



Stockholm August, 9 2023

**Mr. Orlando Ramón Ortegaño Quevedo**  
**Ambassador of Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland and Sweden**

**Your Excellency,**

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation, representing 1,4 million workers, together with the Olof Palme International Center express our solidarity with Gabriel Blanco, communications director of the Caracas branch of the ASI Venezuela trade union centre, along with a group of trade union leaders from various sectors who were being prosecuted for different reasons and have been condemned to 16 years in prison following a sentence issued on 1 August 2023.

This sentence affects the right to freedom of association, which is very closely integrated within the body of fundamental civil and political rights and is expressly recognised in the most important international and regional treaties, such as the international covenants on civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights adopted by the United Nations or the American Convention on Human Rights and its Additional Protocol, in the inter-American sphere.

The Committee on Freedom of Association of the International Labour Organization has repeatedly stated that:

*The absence of civil liberties removes all meaning from the concept of trade union rights; the rights conferred on workers' and employers' organizations must be based on respect for those civil liberties, such as security of the person and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention (Digest of Decisions of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association, 2018, paragraph 119).*

According to our knowledge of the case, the decision applied to trade union leaders in Venezuela appears to be arbitrary and in violation of the most basic rights of individuals, as well as constituting a serious breach of the right to trade union activity.

Given the complex situation the country has been experiencing in the areas of labour and trade union freedoms, the executive and judicial powers cannot be unaware of how inopportune this measure is, as, if not corrected, it irreparably damages the process of social dialogue that such great efforts have been devoted to building in Venezuela to address the

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observations and recommendations made by the ILO's main supervisory bodies (Committee on Freedom of Association, Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Conference Committee on the Application of Standards), a process to which Central ASI Venezuela, the TUCA and the ITUC have decisively contributed, dedicating every effort to reach a satisfactory, consensus-based solution.

For these reasons, we deeply regret this judicial decision, which criminalises trade union leaders and does nothing to foster a democratic climate for the exercise of trade union activities.

We urge the executive branch, within the framework of the separation of powers, to act to safeguard civil and political rights and the right to freedom of association in Venezuela, to respond with urgency to the judicial measure taken against trade union leaders, to ensure the widest possible exercise of trade union activity in the country, in accordance with ratified international conventions (C87 and C98) and not to jeopardise the process of social dialogue.

Yours sincerely,



Oscar Ernerot,  
Head of International Department, LO



Anna Sundström,  
Secretary General, Olof Palme International Center