

24 January 2021

Ms.
Winnie Byanyima
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Director - UNAIDS
Geneva

Dear Ms. Byanyima,

ICASO, in partnership with diverse Venezuelan HIV and AIDS NGOs preferring anonymity for fear of retaliation, urge the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) to take a public stand for the immediate release of the five staff members of Azul Positivo (Acción Zuliana por la Vida) after military counter-intelligence officers arbitrarily detained them. Azul Positivo is an AIDS NGO working to improve the lives of thousands of Venezuelans abandoned by the government.

Since 12 January 2021, five staff members of Azul Positivo – **Johán León Reyes, Yordy Bermúdez, Layners Gutiérrez Díaz, Alejandro Gómez Di Maggio and Luis Ferrebuz** – are incarcerated for their HIV and humanitarian work. Last Friday, they presented symptoms related to COVID-19. For 16 years, Azul Positivo has improved people's health and lives with HIV and other vulnerable communities. This includes as strategic partners of UNAIDS-Venezuela among other UN agencies.

We understand that the UN agencies are privately asking the Venezuelan government to release Azul Positivo's staff. However, UNAIDS must make **a public statement supporting and vouching for Azul Positivo's work. They must be unconditionally released, and the supplies that were seized should be returned immediately. Finally, the government should end the community response's criminalization and the widespread violation of human rights.**

The refusal to publicly condemn this action will cause much harm to the five detainees and all organizations working on HIV, health, human rights, and humanitarian responses under constant siege by the government entirely unprotected by the UN System.

To close, we urge you and UNAIDS to make a public statement regarding the Azul Positivo staff's illegal detention.

On behalf of ICASO and Venezuelan partner organizations

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Torres, JD, LL.M | Executive Director
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