

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Statement on the Release of United States Citizens Detained in Venezuela
December 20, 2023

Today 10 Americans who have been detained in Venezuela have been released and are coming home, including all 6 wrongfully detained Americans. These individuals have lost far too much precious time with their loved ones, and their families have suffered every day in their absence. I am grateful that their ordeal is finally over, and that these families are being made whole once more.

Additionally, a fugitive named Leonard Francis, who fled the United States before he could be sentenced for his lead role in a brazen bribery and corruption case, was extradited from Venezuela so that he will face justice for crimes he committed against the U.S. Government and the American people.

We are ensuring that the Venezuelan regime meets its commitments. They have announced an electoral roadmap—agreed to by opposition parties—for competitive Presidential elections in 2024. This is a positive and important step forward. And today they are releasing—20 political prisoners, on top of 5 released previously. We will continue to monitor this closely and take appropriate action if needed. We stand in support of democracy in Venezuela and the aspirations of the Venezuelan people.

As we welcome home our fellow citizens, I must also remind all Americans of the longstanding warning against traveling to Venezuela. Americans should not travel there.

Reuniting wrongfully detained Americans with their loved ones has been a priority for my administration since day one. As is the return to the United States of fugitives from justice.

But even as we celebrate the return of these Americans, we also remain deeply focused on securing the release of the hostages in Gaza and wrongfully detained Americans around the world, including Evan Gershkovich and Paul Whelan, who are being detained in Russia, and Americans in Afghanistan, Syria, and China. We will not stop working until we bring them all home.

NOTE: The statement referred to Evan Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal reporter who was arrested by Russian authorities on March 29; and Paul N. Whelan, a U.S. citizen who was arrested and held on espionage charges by Russian security services in Moscow, Russia, on December 28, 2018.

Categories: Statements by the President : Release of U.S. citizens detained in Venezuela.

Names: Francis, Leonard G. "Fat Leonard"; Gershkovich, Evan; Whelan, Paul N.

Subjects: Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Hostages and U.S. nationals detained overseas, repatriation efforts ; Russia, detention of U.S. citizens; Venezuela, democracy efforts; Venezuela, release of detained U.S. citizens.

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