

## U.S.–Venezuela Prisoner Deal Sparks Outrage Over Release of Convicted Murderer

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The recent prisoner exchange between the United States and Venezuela has come under intense scrutiny after it was revealed that one of the Americans freed had been serving a 30-year sentence for a triple homicide. Dahud Hanid Ortíz, a dual U.S.–Venezuelan citizen, was convicted in Venezuela for the 2016 murders of three individuals in

Madrid, a crime involving stabbing, blunt-force trauma, and arson used to conceal evidence.

Ortíz was among ten Americans and permanent residents released by Venezuela in a diplomatic deal brokered with the assistance of El Salvador. In exchange, El Salvador returned over 250 Venezuelan nationals who had been deported under wartime immigration rules, and Caracas agreed to release several Venezuelan political prisoners.

The U.S. State Department acknowledged that it was fully aware of Ortíz's conviction before the deal was finalized. While some of those released had been designated as "wrongfully detained," including Navy veteran Wilbert Joseph Castañeda and dual U.S.–French national Lucas Hunter, Ortíz's case stood apart due to the violent nature of his crime.

Victims' rights groups and international legal observers have condemned Ortíz's inclusion in the swap. A Spanish attorney who had previously been targeted in connection with the case expressed outrage that a convicted murderer was quietly released and allowed to return to U.S. soil. Critics argue the move undermines the integrity of justice systems and raises ethical concerns about the vetting process used in high-stakes diplomatic agreements.

Senior officials involved in the negotiations have defended the broader operation, noting the importance of reuniting American citizens with their families. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele played key roles in coordinating the exchange, which also served broader foreign policy objectives.

Still, the decision to include Ortíz has stirred internal debate within the State Department, with reports of discomfort among diplomats and legal advisers. The image of Ortíz smiling as he arrived in Texas has only deepened public unease, especially among families affected by violent crime.

Lawmakers from both parties are now calling for greater oversight in future prisoner deals. While the humanitarian aspect of securing freedom for unjustly detained Americans remains a priority, the Ortíz case highlights the need to balance diplomacy with accountability. The controversy has renewed calls for transparency and clear criteria when negotiating the release of individuals with serious criminal histories.