

12 March 2019

Venezuela: Luis Carlos Díaz, detained on charges of conspiring to provoke a national power shortage, remains in incommunicado detention

In the early hours of 12 March 2019, the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional, SEBIN) announced that human rights defender and journalist **Luis Carlos Díaz** had been detained on charges of conspiring to provoke a national power shortage. The human rights defender had disappeared while cycling home on the evening of 11 March. He is being held in incommunicado detention in “El Helicoide”, Caracas.

[Luis Carlos Díaz](#) is a journalist and human rights defender in Venezuela. He is a highly-regarded blogger, who has gained national relevance for publishing online content (known as informative “hangouts”) on pressing political issues in Venezuela. Alongside his wife, woman human rights defender and journalist Naky Soto, he reports on human rights issues related to politics and technology, with a focus on freedom of expression. For six years, he hosted the International Encounter of Peace Builders (Encuentro Internacional de Constructores de Paz), and in 2013 he won the Best of Blogs award by Deutsche Welle for his activism around freedom of expression. He has been active in calling for more democratic state institutions and in denouncing human rights violations by the Venezuelan government.

At around 5pm on 11 March 2019, Luis Carlos Díaz was detained while on his way home by Venezuelan authorities. When he did not return home that night, his family believed that he had been enforcedly disappeared. He was brought to his house 9 hours later, handcuffed, by 15 SEBIN agents. He told his wife that he had been ill-treated during his detention.

It was 2:30am on 12 March 2019, when the 15 SEBIN agents began raiding the human rights defender’s house. They confiscated his computers, hard drives, phones and they took money. His wife was told that his detention was a result of his “cybercrimes”. Naky Soto, who is suffering from ill-health, was told that she would not be detained then and there due to her health condition, but she was threatened with imprisonment if she spoke out about her husband’s detention.

The intelligence agents told Naky Soto that Luis Carlos Díaz would be transferred to the SEBIN headquarters “El Helicoide”. Human rights defenders have reported being subjected to torture during their periods of detention there.

The detention of Luis Carlos Díaz comes after a series of ongoing smear campaigns and intimidations against him. Only 6 hours before his disappearance, Luis Carlos Díaz was accused by Diosdado Cabello of causing the country’s blackout crisis, a pro-government politician and military official on a television show called “Con el Mazo Dando”. On 7 March 2019, 23 Venezuelan states suffered a severe power shortage that lasted around 24 hours. In some regions, the blackout is still ongoing. Venezuelans have referred to the fact that the power system is suffering from a series of issues related to lack of maintenance, adequately trained personnel, and other administrative problems. Nicolás Maduro’s government, however, has argued that the blackout is a result of actions of sabotage targeting the country’s largest electric station.

Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned at the government of Venezuela's repeated use of punitive powers to discourage, punish or prevent freedom of expression, and social and political participation. Front Line Defenders is concerned with the arbitrary detention of Luis Carlos Díaz, as well as his ill-treatment while in detention, which is perceived to be a reprisal for his human rights work. Front Line Defenders is also concerned with the possible use of torture against the human rights defender, given the circumstances of his detention by the SEBIN and his transfer to "El Helicoide". Front Line Defenders is also concerned about the threats of detention against his wife and human rights defender, Naky Soto.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Venezuela to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Luis Carlos Díaz;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Luis Carlos Díaz, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Take all necessary measures, in consultation with Luis Carlos Díaz and Naky Soto, to guarantee their physical and psychological integrity and security;
4. Cease the ongoing smear campaign conducted through State-owned media against human rights defender Luis Carlos Díaz;
5. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Venezuela are able to conduct their peaceful and legitimate activities without undue restrictions and without fear of harassment, threats or retaliation.