



Pronouncement of Venezuelan Network of Positive People, RVG+ (*Red Venezolana de Gente Positiva*)

We demand cessation of criminalization, persecution, abuse and threats against members of the MAVID Foundation, our network and people with HIV in Venezuela

The Venezuelan Network of Positive People (RVG+) denounces acts of criminalization, threats, psychological aggression, intimidation and persecution towards MAVID Foundation (Manos Amigas por la Vida), members of our network and civil society organizations working in the HIV field.

On Friday, February 15th 2019, in the city of Valencia in the state of Carabobo, the headquarters of the MAVID Foundation was the subject of an abusive and arbitrary raid by state security forces, identified as members of the Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigation Service Corps (CICPC - Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas). **The Foundation is an NGO that for 16 years has been dedicated to defending the human rights of people with HIV, the majority of its members belong to the Venezuelan network of Positive people (RVG +). In recent years, they have worked** together with various national and international NGOs and United Nations agencies to help people with HIV in situations of extreme vulnerability and risk of death as a result of the severe humanitarian emergency throughout the country of Venezuela. **Officials entered the organization's headquarters violently, when it was closed, forced the locks of the doors and security bars, and they cordoned off the area, preventing the presence of witnesses.**

In the raid, officials stole antiretroviral drugs and other pharmaceuticals for medical treatment: clinical supplies donated by private institutions for people with HIV and other health conditions, containers of infant formula donated by AID for AIDS for mothers with HIV living in poverty, as well as caesarean section kits and packets of the antiretroviral zidovudine, required by public hospitals for childbirth by women with HIV. In addition, they took computers and patient histories, cash for transportation and food for foundation volunteers visiting public health centers. After two hours of this arbitrary and illegal procedure, Manuel Armas and Jhonatan Mendoza, members and leaders of the foundation, arrived and made inquiries as to the reasons for the search. However, they were forced to sit down and, without the assistance of lawyers, they were prohibited from taking inventories of the medicines, supplies and materials removed.

Officials also took cases of rapid HIV tests, color condom boxes and water-based lubricants given by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), to the MAVID Foundation as a participant in the first HIV prevalence study in MSM in Venezuela with the approval of the Ministry of Health (MPPS) which was laid out in the ministry's commitments in the Implementation of the "Master Plan for strengthening the response to HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Venezuela from the perspective of public health". This plan was prepared by the MPPS, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), UNAIDS, Venezuelan Society of Infectiology and RVG+, representing civil society.

At the end of the aforementioned acts, the officials transferred Manuel Armas and Jhonatan Mendoza to the headquarters of the CICPC in Plaza de Toros, Valencia, where they remained in detention for seven hours. , Wilmer



Alvarez, vice president of the Foundation and member of the RVG +, was also arrested when he approached the offices of the CICPC to know the reasons for the arrest of his colleagues. These three people were released thanks to the work of lawyers and demands of release by social networks at the national and international levels. The event was publicly denounced by recognized international institutions such as UNAIDS, the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO), Global Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), among others, who made forceful calls to the Venezuelan State to cease the criminalization and harassment against the MAVID Foundation.

Subsequently, on Saturday, February 16th, 2019, presumed security officers carried out acts of surveillance and harassment towards several members of the RVG + and NGOs with HIV work simultaneously in Valencia and in two cities in other states of the country: Guanare in Portuguesa State and Barquisimeto in Lara state. The officials visited their homes and the NGOs' headquarters, making inquiries while refusing to identify themselves. On Sunday February 17th, 2019 unknown persons approached the homes of the main representatives of RVG+ for Lara state and the President of the NGO Conciencia por la Vida (Conscience for Life) in the city of Barquisimeto, took photos and made inquiries to her neighbors regarding her and her family.

On the same day, in press conferences and messages published on his official Twitter account, the Director of CICPC, Douglas Rico, lied to the public about the illegal and arbitrary raid on the MAVID Foundation and made allegations about an alleged illegal sale of antibiotics, without showing results of the research carried out. The Director also omitted that his officials removed computers, complaints and copies of death certificates of 1,200 people with AIDS, consigned by relatives to the foundation in 2018, because the Ministry of Health did not buy or deliver anti-retroviral drugs to these people in time. We emphasize that the Deputy Minister of Health, Marisela Bermudez, and the head of the National AIDS Program, Raúl Leonett, know of the existence of these documents, which were submitted in Technical Working Sessions held 5 February 2019 with RVG+ for the implementation of the Master Plan, which benefits more than seventy thousand people living with HIV. These technical working have taken place since December 2018 with representatives from PAHO, UNAIDS, Venezuelan Society of Infectious Diseases and the RVG+, as civil society. Director Rico, also omitted the seizure of the passport of Eduardo Franco, Secretary of RVG+ and President of MAVID foundation, who at the time was heading to Caracas to meet with representatives of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in order to contribute to the design of strategies to help save the lives of people with HIV and vulnerable populations in Venezuela.

The illegal search and seizure of MAVID Foundation violated all constitutional and procedural guarantees and effective judicial guardianship, was carried out without a judge's written order, or authorization by a public prosecutor. The detention of members of this foundation was arbitrary and took place without access to lawyers. For this and for the acts of intimidation against other members of the RVG +, we hold the director of CICPC responsible for the damages that these acts caused to these individuals, as well as to the users of the foundation, who live in fear and whose lives and health are endangered by not taking their treatments and are protected by dozens of NGOs with HIV work in all parts of Venezuela.

Therefore, the Venezuelan network of Positive people (RVG +) pronounces:



1.-to require the Venezuelan state cease the criminalization, persecution, abuse and threats against members of the MAVID Foundation, of our network and of the people with HIV in Venezuela, and to guarantee the rights established in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in international covenants and human rights agreements signed and ratified by the nation.

2.-to request that the agencies of the United Nations activate the mechanisms of protection and security for members of the RVG +, the organizations of Venezuelan civil society with work in HIV, and victims of the attacks of the Venezuelan state for their work in the defense of human rights and humanitarian work.

3.-To call on the international community to pay attention to Venezuela and to vigorously condemn attacks on the work of civil society in favor of vulnerable and socially excluded populations, such as those living with HIV, who have been negatively impacted and had irreversible damage caused by the complex humanitarian emergency that blankets the country.

4.- To ratify the commitment to people with HIV and AIDS, their families, civil society organizations, medical professionals and health personnel, academies and other actors who contribute their efforts to the creation of mechanisms aimed at saving lives and protecting people in Venezuela.

Venezuelan Network of Positive People (RVG+)

Venezuela, February 18th 2019.