

Cilia Flores denounces torturous treatment in US jail as anti-government protests grow in Venezuela

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A federal judge in Manhattan on Thursday refused to release Cilia Flores, the wife of the overthrown Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, from the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, where her health has steadily deteriorated over nine months of imprisonment. The same morning, prosecutors unsealed a superseding indictment charging Flores, 69, and Maduro, 63, with conspiracy to commit torture. If convicted, both face a mandatory minimum of 50 years in prison, a life sentence in all but name.

Flores was seized along with her husband on January 3, when US special forces stormed their safe house at the Fuerte Tiuna military base in Caracas. Her lawyer, Mark Donnelly, has told the court that she suffered “permanent scarring by her captors,” with injuries to her face, forehead and abdomen. In jail she has lost more than 25 pounds and two molars. She suffers from mitral valve prolapse, has not received her monthly injection for it since her arrest, and doctors have recommended cardiac catheterization. When a fight broke out in her unit, guards fired pepper spray that left her with chest tightness.

Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein brushed all of this aside. “For whatever it’s worth, her appearance today is no worse and perhaps a little better than when I first met with her on her arraignment,” he said. Donnelly answered: “She was still bandaged up from the military invasion.”

The *New York Times*, the newspaper of record of the Democratic Party, treated the case as a story about “wealthy defendants” trying to “leverage their money to avoid incarceration in America’s troubled federal jails.” It idiotically placed the wife of a head of state and former official abducted in a military raid alongside a Manhattan lawyer who swindled investors out of \$700 million, and repeated without comment the prosecutors’ complaint that home detention would create “a two-tiered system of bail.”

Flores was a leading figure of the Chavista state, serving as attorney general and president of the National Assembly. But the *Times*, an unofficial publication of the Democratic Party, has nothing to say about the illegality of her capture, adopting the conqueror’s point of view of the Trump White House.

The concern of Trump’s prosecutors for equal justice is a

fraud. Last December Trump pardoned former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, convicted in the same Manhattan court of conspiring to flood the United States with cocaine. The narco-terrorism case against Maduro was always threadbare, and in January the Justice Department dropped its claim that the “Cartel de los Soles” allegedly led by Maduro was an actual organization.

The torture charge was added to give the prosecution a semblance of credibility. It comes from a government that runs Guantánamo and that in March 2025 shipped 238 Venezuelan migrants to the torture dungeon in El Salvador known as CECOT. For two decades the same government financed coup attempts, civil war plots and mercenary raids against Caracas.

The treatment of Flores and Maduro has a definite political purpose. Speaking at the United Nations on September 22, Trump boasted of the invasion and the oil deal that followed, declaring: “To the victor belong the spoils. You’ve all heard that.”

The spoils go to Wall Street, with Trump’s cronies getting first dibs. The vanquished are to be humiliated and destroyed as a warning to anyone perceived as an obstacle to US hegemony, as Washington and Israel did when they assassinated the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah and set out to decapitate the Iranian state.

The invasion of Venezuela, the abduction, imprisonment and show trial of Maduro and Flores constitute crimes against the Venezuelan people. Workers in the United States and internationally must demand their release, an end to Washington’s neo-colonial domination and the withdrawal of all US troops, political operatives and corporate officials from the country.

The government in Caracas will make no such demand. On the evening of September 22, acting President Delcy Rodríguez met Trump in Manhattan a short drive from the cells where Maduro and Flores are held. She called the encounter “historic” and thanked Trump for his support. She did not ask for the prisoners’ release. Federal prosecutors have turned this silence into a legal weapon. In an October 2 filing opposing the defendants’ claim of head-of-state immunity, they argued: “If

Venezuela wished to assert its view that the defendants were entitled to immunity in this, it could have.”

Trump, for his part, is counting the profits. Earlier in September, he told Republican lawmakers that the United States had already paid for the war “about 54 times” with Venezuelan oil.

Protests against Rodríguez and the occupation

The money is certainly not flowing to Venezuelan workers. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS) recorded nearly 4,200 protests this year through September, more than 650 of them in August alone. The minimum monthly wage has been frozen since 2022 at 130 bolívars, worth a few cents of a dollar at the official exchange rate. The government of Rodríguez, like Maduro’s before it, pays workers in discretionary and still miserable bonuses that count toward no pensions or severance pay.

Since the June 24 earthquakes, which killed at least 6,509 people and caused \$14.8 billion in damage, the electrical grid has broken down. Blackouts now reach 16 hours a day. On September 30 and October 1, residents of Carabobo, Zulia, Aragua, Portuguesa, Sucre and Falcón blocked roads and burned tires, and in Guacara they shut down the Central-Regional Highway linking Caracas with the west. In Carabobo, protesters tore down the gate of the state power company, Corpoelec. The government responded by stationing National Guard troops at Corpoelec offices and pressing ahead with a law that opens electricity generation to private and foreign capital and raises rates to “real costs” to guarantee returns for investors.

On September 28, university workers protested on the bridge over Lake Maracaibo, where police and troops blocked their path. “Delcy, we will throw you out sooner or later, because you are more of the same,” said one protester.

The working class has shown its readiness to fight, but the trade union bureaucracy is doing everything to contain it. During the June 10 national teachers’ strike, the union leaders told teachers to stay home and in Caracas did not call so much as a rally outside the Education Ministry. On September 24, when workers and pensioners marched on the Labor Ministry, the organizers allowed Juan Pablo Guanipa of the right-wing Primero Justicia party to take the platform and proclaim, “All Venezuela demands elections now.” Guanipa cheered the US bombing of January 3 and in August demanded “legal security” for private investors under the oil deal.

The same union apparatus now placing itself in front of the protests has supported US-backed operatives, including Juan Guaidó in 2019 and María Corina Machado’s candidate Edmundo González in 2024.

Workers cannot let their anger be channeled behind the US-sponsored opposition and the demand for elections, which would install a different set of Washington’s clients. The plunder of Venezuela’s oil and labor by US corporations and banks requires that workers be kept impoverished and powerless, and that they accept conditions amounting to colonial servitude. None of the factions of the political establishment, including the union bureaucracy, the Chavista apparatus or the right-wing opposition, will fight for living wages, secure jobs, decent public services or an end to the looting of the country’s resources. Chavismo, which claimed to be building “21st-century socialism,” has delivered Venezuela to Washington as a protectorate. That is the decisive lesson of bourgeois nationalism.

But Venezuelan workers are not alone. Fuel price hikes have set off protests across Latin America, including a 50-day general strike in Bolivia, sold out by the union bureaucracy, widespread roadblocks across Honduras and Guatemala and threats of a truckers strike across the US. On October 1, more than 20,000 students and workers marched in Chile against education cuts, while health workers and retirees of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) rejected a 2.9 percent raise and broke the padlocks on their union headquarters to demand the resignation of union boss Rafael Olivos. Hundreds of thousands of students, teachers and parents marched on Tuesday against crumbling schools in France, while mass demonstrations over housing have spread to more than 50 cities in Spain.

These struggles face the same enemies: the imperialist powers that plunder the world, the venal capitalist governments, and the union apparatuses and their partners in the nominally “left” parties that block these struggles. The way forward for Venezuelan workers demands a new political leadership, independent of the union bureaucracy and of all bourgeois parties, linking their fight with that of workers throughout the Americas and the world on the basis of a genuinely revolutionary socialist program.



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