

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

22 December 2015

VEN105385.E

Venezuela: Treatment of members of the Primero Justicia (PJ) party [Justice First] by authorities, including instances of violence (January 2015-December 2015)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Treatment of Members of PJ by Authorities

On 3 November 2015, Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), a state television network based in Caracas, reported that workers of several unions planned to go to the Office of the Attorney General on the following day to request an investigation into the actions of Tomás Guanipa, a member of the National Assembly for PJ, who allegedly committed a [translation] "series of economic and financial crimes' ... related to an international conspiracy against Venezuela's currency" (Venezuela 3 Nov. 2015). Sources reported on 4 November 2015 that PJ denounced the government's accusations against Guanipa for his alleged links with Dólar Today [a Miami-based website that provides news on Venezuela and its currency exchange rate (Dólar Today n.d.)] (Notitarde 4 Nov. 2015; ACN 4 Nov. 2015). Thomas Dangel [a local coordinator of PJ (ACN 4 Nov. 2015)] [translation] "qualified these accusations as 'persecution' against" Guanipa (Notitarde 4 Nov. 2015). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

On 15 September 2015, the website of PJ posted a press release in which the party denounced President Nicolás Maduro's [translation] "unfounded accusations" against Wilson Castro, PJ coordinator in the state of Bolívar (PJ 15 Sept. 2015). The press release indicates that Castro has been accused by the government of having ties with [Colombian] paramilitaries (ibid.). Sources report that Castro was accused [by Maduro (*El Universal* 15 Sept. 2015)] of being responsible for looting that occurred in the town of San Félix [state of Bolívar] on 31 July 2015 (*El Universal* 15 Sept. 2015; *Correo del Caroní* 10 Aug. 2015). *Clarín*, a newspaper based in Buenos Aires, reports that the looting in San Félix occurred because of the shortages of basic goods, which President Maduro attributes to [translation] "an 'economic war' fostered by businesses and the opposition to destabilize the government" (*Clarín* 31 July 2015). According to sources, during the looting, 60 people were detained by authorities and one person died (qtd. in Notiminuto 31 July 2015; *Clarín* 31 July 2015) [translation] "from a bullet in the chest, under unclear circumstances" (ibid.). *Clarín* reports that business people attributed the shortages of basic goods to the [translation] "severe controls over prices and exchange rates" (ibid.).

On 15 September 2015, *El Universal*, a Caracas-based newspaper, reported that the Minister of Interior, Justice and Peace accused Wilson Castro of [translation] "orchestrating ... [a] 'sabotage plan during the back-to-school' season, 'with the support of 'ultra-right-wing elements'" (*El Universal* 15 Sept. 2015). Castro was accused of doing this from Colombia (ibid.). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The website of PJ reports that on 12 September 2015, during a meeting with the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela) in the municipality of Caruachi, President Maduro accused Wilson Castro of colluding with a criminal organization that committed a series of break-and-enters in [translation] "several schools" in the state of Bolívar (PJ 13 Sept. 2015). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Notiminuto, a news portal based in Venezuela, quotes Rachid Yasbek, General Secretary of PJ, in an August 2015 article, as stating that [translation] "the party suspects that they are being subjected to persecution" as they see "'suspicious' vehicles with tinted windows in front of PJ members' residences" (12 Aug. 2015). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The website of PJ reports that, on 13 June 2015, the party organized a political demonstration in the state of Zulia to express its support for political prisoners and to denounce President Maduro's [translation] "political persecution" against dissident sectors in Venezuela and leaders of the opposition (PJ 13 June 2015). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In February 2015, sources reported that PJ denounced the government's accusations against Julio Borges, National Coordinator of PJ, for being associated with an alleged coup (*El Nacional* 14 Feb. 2015; PJ 18 Feb. 2015). The website of PJ indicates that these accusations are [translation] "unfounded" and accuses the government of "criminalizing dissent and persecuting those who think differently" (ibid.). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; ContraPunto; ecoi.net; *El Diario de Guayana*; El Mercurio Web; *El Sol de Margarita*; Factiva; Freedom House; Globovisión; Human Rights Watch; La Patilla; Notisemana; *Political Handbook of the World*; United Nations – ReliefWeb; United States – Department of State, Embassy in Caracas; Venezuela – Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Interiores, Justicia y Paz; *Zulia por Dentro*.

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