

Two directors of Human Rights Watch deported!

Paris - Geneva, September 22, 2008 - The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), expresses its deepest concern over the deportation from Venezuela by the authorities of two staff members of Human Rights Watch, Messrs. José Miguel Vivanco, a Chilean national and director for the Americas and Daniel Wilkinson, and American national deputy director for the Americas.

On Thursday September 18, 2008, about 20 armed men, some in uniform, apprehended Messrs. **José Miguel Vivanco** and **Daniel Wilkinson** at their hotel to carry out an order of deportation. This deportation immediately followed the presentation in Caracas of a report on the situation of human rights in Venezuela.

The previous day, both the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nicolás Maduro, and the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Tarek El Aissami issued a joint statement stating that Human Rights Watch was acting in concert with the United States and providing the grounds for the deportation. Messrs. Vivanco and Wilkinson were accused of having violated the laws and the Constitution, undermined the public institutions and unlawfully interfered in the internal affairs of the State.

The two men were prevented from contacting anyone, including their embassies, their telephones were disabled and they were sent by plane to Sao Paulo, where they arrived on Friday morning.

The report, entitled “A Decade under Chavez, Political intolerance and lost opportunities for advancing human rights in Venezuela”, documented serious violations of human rights since the Chavez's coming into power in 2002 : dismantlement of judicial independence, the Government's intimidation of human rights defenders and NGOs, and more generally the use of discriminatory policies undercutting freedom of expression, freedom of association and the ability of the civil society to promote human rights in the country.

The Observatory expresses its deep concern about this deportation, which is evidence of the Venezuelan authorities' lack of tolerance for all forms of dissenting voices.

The Observatory further calls upon the Venezuelan authorities to put an end to any acts of harassment against all Venezuelan human rights defenders and to conform with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially its Article 1, which states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” and its Article 12.2, which provides that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto*

or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”.

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L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.

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