparency. Verified figures, individual cases, and the continued exile of leaders demonstrate that Venezuela needs deeper measures: unconditional freedom, independent justice, truth for victims, guarantees of non-recurrence, and political participation without fear.

Until those conditions change in a real, verifiable, and sustainable manner, host countries must keep asylum and international protection pathways open to persecuted Venezuelans. Return may only be voluntary and safe; it must never be imposed on the basis of an appearance of normalization.

VEPPEX position: Genuine reconciliation cannot exist while there are political prisoners, deaths in custody, disappeared persons, people facing political prosecution, and exiles without guarantees for return. Host countries must protect them and respect the principle of non-refoulement.

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Note on Updates and Public Use

This document was prepared for diplomatic advocacy, submission to international organizations, and journalistic use. Because releases, new detentions, or procedural changes may occur after the cutoff date, VEPPEX recommends verifying each case immediately before publication, a press conference, or an official submission.

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