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To the attn. of:

Ms Ursula von der Leyen

President of the European Commission

Mr António Costa

President of the European Council

Ms Kaja Kallas

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President
European Commission

7 August 2025

Dear President von der Leyen,

Dear President Costa,

Dear High Representative Kallas,

THE EU MUST HEED WAKE UP CALL ON HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN VENEZUELA

One year on from the disputed 28 July 2024 presidential election that led to increasing repression across the country, Amnesty International is writing to urge you to lead the European Union (EU) and its member states to take urgent and concrete action to respond to the human rights crisis in Venezuela. Even as this crisis has become protracted and EU diplomatic presence in the country itself is challenged, spiraling violations in the country since elections in 2024 – and their grave human impact – should be a wake-up call to redouble EU engagement for human rights in the country.

In a new report, [*Detentions without a trace: The crime of enforced disappearance in Venezuela*](#), Amnesty International details the situation of 15 people who were forcibly disappeared between the presidential election of 28 July 2024 and 15 June 2025, including several EU nationals. Of these 15 individuals, eight are still missing and their fate remain unknown, whilst two were released to United States (US) authorities on 18 July as part of a cruel [prisoner swap](#) between the Salvadoran, Venezuela, and US governments.

Our research concludes that enforced disappearances, including short-term disappearances, are part of a widespread and systematic attack on the civilian population – particularly those the authorities consider dissidents – and could constitute crimes against humanity. In the cases of foreign or dual nationals, including EU nationals from Spain and France documented in this report, enforced disappearance seems to be aimed at exerting political pressure on other governments worldwide. This suspicion became all the more plausible after the above-mentioned prisoner swap and the release of US nationals and permanent residents, including that of dual French-US citizen Lucas Hunter.

Our report highlights the urgent need to act on behalf of people who have been forcibly disappeared and arbitrarily detained in Venezuela, as well as to support consistent international scrutiny and mechanisms that can deliver justice for these crimes.

In the absence of a reliable national justice system in Venezuela, the international community has created and maintained various scrutiny and accountability mechanisms for victims. With support of the EU and its member states, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council created the [Fact-Finding Mission](#) (FFM) on Venezuela in 2019. Since then, its mandate has been successively renewed in 2020,

2022 and 2024, and it should continue to thoroughly investigate serious human rights violations until October 2026. At the same time, the [Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) opened a preliminary examination into possible crimes against humanity in Venezuela in 2018 and that examination advanced in November 2021 to a formal investigation, which is ongoing. Finally, since 2023, [Argentine courts](#) have been investigating crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela since 2014, under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

The country's deep-rooted human rights crisis spiraled [prior to, during and after](#) the presidential election. The authorities persecuted [political dissidents](#); committed mass arbitrary detentions of protesters and bystanders, including over 200 children and people living with disabilities; brought excessive use of force against protesters, leaving at least 25 dead; subjected detainees, including children, to [torture](#) and sexual violence; weaponized [social service apps](#) against expressions of dissent; passed criminalizing legislation against civil society organizations; and continued to erode any semblance of judicial independence and due process guarantees, including by committing widespread short-term enforced disappearances.

Despite longer-term [engagement](#) of the EU and its member states in the Venezuelan crisis, the 2024 elections, followed by EU [sanctions](#) and the [reduction](#) of diplomatic presence in the country in early 2025, have worryingly slowed EU and member state engagement on human rights in the country. On 23 January 2025, a European Parliament [resolution](#) expressed concern about the significant escalation in harassment of Venezuela's opposition, in particular through enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests. In a [statement](#) at the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2025, the EU "condemn[ed] all acts of repression, including excessive use of force and harassment against dissenting voices...and call[ed] on Venezuela to free immediately and unconditionally all political prisoners and to end arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearance, including of dual and foreign citizens."

In this spirit, the EU and its member states must throw their full political weight behind international efforts toward justice and take renewed, concerted steps to engage the Venezuelan authorities on the serious human rights situation in the country:

- **Use all available diplomatic and multilateral channels to exert pressure on the Venezuelan authorities up to highest level to end human rights violations** in the country, including enforced disappearances.
- **Press the authorities to disclose the fate and whereabouts of all forcibly disappeared and detained persons and to release all those arbitrarily detained.** This is particularly crucial for those states whose citizens are currently forcibly disappeared and arbitrarily detained, including France, Italy, Hungary and Spain.
- **Reinforce technical, political and financial support to Venezuelan human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society organizations operating inside and outside Venezuela.**
- **Publicly and privately support, through public statements, pro-active diplomacy, and resource mobilization, international scrutiny and international justice mechanisms, including the Fact-Finding Mission, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the International Criminal Court.** This will be all the more crucial in view of the UN liquidity crisis and the United States government's abrupt cuts to its foreign aid.
- **Develop a robust, unified and concrete strategy for EU and member state action for human rights in Venezuela,** including:
 - Practical and political engagement for the release of all those arbitrarily detained.
 - Work toward gaining EU and member state access to detained individuals and/or access for trial observation.
 - Sustained and strategic communications on individual cases of detained individuals, where possible, naming names of detained individuals and designating them explicitly as human rights defenders (HRDs) where this is the case.
 - An explicit, common strategy of shared responsibility at EU level for engagement on behalf of EU nationals and dual nationals arbitrarily detained and/or forcibly disappeared in Venezuela.

- Protection and support to civil society and HRDs in the country and in exile, with necessary funding matched by full diplomatic backing for the protection of HRDs, contributing to an enabling environment and promoting their important work and the issues they raise.
 - Work toward Council Conclusions on Venezuela to adopt an explicit mid- to longer-term strategic approach to Venezuela, including engagement on human rights.
 - Protection and support to refugees and migrants from Venezuela, including diplomatic engagement with countries in the region, both bilaterally and at multilateral level, including at the forthcoming EU-CELAC summit, and particularly with United States authorities on the prohibition of [refoulement](#) and [forced returns](#) to Venezuela. These efforts should be matched by efforts to ensure protection from *non-refoulement*, effective access to asylum and to subsidiary protection for Venezuelan nationals who would be at risk of facing [serious harm](#) if returned to Venezuela, as well as resettlement in EU member states.
 - Strengthening work on accountability with support to the work of the UN FFM and the ICC.
 - Conducting pro-active outreach and boosting collaboration with other states in the region and globally on human rights in Venezuela.
 - Ensuring that EU and member state engagement is not limited in its focus on the political opposition but takes a broad-based approach supporting wider Venezuelan civil society, rights defenders and activists.
- Fully use the opportunity of the EU-CELAC summit on 9-10 November to engage for human rights in Venezuela, including, for instance, by making a public call for the release of all those arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared for political reasons.
 - Respond to the impact of the abrupt stoppage of US foreign aid for human rights and humanitarian work in Venezuela and the region by stepping up EU and member state support. While the EU and its member states cannot be expected to fill the gap left by the suspension of US foreign assistance, increased funding, along with robust and strategic diplomacy in support of civil society and in outreach to like-minded states to follow suit, will be crucial in the mid- to longer-term.

The widening scale and gravity of the human rights crisis in Venezuela must not be normalized or ignored - rather, the EU and its member states must seize every opportunity to deliver on their stated values and principles, acting meaningfully to support the Venezuelan people and the country's embattled civil society.

Sincerely,



Valentina Ballesta
Americas Deputy Director, Research
Amnesty International



Eve Geddie
Director, European Institutions Office
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