

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Statement on the Return of United States Citizens Wrongfully Detained in Venezuela

October 1, 2022

Today, after years of being wrongfully detained in Venezuela, we are bringing home Jorge Toledo, Tomeu Vadell, Alirio Zambrano, Jose Luis Zambrano, Jose Pereira, Matthew Heath, and Osman Khan. These individuals will soon be reunited with their families and back in the arms of their loved ones where they belong. I am grateful for the hard work of dedicated public servants across the U.S. Government who made this possible and who continue to deliver on my administration's unflinching commitment to keep faith with Americans held hostage and wrongfully detained all around the world. Today we celebrate that seven families will be whole once more. To all the families who are still suffering and separated from their loved ones who are wrongfully detained: Know that we remain dedicated to securing their release.

It is also a priority of my administration to prevent Americans from having to endure the unimaginable pain of being held hostage or wrongfully detained. This summer, I signed an Executive order that will impose new costs, including sanctions and visa bans, against the perpetrators of such acts. In addition, the State Department has introduced a new warning indicator "D" that is designed to help Americans understand where and when travel may incur increased risks of wrongful detention, potentially for long periods of time. If travelers make the decision to go despite this "D" warning, they need to know that they are incurring massive personal risk and that it may not be feasible for the U.S. Government to secure their release.

NOTE: The statement referred to José Luis Zambrano, Jorge Toledo, Tomeu Vadell, Alirio José Zambrano, and José Ángel Pereira, former CITGO Petroleum Corp. executives who were convicted on corruption charges in Caracas, Venezuela, on November 22, 2017; Matthew J. Heath, a former U.S. Marine Corps corporal who was detained in connection with a suspected sabotage plot in September of 2020; and Winter Garden, FL, resident Osman Khan, who was arrested after crossing the Colombia-Venezuela border in January.

Categories: Statements by the President : Venezuela, return of U.S. citizens wrongfully detained.

Names: Heath, Matthew J.; Khan, Osman; Pereira, José Ángel; Toledo, Jorge; Vadell, Tomeu; Zambrano, Alirio José; Zambrano, José Luis.

Subjects: Foreign policy, U.S. : Hostages and U.S. nationals detained overseas, repatriation efforts; State, Department of : Travel warnings and safety indicators, strengthening efforts; Venezuela : Detained U.S. citizens, release.

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