

## Maduro's hostages

By Fernando Mora<sup>1</sup>

For nearly ten months, ***thirty-eight Colombian nationals have been unlawfully detained by the Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela***, held *incommunicado* in deplorable prison conditions that flagrantly violate their fundamental human rights. These individuals remain imprisoned without formal charges, trials, or access to a fair judicial process. The Venezuelan authorities operate with impunity, disregarding both domestic legal standards and international human rights obligations.

This humanitarian crisis is compounded by a deafening silence from Colombia's President Gustavo Petro. It is deeply troubling that while Maduro openly refers to Petro as his "Siamese brother," these thirty-eight Colombians languish behind bars, forgotten and denied justice. The president's silence undermines Colombia's *responsibility to protect* its citizens and sends a dangerous signal of complacency in the face of blatant human rights abuses.

The plight of these Colombians reflects a broader, systemic issue in Venezuela, where political repression has escalated. According to credible local media reports, there are currently ***853 political prisoners in Venezuelan detention facilities***. Many of these detainees have been imprisoned solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, civic activism, or peaceful dissent—actions recognized and protected under international law.

### Case Studies Illustrating the Crisis

**Kevin Saavedra Basallo:** Detained for over 276 days without official information on his status or whereabouts. Arrested while visiting Venezuela to see his girlfriend, Kevin was accused of being an infiltrator solely because he carried a military service booklet in his wallet. His family's desperate pleas for his release highlight the arbitrary nature of his detention.

**Arlei Danilo Espitia:** Detained shortly after crossing the Colombia-Venezuela border. Venezuelan authorities transferred him without explanation, and his family has since been left in

the dark. Senior Venezuelan official Diosdado Cabello publicly labeled Arlei and others as "mercenaries" and paramilitary operatives—accusations [words that Maduro-Petro frequently use] lacking credible evidence.

**Manuel Alejandro Tique:** A humanitarian worker with an NGO, Manuel was arrested despite possessing all legal documentation. Since his detention, communication has ceased, and authorities have accused him of recruiting paramilitary forces without substantiation, casting a shadow over his humanitarian mission.

### Urgent Policy Recommendations

**Immediate Diplomatic Pressure:** The Colombian government must urgently demand the unconditional release of these 38 Colombians and actively engage international bodies such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to hold Venezuela accountable.

**International Advocacy:** Colombia should collaborate with global human rights organizations to expose and condemn these arbitrary detentions, emphasizing the breach of international law and pressing for transparent investigations.

**Strengthen Citizen Protection Measures:** The Colombian state must reinforce consular support and establish mechanisms to monitor and assist nationals at risk of detention abroad, ensuring no Colombian is left without representation.

**End the Culture of Impunity:** An international coalition should push for sanctions and targeted measures against Venezuelan officials responsible for human rights abuses, signaling that such violations will bear consequences.

The unlawful detention of these Colombians—and countless Venezuelans—is far more than a bilateral issue; it is a grave human rights crisis that demands immediate and unwavering action. Yet, President Gustavo Petro remains silent and passive in the face of this injustice. The lives and dignity of these citizens hang in the balance, requiring urgent intervention, decisive leadership, and an unrelenting commitment to justice.

Bogotá, Colombia, 21 October 2025.

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