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## **Venezuela Denies Detained Joshua Holt's Life 'in Danger'**

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*A witness told the Miami Herald that police were conducting door-to-door searches when they took issue with Holt filming them on his mobile phone.*

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza has denied that the life of a jailed U.S. citizen charged with weapons offenses is in danger, accusing the United States of turning the man at the centre of a judicial case into a political pawn.

Joshua Holt, a 25-year-old former Mormon missionary from Utah, was arrested 18 months ago in Caracas while waiting for a U.S. visa for his new Venezuelan bride, fellow Mormon Thamara Candelo, and her two young children.

Police raided Candelo's apartment on June 30, 2016, later claiming they had found illegal weapons and that the couple are linked to an opposition paramilitary gang, according to PJ Media.

Thamara's mother, Maria Caleño, told NPR that she witnessed the raid and saw police officers slip weapons into Holt's luggage before declaring they had found them at the scene.

A witness told the Miami Herald that police were conducting door-to-door searches when they took issue with Holt filming them on his mobile phone.

Two hours later, masked officers who may have been military intelligence came back, "found" the weapons and arrested Holt and his wife. Both were finally charged on Tuesday and are now awaiting trial.

Posting on Twitter on Friday in response to allegations by the U.S. State Department that Holt's detention was politically motivated, Arreaza insisted that Holt had been granted access to legal representation and that U.S. criticism of the proceedings amounted to "political interference."

"It is false that Holt's life is in danger due to lack of or insufficient medical attention," Arreaza wrote in his official statement. "Proof of this is that on December 12, the judge was able to confirm his state of health, so there are no grounds to grant a humanitarian measure."

"We regret that the U.S. government intends to turn a judicial case into a political issue with unspeakable purposes since, in the past, similar cases have been handled – as they should be – within the consular sphere by the authorities of both countries, in accordance with the respective legal procedures and without any type of conflict."

"We reiterate that Venezuela complies with its international commitments, including consular access to foreign citizens in detention situations, as well as due process, which is guaranteed by the constitution.

"For this reason, we demand respect for Venezuelan institutions and legal processes, as well as the immediate cessation of the campaign of distortion that attacks our judicial system."

On Monday, Holt's mother had released an audio recording of her son complaining of poor health, and pleaded for his release.

"I'm very dizzy and I can't think and my stomach hurts," Holt says in the 40-second voicemail message. "It hurts bad, and I don't know what to do. I've never felt like this before."

U.S. State Department spokesman Heather Nauert said embassy personnel were prevented from observing Holt's hearing on Tuesday. "The United States remains extremely concerned for Mr. Holt's health and welfare, which continues to deteriorate under the custody of SEBIN, the Venezuelan intelligence agency," she said in a statement.

"We call on the Venezuelan government to grant **immediate consular access** to Mr. Holt. We remind the Venezuelan government that pursuant to its international obligations, Venezuela must grant Mr. Holt **fair trial guarantees**.

"His life should not be jeopardized under SEBIN's custody. Therefore we renew our call for Mr. Holt's **immediate release on humanitarian grounds**."

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