

Increased persecution against health professionals for their demands to seek solutions to the humanitarian emergency in Venezuela ¹

Background

On Sunday, February 10, 2019, some 40 doctors from different health agencies of Táchira state, moved to Cúcuta and reached the Las Tienditas sector, where the international aid collection center for Venezuela is located, in order to demand the income of aid². One of the participants was the chief pharmacist of the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security (IVSS) of Táchira, Isabel Moncada, who gave statements to the TV channel NTN24, which is censored in Venezuela.

The next day, the director in charge of the IVSS in Táchira, the doctor Hubert Zambrano, is replaced by a community doctor. The new director informed the IVSS staff that they should attend an event with the vice president of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela and president of the illegitimate constituent national assembly, Diosdado Cabello, to be held on that date (February 11); the pharmacist Moncada excused herself from attending, stating that, being a working day and being on duty, she should remain in office at the institution.

Facts

On Tuesday, February 13, in an operation headed by Freddy Bernal³, with officials of the Special Actions Forces (FAES) and the Scientific, Criminal Investigations Body (CICPC), a raid took place in the IVSS hospital in the state Táchira, 7 employees were arrested, among which were the pharmacist Moncada, the administrative assistant, four pharmacy assistants and an official of the Bolivarian militia who performed security duties. In addition, the former director Zambrano and the IVSS administrator, economist Laura Josefina Martínez, were searched and detained in their homes. Three workers were also arrested from a kiosk that sells various products in the area surrounding the IVSS hospital, for a total of 13 detainees.

Current situation

All the detainees were presented before an ordinary criminal control court, but by a hand-written request by a prosecutor of the case, a control court with competence in matters of economic illicit took the case. Subsequently, the cause of the kiosk workers was separated from the rest of the defendants, although the same police report that was raised simultaneously for all is maintained. The workers of the kiosk were accused of conspiracy and reselling products. On the site the police confiscated a pair of gloves, sanitary napkins and deposits for stool and urine samples; according to the CICPC report, none of the products belonged to the IVSS. The officials of the IVSS were accused of simple corruption, illegal obtaining of gain and seizure. The Regional Command No. 1 of the Bolivarian National Guard, based in San Cristóbal, Táchira state, was assigned to both groups as a place of confinement.

¹ Note prepared with information provided by one of the lawyers in the case.

² La Nación: Venezuelan doctors march to Cúcuta to demand the entry of humanitarian aid (includes videos). At: <https://lanacionweb.com/nacional/medicos-venezolanos-marchan-a-cucuta-para-exigir-el-ingreso-de-la-ayuda-humanitaria-videos/>

³ Freddy Bernal simultaneously performs the positions of "Protector" of Táchira state, General Commissioner of the Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN), National Coordinator of Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP) and, although he has no formally recognized position, he has headed several operatives of the Special Actions Forces (FAES), dependent on the Bolivarian National Police Force.