



**CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA**

**SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA**

AUGUST 2021

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Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ) registered **46 attacks and security incidents** during August 2021 in Venezuela.

The Criminalization Policy against the promotion, defense, and demand of human rights has not ceased. Defenders continue to face The Logic of the Internal Enemy, while the State deepens and perfects the mechanisms to repress, control, and limit the exercise of their actions.

Risks continue for those on the front lines of responding to the social, political and human rights crisis in the country.

The lack of commitment of the State to comply with its international obligations to respect, protect and guarantee human rights, has as a consequence the reduction of civic and democratic space in the country and the lack of timely investigations to stop the criminalization of those who defend and demand rights.

The work of documentation, denunciation, visibility, and support is essential for the strengthening of the rule of law and democracy. Activities in favor of human rights and humanitarian actions must be promoted and respected without any type of retaliation.

01 **AGGRESSIONS AND HARASSMENT BY STATE OFFICIALS INTENSIFY**

46 violations of the right to defend human rights in Venezuela during August 2021.

The right to defend, promote and demand rights remains under attack, as the State intensifies repressive actions and social control that affect the operation and security of people and human rights organizations.

Additionally, the Complex Humanitarian Emergency that the country is going through adds to the elements that consolidate a hostile and adverse environment for the exercise of the right to defend human rights.

Repressive and social control measures continue to be applied as a form of retaliation against those who carry out activities related to the vindication and protection of rights.

The use of the Logic of the Internal Enemy is accentuated under hate speech, disqualification, and intimidation, at the same time as the restrictions of civic and democratic space and the use of regulations related to the control of terrorism and organized crime to persecute the civil society.

Given the complexities that surround the Venezuelan socio-political environment, we reiterate that the work of promotion and defense of human rights, as well as humanitarian action, are essential for the protection of human dignity. It is essential to create effective mechanisms for the full and free exercise of human rights. and the protection of those who defend them.

AUGUST 2021 ATTACKS



46 ATTACKS

46 attacks and security incidents documented during the month of August show that stigmatization based on hate speech and disqualification is the starting point of the Criminalization Policy, causing an increase in more violent attacks such as acts of intimidation, harassment, threats, and arbitrary detentions, among others.

Stigmatization also seeks to generate a dissuasive impact on organizations as part of State terrorism used to control the population by issuing “exemplary messages and punishments”.

The 46 events recorded during the month of August were characterized by:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



During August the continuity of stigmatization campaigns and accusations by State officials was present, accusing the organizations of “destabilizing”, “vagabonds”, “of the right”, among others.

During this period, acts of intimidation and harassment by officials and other actors who are part of different structures of the Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3) or who identify with the ruling party were constant, violating the activities of the organizations and representing an impact on the personal and psychosocial security of defenders.

The process for the entry into force of Administrative Ruling N ° ONCDOFT-002-2021 advanced within the framework of the actions undertaken by the State as part of its strategy to reduce civic and democratic space, by limiting the right to freedom. of association.

Finally, digital attacks on the websites of organizations continue. These actions mainly occur in order to avoid and limit the visibility of complaints.

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

All attacks (46) documented during the month of August 2021 were directed against human rights organizations and organizations that carry out humanitarian actions.



During the month, we highlight the generalized attacks against the work of the organizations, mainly in the framework of the criminalization of international cooperation, as well as the attempts to discredit their documentation and complaint processes, in addition to the questioning of their independence.

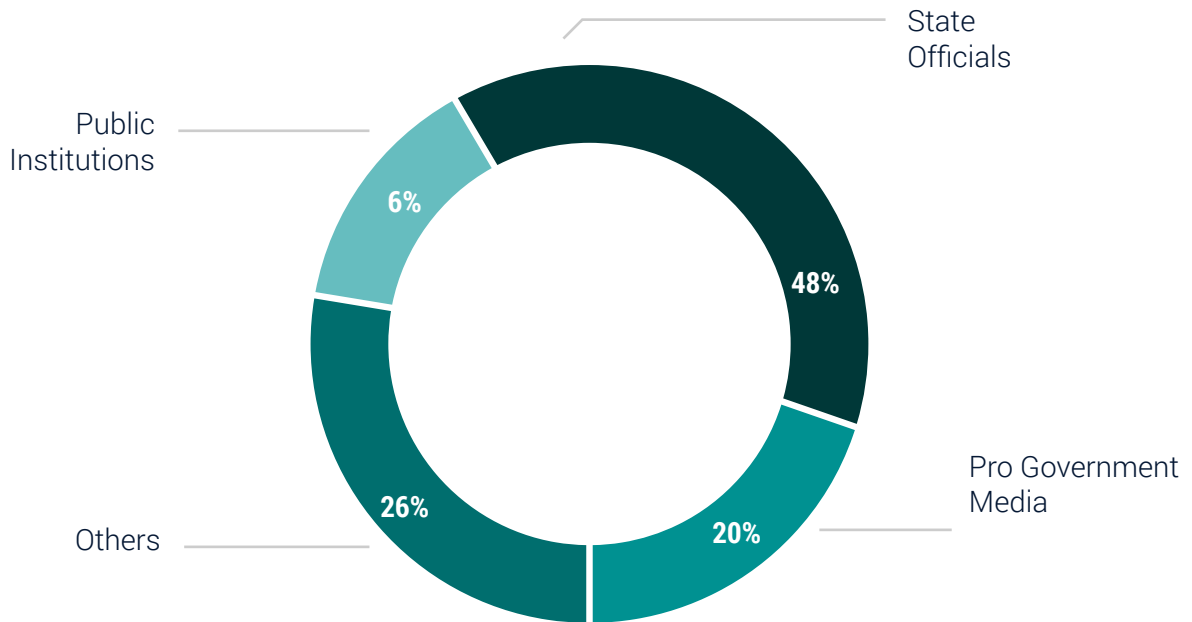
Among some of the cases, we highlight the systematic nature of the stigmatization, threats, and harassment campaigns against *Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA*; the accusations to the detriment of the organizations *Transparencia Venezuela*, Amnesty International, and the *Fundación de Derechos Humanos de los Llanos – Fundehullan*.

On the other hand, the organization Convite A.C. denounced the blocking of their website for several days.

PERPETRATORS

The main perpetrators for the attacks and security incidents documented during the month of August were distributed as follows:

A total of 22 (48%) of the events were carried out by public officials and members of the National Executive Power, who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; 12 (26%) of the attacks were carried out by people or groups affected by the political interests of the State, members of the associated entities or that make up the Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3), the aggressors mainly perpetrated threats, acts of intimidation and harassment and joined the stigmatization campaigns; 9 (20%) the attacks were perpetrated from the state's traditional and digital media and their social media accounts; finally, 3 were the responsibility of Public Institutions or State entities (6%).



02 THE LOGIC OF THE INTERNAL ENEMY USED TO ACCUSE AND DISCREDIT ACTIONS OF DEFENSE AND DEMANDING OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Stigmatization campaigns are presented as the main form of aggression between the different patterns that make up the Criminalization Policy against those who promote, defend and demand human rights in Venezuela.

Hate speeches, calls for violence, and discrediting campaigns against those who make up the human rights movement in the country have been systematic in its nature and the starting point for committing other attacks to the detriment of people and organizations that carry out actions in this area, as they are considered Internal Enemies of the State. During the month of August, this pattern of attack continued to worsen, which is reflected in 37 new acts of stigmatization.

Starting from a discursive line based on the logic of the internal enemy, high-level public officials, including deputies and members of the Executive Power, and related journalists and communicators affiliated with the national system of public media, as well as individuals identified with Chavismo and the structures of the Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3 by its Spanish name), made use of different communication platforms, both traditional and digital, as well as their social media accounts to attack, offend and discredit those who defend human rights in the country.

The accusations against organizations for allegedly incurring illicit acts associated with crimes of organized crime and terrorism were recurrent¹.

¹Tweet from Llafrancis Colina. 01.08.21. Available in: <https://twitter.com/carollafra/status/1421879294880534529>

Tweet from Llafrancis Colina. 01.08.21. Available in: <https://twitter.com/carollafra/status/1421879672875458561>

Tweet by Ricardo González Alvarado. 01.08.21. Available in: <https://twitter.com/RicardoKonducta/status/1421853876156837890>

Tweet by Jorge Arreaza. 01.08.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/jaarreaza/status/1421850473188020224?s=20>

weet by Erika Ortega Sanoja. 08.08.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/ErikaOSanoja/status/1424336966909415426>

Tweet by Jorge Arreaza. 14.08.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/jaarreaza/status/1426702859911958528?s=19>

Tweet from Pablo Fernandez. 14.08.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/pabloefb/status/1426713377754206214?s=19>

Statements by Omar Prieto. 16.08.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/OmarPrietoGob/status/1427248448345186306>

Likewise, the media served as platforms for the broadcast and dissemination of content with which it was intended to accuse the movement and human rights organizations of being involved and collaborating with interventionist actions. Among the main programs and digital platforms responsible for stigmatization against organizations and human rights defenders and those who carry out humanitarian action are the following: *Con el Mazo Dando*, *La Hojilla*, *Zurda Konducta*, *Lechuguinos*, *La Iguana TV*, among others².

The accusations to criminalize international cooperation were recurrent, alleging that the organizations receive foreign financing for destabilizing purposes, as well as the speeches aimed at questioning the independence of the organizations, trying to link them with political-partisan associations, and the veracity of their complaints. on the human rights situation in the country.

These actions demonstrate that the work of denouncing, documenting, and accompanying victims of abuses of power and human rights violations continued to be uncomfortable for the Venezuelan State, which is why it continues to adapt and perfect the strategies to neutralize and impede their activities, starting with attempts to delegitimize their actions.

The CDJ is concerned about the increase in hate speech against the promotion, defense, and demand of human rights. The content of the statements of State officials worsened during the month of August, with calls and incitements, by different actors³, to commit acts of violence, harassment, and intimidation against human rights organizations and humanitarian organizations that operate in the country.

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#HABLEMOSDDHH

²Con el Mazo Dando. "Chancellor Jorge Arreaza questioned that Provea seeks to cloud the victory of the Venezuelan athletes in Tokyo. 01.08.21. Available at: <https://mazo4f.com/canciller-arreaza-cuestiono-que-provea-busque-empanar-victoria-de-los-atletas-venezolanos-en-tokio>

"Miserable and disgusting": Provea published a tweet for medals from Venezuela and they burst it in networks. La Iguana Tv. 02.08.21. Available at: <https://www.laiguana.tv/articulos/949343-provea-mensaje-medallas-venezuela/> FRUSTRATED! See how tweeters destroy Provea after disparaging the work of our Olympic athletes (+ TUIITS). Lechuguinos. 02.08.21. Available in:

<https://www.lechuguinos.com/tuiteros-destruyen-provea-atletas-olimpicos/>

Con el Mazo Dando. 04.08.21. Minutes: 47:20 - 48:30. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-B1Bdz50oo>

UNCOMMUNAL PLOTTING! Juan Guaidó has stolen \$ 135 billion from the Venezuelan people. Lechuguinos. 05.08.21. Available in: <https://www.lechuguinos.com/guaido-robado-135-mil-millones-dolares/>

Will the ICC Prosecutor's Office open an investigation against Venezuela? This says right-wing NGO. The Iguana Tv. 07.08.21. Available at: <https://www.laiguana.tv/articulos/951176-fiscalia-cpi-investigacion-venezuela-esto-dice-ong-provea/>

Tweet from the Samuel Robinson Institute. 11.08.21. Available at: https://twitter.com/isrobinson_/status/1425528593921216521

Zurda Konducta. 12.08.21. Minutes 1: 04: 00-1: 06: 46. Available in:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2qAJcQfxbo&t=5492s>

La Hojilla. 14.08.21. Minutes. 3: 34-6: 27. Available in:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkmcTPVZmM&ab_channel=LuiginoBracciRoadesdeVenezuela

La Hojilla 17.08.21. Minutes. 31: 32-35: 42. Available in:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pms5yoP4xyE&ab_channel=LuiginoBracciRoadesdeVenezuela

Con el Mazo Dando. 18.08.21. Minutes: 32:37 - 32:58. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJmq3bPZIXk>

Con el Mazo Dando. 18.08.21. Minutes 47: 24 - 47:37. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJmq3bPZIXk>

Con el Mazo Dando. 18.08.21. Minutes 53:50 - 54:00. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJmq3bPZIXk>

La Hojilla 24.08.21. Minutes. 2: 00: 15-2: 00: 47. Available in:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjOCTO1JAJ0&ab_channel=LuiginoBracciRoadesdeVenezuela

La Hojilla 24.08.21. Minutes. 2: 13: 11-2: 13: 48. Available in:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjOCTO1JAJ0&ab_channel=LuiginoBracciRoadesdeVenezuela

Tweet by José Roberto Duque: 08.28.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/JRobertoDuque/status/1431621432237338628>

<https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/fundehullan-hostigamiento-psuv-barinas/> Tweet by Juan Kursk. 30.08.21. Available at:

https://twitter.com/kursk_juan/status/1432506350014189576

³Tweet interaction. 01.08.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/RamonPach/status/1421889256696524807>

Tweet from Romain Migus. 01.08.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/RomainMigus/status/1421875261499449344?s=19>

FRUSTRATED! See how tweeters destroy Provea after disparaging the work of our Olympic athletes (+ TUIITS). Lechuguinos. 02.08.21. Available in:

<https://www.lechuguinos.com/tuiteros-destruyen-provea-atletas-olimpicos/>

We emphasize that to the extent that stigmatization campaigns from actors in positions of power increase and are strengthened, other individuals may be motivated to materialize threats and other types of aggression that could compromise the safety, freedom, integrity, and life of those who defend human rights in the country.

From the CDJ we warn that through stigmatization campaigns the Criminalization Policy against the defense and demand of human rights continues to deepen and strengthen, making the defense of rights a high-risk work. An immediate step that must be taken by the State to guarantee the free and non-retaliatory exercise of the right to defend rights is the immediate cessation of stigmatization.

03 THE DEFENSE AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

Given the increase in aggressions, limitations, and obstacles against the work of human rights and humanitarian action organizations in Venezuela, it is essential to reiterate the importance of the actions undertaken by civil society that is in the first line of action responding and attending to the socio-economic needs of the population and seeking the scope of justice and respect for fundamental freedoms.

In the context of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency and the restrictions on civic and democratic space, the resilience with which organizations and individuals have continued to work despite the Criminalization Policy exercised against them has been highlighted. However, the different reprisals and patterns of aggression that seek to inhibit its actions, the human rights movement has strengthened and persisted, from different areas, seeking the protection of human dignity.

From the *Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia*, we emphasize that in the context that Venezuela is currently going through, it is essential to guarantee propitious and safe environments for the exercise of the defense of human rights, in the understanding that the actions carried out by these people and organizations are fundamental for the full existence of democracy and the strengthening of the Rule of Law.

Any process aimed at solving the socio-political crisis that the country is going through must start from the perspective of human rights and it must be guaranteed that every person and organization that promotes, defends, and demands these rights does so without fear of reprisals or arbitrary limitations.

04 INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA

Faced with the advances in the Criminalization Policy for the defense and demand of human rights in Venezuela, international organizations and international organizations for the protection of human rights continue to speak out in rejection of the attacks committed and demanding that the State comply with its duty to promote and protect the work of human rights defenders.

On August 16, 2021, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) made a new statement regarding the implementation of Administrative Ruling No. ONCDOFT-002-2021 and how it represents a systematic threat against the work of the organizations and human rights. In addition, it considered that “the measure is part of an intimidating environment against people and organizations that defend human rights. In addition, it requires non-profit organizations to register with an anti-terrorist office, which promotes their stigmatization”⁴. Finally, the Commission reiterated what was stated in its press release No. 108/21⁵ in which, among other things, the State was urged to annul said Administrative Ruling, “because it is concerned that these measures, in addition to reaffirming the decomposition of the State of Law and democracy, can be used to repress, and even delegitimize and stigmatize, the work carried out by organizations that defend human rights”.

In relation to the pronouncements of international organizations, the following stand out:

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint program of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), spoke on two occasions in relation to the case of the Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA. The first, on August 13⁶, issued a press release in which they stated that “in a context of growing repression against civil society, the working conditions and security of human rights defenders in Venezuela are weakened. The acts of stigmatization against the PROVEA organization show the scope of the persecution of civil society actors. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT) urges the Venezuelan authorities to stop stigmatizing and criminalizing human rights defense organizations”. In addition, in the same communication they highlighted cases of arbitrary arrests of defenders during 2021, such as the five members of the organization Azul Positivo on January 14; of the three members of FundaRedes on July 2, 2021, among other attacks as evidence of the increase in attacks on defenders and civil society organizations.

On a second occasion, on August 16, the Observatory of OMCT and FIDH spoke through a series of messages on the social network Twitter rejecting the new attacks committed against the Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA; the international organization stated: “We urge the authorities to stop the attacks against Provea and all other civil society organizations”⁷.

⁶Press release. VENEZUELA: Attacks against human rights defenders and smear campaign against PROVEA. Paris-Geneva, August 13, 2021. In: <https://www.fidh.org/es/region/americas/venezuela/venezuela-ataques-contra-personas-defensoras-de-derechos-humanos-y>

⁷The Observatory @OBS_defenders: #Venezuela: Venezuelan authorities again attack @_Provea with false accusations of drug trafficking and corruption (FAE commander). We urge the authorities to stop the attacks against Provea and all other civil society organizations! In: https://twitter.com/OBS_defenders/status/1427312925342056455

05 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of the Enemy Within logic must cease. Human rights defenders and organizations are essential actors for democracy and their actions must be promoted and protected.

It is essential that for the solution of the existing socio-political crisis in the country, acts of violence, repression, and social control that the State uses as a means to remain in power and that generate negative impacts on the enjoyment of human rights in the country cease. Venezuela.

The different actors that make up the State must work in order to create propitious and safe environments so that those who promote, demand, and defend rights can do so freely and without fear.

As long as the actions aimed at reducing the civic and democratic space persists, it will continue to be a challenge and high-risk work for those who defend and demand human rights and for those who carry out humanitarian actions in the country.

Venezuelan citizens require the work and actions of documentation, denunciation, accompaniment, and assistance exercised by the human rights movement to the extent that social, economic and justice needs continue to exist.

We urge the State to fully comply with its international obligations to respect, protect and guarantee rights, including that of defending human rights and humanitarian action, immediately cease the Criminalization Policy and refrain from implementing the logic of the Internal Enemy.

We emphasize that acts of intimidation, harassment, stigmatization, aggression, threats, and other types of retaliation must be investigated and punished; Laws, mechanisms, and instruments contrary to the defense and demand of rights must be repealed and the State must seek the re-establishment of democratic institutions and the rule of law in accordance with Constitutional mandates.

We continue working for the establishment of effective public policies and mechanisms that seek and promote the effective protection of people and organizations that defend human rights in Venezuela.

From the CDJ we reaffirm our commitment to respect and guarantee the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and demonstration, freedom of expression. As well as the effective application of the Declaration on the right and duty of individuals, groups, and institutions to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms; known as the Declaration of Defenders, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1998.

CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA