



DUBLIN

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 233 8695

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Venezuela: Incommunicado detention of woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel

On 9 February 2024, woman human rights defender and lawyer **Rocío San Miguel** was detained along with five of her relatives by intelligence service officers under the charges of treason, conspiracy, terrorism among other crime allegations. The defender had been accused by the country's Attorney General of being involved in an alleged plot to kill high-ranking authorities of the Venezuelan government, including the President.

[Rocío San Miguel](#) is a human rights lawyer and president of *Control Ciudadano para la Seguridad, la Defensa y la Fuerza Armada Nacional* (Citizen Watchdog on Security, Defense and the Armed Forces). The organisation promotes citizens' oversight on issues of national security, armed forces, and defense. It also monitors Venezuela's commitments to the Rome Statute and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR). Due to her work, Rocío San Miguel has faced previous retaliation by Venezuelan public officers, including defamation. In 2018, the State of Venezuela [was found responsible for the violation of the rights to political participation, freedom of thought and expression among others](#) against the woman human rights defender in a case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

On 9 February 2024, woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel was approached in the airport by officers of the migration administration under the claim of checking her migratory status, to be later detained and transferred to an unknown place. Subsequently, her daughter and four other members of her family were also detained. She has remained without access to her lawyer and her location and legal situation was unknown until 11 February, [when the country's Attorney General shared on his personal X account](#) that the defender had been detained for being allegedly involved in a plot to kill the President of Venezuela among other high-ranking authorities. No information about the other five relatives of the defender was shared until the [late night of 12 February](#), when the same X account informed that in an initial hearing happening that same night the Public Prosecutor's Office requested that they were also investigated under the accusation of being allegedly involved in the above mentioned plot.

On 13 February, four of the five relatives of the woman human rights defender were released while Rocío San Miguel will remain at the National Intelligence Service Prison El Helicoide [under the charges of treason, conspiracy, terrorism and association](#), following the decision of the Second Court Against Terrorism. To this day, the defender has had no access to her lawyer and family.

[Front Line Defenders had previously raised concern at](#) the situation facing woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, as she had been regularly a target of defamation by government authorities for participating in human rights spaces and denouncing human rights violations in the country.

The current detention of the human rights lawyer has gained the attention of national and international organizations. On 12 February, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) [shared on social media](#) their condemnation to what they believed constituted a forced disappearance of the woman human rights defender. Rocío San Miguel [is a beneficiary of precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission since 2012](#), and the IACHR requested the State of Venezuela to inform about her location and to ensure the respect of her judicial rights. In addition, on 13 February, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [has also stated on social media](#) that they are following up on the detention of the woman human rights defender, as well as “urge her immediate release & respect for her right to legal defence”. This

adds to the [press release by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela](#), in which the Mission raised concern over the situation of woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel and the misuse of law against many others who express their opposition to the current government in the country, calling for an end to this repression.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern regarding the incommunicado detention of woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, as well as the series of irregularities in the process against her and her relatives, as it believes this constitute another attempt to stop her legitimate activity in the defence of human rights in Venezuela. Front Line Defenders is equally concerned at the government of Venezuela's use of the State's punitive powers to discourage, punish or prevent the exercise of the right to defend human rights in the broadest sense, and the generalised efforts to discredit and criminalise the work of human rights defenders in the country.

Front Line Defender urges the authorities in Venezuela to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel and her relatives as it is believed that they are solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel and guarantee her physical and psychological security and integrity, as well as that of her family;
3. Ensure that the treatment of woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Inform the family and lawyer of woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel of the place of her detention, as well as of any change of locations, and allow them immediate and unfettered access to her;
5. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Venezuela are able to conduct their peaceful and legitimate activities without undue restrictions and without fear of harassment, threats or retaliation, including judicial harassment against them or their families.