

13 January 2021

Venezuela: six members of humanitarian organisation Azul Positivo detained

On 12 January 2020, six members of **Azul Positivo** were arrested and detained in the facilities of the General Directorate of Military Counter-intelligence (DGCIM) in Maracaibo, Zulia. The detention followed an alleged audit of the office of Azul Positivo by Zulia State Police and DGCIM, which lasted approximately six hours. The human rights defenders and members of Azul Positivo have been denied access to their lawyers since their detention. The charges against them are still unknown.

[Azul Positivo](#) is a humanitarian organisation which has been providing humanitarian aid to vulnerable communities in Zulia, particularly people living with HIV/AIDS, for over fifteen years. The organisation has been exceptionally active in combating the impact of COVID-19 on local communities through workshops on sexual and reproductive health, educational sessions on disease prevention and assistance in food safety.

On 12 January 2020, at around 11:30, Zulia State Police and DGCIM officers entered the headquarters of Azul Positivo in Maracaibo. According to the information available, the officers informed the members of the Azul Positivo that they would carry out an audit of the organisation. As part of this procedure, the general director, Johan León Reyes, and other executive members of Azul Positivo who were present on the day were questioned. Six hours later, five members of the organisation were transferred to the DGCIM headquarters in Zulia, where they were placed in detention. Later that day, local organisations were informed that a sixth member of Azul Positivo had also been detained.

Since their detention, the six human rights defenders have not had access to any lawyer. Their lawyers were denied entry and could not verify the status of the detainees. On 13 January 2020, the detainees were again denied access to their lawyers. The lawyers were informed that the human rights defenders would be presented before a military court. If so, this would set a dangerous precedent for the defence of human rights in Venezuela. The detainees have not yet been informed of the charges they face.

Front Line Defenders has previously denounced the escalation of attacks against organisations that carry out humanitarian work and promote human rights in the context of the complex humanitarian crisis that Venezuela has faced in recent years. Front Line Defenders condemns the attacks against Azul Positivo and expresses in particular its concern that the human rights defenders have been denied access to their lawyers.

Front Line Defenders reiterates its concern that events such as those carried out against Azul Positivo have an intimidating effect on the community of human rights defenders in Venezuela, particularly those who continue to denounce the humanitarian crisis and those who provide fundamental humanitarian support during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Venezuela to:

1. Guarantee to all members of Azul Positivo their right to a lawyer;
2. Release the human rights defenders, as it believes their detention to be solely motivated by their humanitarian work in Zulia;

3. Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all members of Azul Positivo and their families;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Venezuela can operate in a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights.

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