



November 2021

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Write For Rights is Amnesty International's largest annual letter writing campaign. People like you around the world write letters on behalf of individuals who need urgent help, like Zhang Zhan—pictured right—who is in prison for reporting on COVID-19. Through the power of collective grassroots action, your letters will help convince government officials to free Zhang, to free the other individuals unjustly imprisoned, and to seek justice for past human rights abuses.

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China: Release jailed Wuhan activist 'close to death' after hunger strike

(November 4, 2021) A Chinese citizen journalist jailed for reporting on the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan is at risk of dying if she is not urgently released to receive medical treatment, Amnesty International said today.

Zhang Zhan, who was sentenced to four years in prison in December for posting on social media about China's handling of the outbreak, has been on hunger strike in protest at her incarceration. Her family say they do not expect her to live through the winter if she is not released on medical grounds.

"Zhang Zhan, who should never have been jailed in the first place, now appears to be at grave risk of dying in prison. The Chinese authorities must release her immediately so that she can end her hunger strike and receive the appropriate medical treatment she desperately needs," said Gwen Lee, China Campaigner at Amnesty International.

"The Chinese government's prosecution of Zhang Zhan, simply because she tried to uncover what was happening in Wuhan amid huge government secrecy about the pandemic, is a shameful attack on human rights."

Zhang Zhan, a former lawyer, travelled to Wuhan in February 2020 to provide on-the-ground information about what was happening there. She posted on social media about how government officials had detained independent reporters and harassed families of Covid-19 patients.

She went missing in Wuhan in May 2020. It later emerged that she had been taken by the Chinese authorities and detained in Shanghai, where she was convicted of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" after a sham trial.

In June 2020, Zhang Zhan began a hunger strike in protest at her detention. By December, her body was so weak she had to attend her trial in a wheelchair.

Prior to the trial, authorities force-fed her and restrained her for days at a time to prevent her from removing a feeding tube. They also forced Zhang to wear shackles and hand restraints 24 hours a day for more than three months as punishment for her hunger strike.

On July 31st, 2021, she was admitted to hospital due to severe malnutrition. However, she was returned to prison and remains on a partial hunger strike despite the grave risk to her health, which continues to de-

teriorate at a dramatic rate.

Since her trial, the authorities have refused to let her speak to her lawyer or meet her family in person. She has been allowed occasional phone or video calls with relatives, under supervision.

In a Twitter post on October 30th, her brother Zhang Ju wrote: “I don’t think she’s going to live much longer. If she doesn’t make it through the coming winter, I hope the world will remember her as she once was.”

Zhang Zhan is featured in Amnesty International’s 2021 Write for Rights campaign calling for her release.

“Zhang Zhan is a victim of the Chinese government’s zero-tolerance approach to criticism and opposing views. She has been imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression, and she must be immediately and unconditionally released,” Gwen Lee said.

“Pending her release, she must have regular, unrestricted access to her family and lawyers of her choice, and not be subjected further to any ill-treatment. If Zhang Zhan dies in prison, her blood will be on the Chinese government’s hands.”

Citizen journalists were a vital source of uncensored, first-hand information about the Covid-19 outbreak in China. Because they work independently of state-controlled media, citizen journalists face constant harassment for exposing information the Chinese government would rather keep quiet.

There is an alarming pattern of deaths of imprisoned Chinese activists, either in detention or after being belatedly released on medical parole.

In July 2017, human rights activist and Nobel Laure-



ate Liu Xiaobo died in custody after the authorities refused his and his family’s requests to receive treatment abroad for his cancer.

The same year, Chinese writer and government critic Yang Tongyan (pen name Yang Tianshui) died three months after being released on medical parole and undergoing an operation to remove a brain tumour.

Beijing activist and prominent campaigner Cao Shunli died from organ failure after months in custody in March 2014. She was denied appropriate medical treatment while in jail.

Urgent Action: Mexico Mass Deportations Must Stop

NAME AND PRONOUN: [asylum seekers] (them)

On August 9th and 10th, 2021, organizations from the Collective for Observation and Monitoring of Human Rights in the Mexican Southeast (Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano) reported the arrival of flights from Texas, United States into Tapachula, Chiapas. These flights were reportedly carrying migrants and asylum seekers deported from the United States under Title 42, a measure implemented by the US in response to COVID-19, under which people crossing the Mexico-US land border may be expelled. According to the account of local organizations, authorities from the

National Institute of Migration (INM) and the National Guard (GN) took those arriving on deportation flights to the Talismán border with Guatemala and abandoned them, without conducting administrative processing or individualized risk assessments. Processing also reportedly did not place on the Guatemala side of the border and no orientation or guidance was provided. According to local organizations, such incidents have occurred throughout the months of August and September and have affected predominately people from Haiti, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. This practice is reportedly also taking place at the Vil-

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lahermosa airport, in the southern State of Tabasco, with migrants and asylum seekers arriving on flights being immediately loaded onto buses by authorities and sent to Honduras without individualized risk assessments or administrative processing.

Local organizations also report that in addition to this treatment being experienced by those deported from the United States, people from Haiti and Central America detained in the interior of Mexico have also been subject to this practice. Local organizations report that even those with regular status in Mexico, such as those with refugee status or official asylum applications have also been subject to expedited deportation – a serious violation of their rights. Amnesty International has previously documented this practice. On September 29, 2021, Mexican migration authorities also reported returning people from Haiti to their country of origin by plane, supposedly on a voluntary basis.

Between August 28 and September 5, 2021, thousands of migrants and asylum seekers, primarily from Haiti, but also from other countries in the region, organized caravans to leave the city of Tapachula, Chiapas following days of protests. The protests related to the pace of asylum application processing and the lack of opportunities and decent living conditions in the city. Authorities from INM, GN and the military repressed the caravan, using excessive force against those participating. According to local organizations, authorities beat migrants and asylum seekers, and separated children from their families. Journalists were also reportedly injured. Authorities have also engaged in the persecution of Haitian migrants in the Northern border state of Coahuila, where thousands of people from Haiti have been waiting to cross into the US. Media reports suggest that police, INM and national guard officials on September 21 and 22, 2021 conducted raids in hotels and on the streets in order to detain people from Haiti possibly in need of international protection.

In addition to mass, unlawful detentions and expulsions, local organizations also report poor detention conditions in migratory detention centers located at Mexico's southern border. Overcrowding has been reported at the Cupape 1, Cupape 2 (La Mosca), and Siglo XXI centers in Chiapas. Infants, children, and adolescents are also reportedly being held at these facilities despite Mexican law and international standards expressly prohibiting this due to concerns regarding the best interests of the child. Amnesty International and other organizations recently called upon the Mexican government to stop the detention and deportation of migrants and asylum seekers due to the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent years, the number of people seeking asylum in Mexico has soared. Recent data released in 2021 by the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) show that people fleeing Honduras make up the greatest portion of those seeking asylum in Mexico this year, followed by people from Haiti, Cuba, and El Salvador. Amnesty International has documented that attacks, threats, persecution, impunity, and high levels of poverty and inequality are the main factors leading to forced migration from Central American countries to Mexico. With respect to Haiti, protests and widespread violence have been ongoing since at least 2019,

as previously documented by Amnesty International. Amidst the chaos surrounding the killing of President Jovenel Moïse in early July, violent crime, and the human rights crisis afflicting the country, journalists and human rights defenders have increasingly come under attack. The Haitian government has been accused of complicity in large-scale attacks by gangs targeting impoverished neighbourhoods. In a report earlier this year, the UN highlighted the increase in human rights violations. Amnesty International is also calling upon the US government to stop deportations and human rights violations against Haitians in the United States.

Sample Letter

Since August, authorities in Mexico have been conducting mass detentions and deportations of migrants and asylum seekers without taking measures to ensure that these individuals are not being returned to locations where their lives or physical integrity might be at risk. Such deportations potentially endanger the lives of thousands. Excessive use of force against migrants and asylum seekers has also been reported. Take action urgently to protect their rights.

I am writing to express my alarm over the serious risks to the lives and safety of thousands of asylum seekers and migrants from countries such as Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador as a result of recent actions by Mexican authorities. According to the information available, authorities from the National Migration Institute (INM) and National Guard (GN) are conducting mass detentions, expulsions, and deportations without carrying out prior individualized risk assessments or enabling people in need to access protection.

I am also aware of recent incidents in which authorities have persecuted and violently detained migrants and asylum seekers, using unnecessary force against them. According to available information, children are also being held in migratory detention centers in the South of the country, against Mexican law and international standards surrounding the best interests of the child.

I call upon you to uphold the rights of migrants and asylum seekers by putting an end to mass deportations without due process, by ensuring that children are never detained in migratory detention, and by ensuring that migrants and asylum seekers are treated with respect and dignity, not unnecessary or excessive force.

Sincerely,



TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
2. Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 100.21. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador

President of México
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Ambassador Esteban Moctezuma

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Please take action as soon as possible until December 2021. Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

Urgent Action: Haiti Stop US Abuses Against Haitian People

NAME AND PRONOUN: Haitian migrants at the US-Mexico border [they/them]

Thousands of Haitians are traveling to the US-Mexico border to seek asylum in the U.S., with many settling in camps after being denied entry. The US government is responding with human rights violations and violence, including deportations of thousands to Haiti. These deportations put Haitians at risk of violence, being unhoused, and even death as Haiti is in the midst of political, economic, and environmental crises. Media has documented US border authorities abusing and taunting Haitians while riding on horses and brandishing whips. Call on US authorities to end deportations and respect the human right to seek asylum.

Since President Biden came into office, the new US administration has taken some necessary but far from sufficient steps to restore access to asylum at the US-Mexico border. Yet, the Biden administration has shamefully continued the Trump administration's policy of misusing the Title 42 public health authority to block and expel people at the border, recklessly endangering lives using "public health" as a justification. Between March 2020 and May 2021, the government summarily expelled nearly 875,000 people, particularly affecting Black immigrants and asylum-seekers into dangerous conditions in Mexico where asylum-seekers have been subjected to serious violence. The Biden administration has expelled over 400,000 of those people. This misuse of Title 42 continues despite objections by CDC officials and against the recommendations of public health experts. All of this was entirely unnecessary and violates U.S. obligations to uphold the right to seek asylum and not forcibly return individuals to a place where they would be at risk of serious human rights harm. There is no public health rationale to treat immigrants and asylum-seekers differently, and it is causing irreparable harm to them.

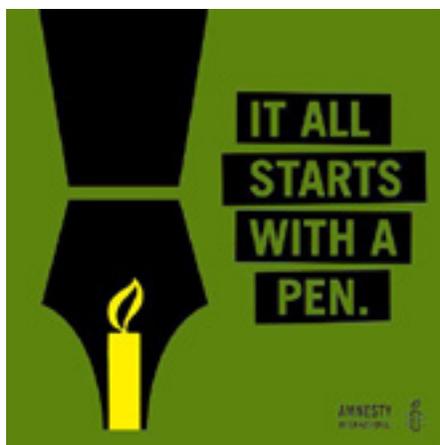
Restoring access to asylum requires upholding due process. Asylum-seekers should be allowed into the country, not expelled or detained, where they can pursue their asylum claims in communities supported by community-based organizations. The use of the expe-

ditioned removal process for considering asylum claims should be rejected, while expedited scheduling for immigration court hearings gives cause for concern. Reform packaged as efficiency based due process is not a guarantee of either.

Media has exposed footage of US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers charging into crowds of Haitian asylum-seekers on horseback — violently dispersing them, taunting them, and forcing them away from safety. This escalation of violent treatment goes hand-in-hand with a rise in deportation flights for Haitian asylum-seekers. The Biden administration is doing everything in its power to deny people access to safe haven, many of whom have been looking for refuge as Haiti continues to reel from political instability and humanitarian disaster — from the catastrophic 2013 earthquake, another devastating earthquake just one month ago, generalized violence and repression, and the assassination of the Haitian President earlier this summer.

Protests and widespread violence have been ongoing in Haiti since at least 2019, as Amnesty International previously documented. Amidst the chaos surrounding the killing of President Jovenel Moïse in early July, the rampant violent crime and the human rights crisis afflicting the country, journalists and human rights defenders have increasingly come under attack. The Haitian government has been accused of complicity in large-scale attacks carried out by gangs targeting impoverished neighbourhoods carried out between 2018 and 2020. In a report earlier this year, the UN highlighted the increase in human rights violations."

The recent conduct of the border is just the latest in a long line of historical abuses of Black immigrants and asylum-seekers in the United States. The xenophobia, hatred, and white supremacy at the core of many U.S. immigration policies cannot be ignored and will continue to cause harm to people seeking safety unless we aggressively combat these problems. It is unconscionable to deport thousands of people to a country in the midst of a political, environmental, and economic crisis where they could experience violence, being unhoused, and death.



Dear President Biden,

I'm writing with deep disappointment about the horrific use of excess use of force at the hands of US border authorities against Haitians and Black asylum-seekers at the US-Mexico border and the Biden administration's aggressive expansion of Title 42 expulsions. The cruelty, racism, and oppression against migrants and asylum-seekers at the border cannot go unanswered.

If the U.S. truly aims to convince the world that its commitment to human rights and racial justice are sincere, then it cannot deny asylum and deport thousands of people who fear for their safety back to a country experiencing extreme instability and massive human rights violations.

I call on the Biden administration to:

- *Immediately halt any and all deportations to Haiti;*
- *Immediately grant humanitarian parole to Haitians at the southern border, and restore access to asylum for all asylum seekers in accordance with international law; and*
- *Immediately end Title 42 expulsions.*

Images from the airport tarmacs in Kabul and Port-au-Prince and the camps in Del Rio have been a damning indictment of the US government's approach to human rights for all. This is your time to reverse course and show leadership. People in the United States and around the world are watching you.

Sincerely,

TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.

2. Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 99.21. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

President Joseph Biden

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington, DC 20500

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webform: www.whitehouse.gov/contact/

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: November 18, 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

ICC Prosecutor's Primary Consideration in Opening an Investigation Must be Timely and Effective Justice for Victims in Venezuela

Nov 4th 2021 -In response to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announcing that it is opening an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela, Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International said:

“The International Criminal Court has finally recognized the urgency of investigating the crimes against humanity that multiple human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have documented and denounced for years in Venezuela. The Office of the Prosecutor must fully investigate the atrocities committed against the Venezuelan people, pursuing

cases against those who bear the greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity.”

The ICC Prosecutor has announced the conclusion of his Office's preliminary examination in Venezuela – which it had opened in 2018 – with a determination that a full investigation is warranted. The Office of the Prosecutor had previously found that crimes against humanity have been committed in Venezuela under Nicolas Maduro's government, since at least 2017, including arbitrary detentions, use of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as persecution.

In a public announcement, Prosecutor Khan and

President Maduro explained that they had agreed to a “Letter of Understanding”. Prosecutor Khan also highlighted the importance of “positive complementarity” in his approach to the Venezuela investigation.

“This is the first ICC investigation into a country in the Americas. To be effective, the ICC must commence as soon as possible, and should impartially investigate those most responsible for the systematic policy of repression and social control in Venezuela, since at least 2014, as noted by the United Nations’ Fact-Finding Mission in its reports in September 2020 and September 2021,” added Erika Guevara-Rosas.

“While a cooperative approach to investigations would be desirable, the Prosecutor should listen to calls from victims who are yet to see justice and recognize that his Office’s intervention is urgently needed for prompt and effective investigations of crimes against

humanity in Venezuela. Although the ‘principle of complementarity’ urges the Prosecutor to call on Venezuelan authorities to carry out independent and impartial domestic investigations in Venezuela, he must not be deferential to state proceedings at all costs. In particular, when states are not genuinely willing or able to investigate and prosecute crimes under international law themselves – including investigations into those at senior levels or most responsible.”

“Above all, the Prosecutor’s approach must ensure that the rights to justice of victims and survivors of human rights violations in the country are respected and fulfilled by the Court and in Venezuela. It is paramount that human rights defenders who have sought justice at the ICC should be protected against any reprisals.”

URGENT ACTION: Venezuelan Defenders Remain Under Arrest

NAME AND PRONOUN: FundaREDES Human Rights Defenders (them/they)

Javier Tarazona, Director of local NGO FundaREDES, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García, FundaREDES’ activists, were arbitrarily detained on July 2, 2021 after attempting to report harassment from security officers at the Attorney General’s Office in the city of Coro (Western Venezuela), and charged with inciting hatred, treason, and terrorism. Despite numerous requests, their trusted legal representatives have been denied accreditation before the court. The three are still awaiting a pre-trial hearing to take place. We urge authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally since their detention is politically motivated.

FundaREDES is a Venezuelan human rights organization that promotes and defends human rights in the bordering states of Táchira, Apure, Zulia, Falcón, Bolívar y Amazonas. Its work includes documentation and reporting of human rights violations and human rights abuses by non-state actors in these regions. More recently, they have focused on documenting the violence in Apure state, southern Venezuela, in what has been claimed to be a conflict with FARC non- demobilized groups.

According to media outlets, the human rights defenders Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García were in the city of Coro in an education-

al activity with Jhonny Romero, representative of the NGO Mayday Confavidt. The latter works with victims of disappearance and human trafficking in Falcón state. After the event, they went to the Attorney General’s office to submit a formal report of harassment by alleged intelligence service and local police agents. Later that day, reports point out that Bolivarian National Intelligence Service’s (SEBIN) agents arbitrary detained them, without presenting an arrest warrant. Their arrest was not informed formally to their lawyers and their whereabouts remained unknown during 24 hours after their arrest, when they were brought before a Court with special jurisdiction on terrorism. Authorities released Jhonny Romero on July 3, 2021 before the hearing.

The local NGO Foro Penal has informed that despite being their trusted defence lawyers, all three human rights defenders facing charges were assigned public defenders, although one Foro Penal member was able to see them and talk to them. Due to the lack of trusted legal representation, it’s unclear why they are being investigated, but it is public that they have been charged with instigation of hatred, “terrorism” and treason. Some of these crimes are established in the

“Organic Law on Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism”. The authorities in Venezuela have commonly used this law to criminalized human rights defenders and humanitarian workers, as the case of five

members of Azul Positivo in January 2021. Since their arrest, Foro Penal has requested their legal representation on countless occasions, which was always denied. Their pre-trial hearing has also been postponed numerous times.

Nicolás Maduro government has continually harassed, prosecuted, and censored activists and civil society organizations working to protect the rights of Venezuelans amidst a humanitarian complex crisis and a deep human rights crisis that is making Venezuelans fled in unprecedented numbers in search of safety and a dignified future abroad. By June 2021, over 5.6 million had fled the country.

All these events are not isolated. Since the beginning of 2021, civil society in Venezuela has reported a new crackdown wave against human rights activists and human rights defenders, mainly focusing on criminalizing international cooperation and attempting to implement new repressive mechanisms over civil society in the country. This new set of repressive attacks have also affected independent media outlets.

Last year, a report from the UN independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment committed in the country since 2014, and concluded that these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity.

Sample Letter

Dear Nicolás Maduro,

I am deeply alarmed that human rights defenders, Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García from the organization FundaREDES have not been released after having spent over three months arbitrarily detained. Their arbitrary detention and the ensuing criminal investigations against them must be stopped immediately.

FundaREDES monitor, document and report on human rights abuses committed by armed groups in Venezuela's border regions. The charges they face appear to be politically motivated since SEBIN officers arrested them without an arrest warrant, and the court charged them with terrorism, which are elements of a well-documented pattern of arbitrary detentions. In addition, they have been denied access to trusted legal representation, and the delays to their pre-trial hearing violates their right to due process.

TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
2. Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 75.21. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

President Nicolás Maduro

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H.E. Joaquin A. Perez Ayestaran

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Salutation: Dear Ambassador

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: December 3, 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the

We urge you to release Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García immediately and unconditionally, close all criminal investigations into these human rights defenders, and put an end to the harassment and criminalization of non-governmental organizations in Venezuela.

Sincerely,