



**CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA**

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

OCTOBER 2021

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Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ), **documented 73 attacks and security incidents during the month of October 2021 in Venezuela.**

The Policy of Criminalization, repression, and social control exercised by the Venezuelan State escalates. October reflected that those in the first line of action promoting, defending, and demanding human rights in the country continue to face a hostile context that exposes them to serious risks.

The restrictions on civic and democratic space, the consequences of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency, and the increase in institutional violence continue to affect the free exercise of activities of a humanitarian nature or in the field of human rights.

The use of the *Internal Enemy Logic* in Venezuela represents the starting point for the commission attacks against defenders and civil society organizations. Hate speech, discrediting, and calls of violence acts have led to an increase in violence against the human rights movement in the country.

The risks to which those who defend human rights are exposed, added to impunity for human rights violations and the lack of guarantees or effective public policies for the promotion and protection of their work, is contrary to the international obligations of the State, which systematically violates the rights to free association, expression, opinion and defense of human rights.

In order to advance in solving the social, political, and human rights crisis existing in the country, it is essential to build propitious and safe environments for the promotion, defense, and demand of rights, for these reasons we insist on the need to incorporate the Human rights perspective in the processes of dialogue and negotiation between political sectors, that are currently underway.

In order to guarantee the recovery of Democracy and the rule of law, the documentation, denunciation, visibility, and accompaniment actions must be promoted and respected without any type of retaliation.

01 INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT, AND THREATS AGAINST THOSE WHO DEFEND AND DEMAND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INTENSIFYING

73 new violations against the right to defend human rights in Venezuela during October 2021.

The deepening of violence against human rights defenders and civil society organizations is concerning. The attacks increase to the extent that the State, in accordance with the *Internal Enemy Logic*, criminalizes those who demand the fulfillment of their human rights obligations.

The materialization of violent acts as a result of stigmatization campaigns continues to negatively affect the defense, promotion, and demand of rights. This is demonstrated by the intensification of intimidation, harassment, and threats against those who defend and demand human rights.

The State is still not guaranteeing the conditions for the free exercise of activities in the field of human rights and humanitarianism, and on the contrary, repressive patterns continue to be perfected to limit and control its actions, based on a policy of terror that, in addition to affecting directly to the victims, it aims to have an inhibitory effect on the rest of those who defend, promote and demand human rights.

The State's Criminalization, Repression, and Social Control Policy continue to limit the organizations' operations and as a consequence stigmatization, intimidation, harassment and threats increase.

OCTOBER 2021 ATTACKS



73 ATTACKS

73 attacks and security incidents documented during the month of October show the increase in violence against people and organizations that defend human rights.

Stigmatization and the qualifications as enemies, traitors of the homeland, destabilizing agents, among others, continue to be the main way of attacking the defense, promotion, and demand of rights. These speeches encourage violent acts and have led to the materialization of more serious attacks against those who promote, defend and demand human rights, increasing acts of intimidation, harassment and threats.

The use of criminal law, with an emphasis on crimes associated with terrorism and organized crime, added to judicial harassment, increases as one of the mechanisms of retaliation for documenting, denouncing, and making visible the human rights crisis in Venezuela.

These events are intended to discourage the work of human rights defenders and organizations, but also represent a danger to them as it serves as a trigger for different actors to commit attacks and also to be protected by the structural impunity for human rights violations existing in Venezuela.

The 73 events registered during October were characterized by:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



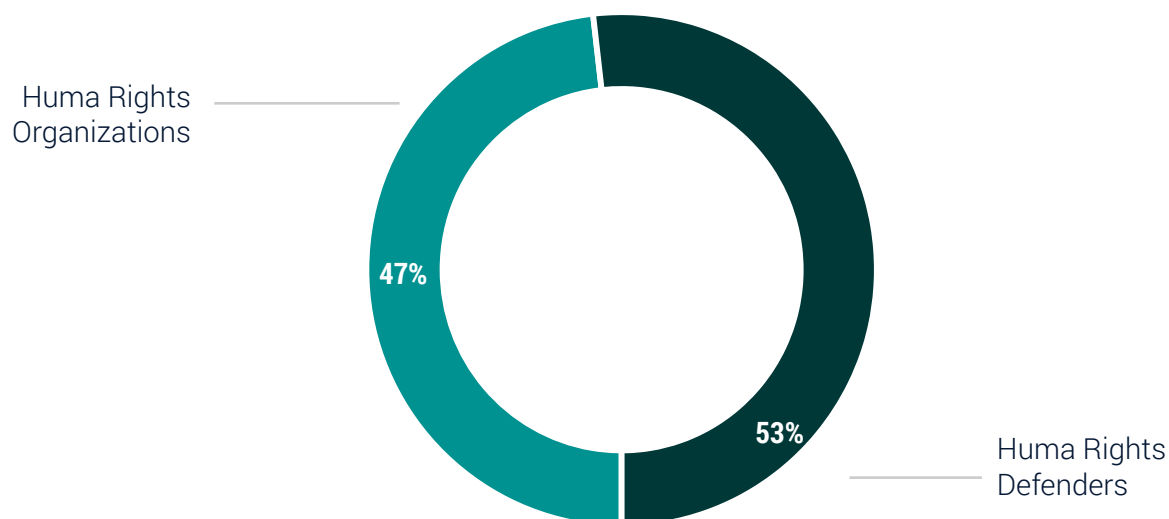
Accusations against human rights organizations of “destabilizers”, questioning the work of documentation of the complaint and documentation, describing them as “*anti-Chavistas*” and “*antimaduristas*”, “*showers*”, “*tarifadas*”, among others, are systematic.

These events have also generated an increase in acts of intimidation and harassment and threats by officials and other actors who compose the different structures of the Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3 by its Spanish name) or who identify with the ruling party, violating the activities of the organizations and representing an impact on the personal and psychosocial security of the defenders.

The persecution and judicial harassment, the threats to criminally investigate and limit the operation of organizations and human rights defenders increase, showing that the State aims to deepen the criminalization and repression of the defense and demand of rights.

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total number of documented attacks during the month of October 2021, 39 were against human rights defenders, equivalent to 53% of all. While 34 were aimed at human rights organizations and organizations that carry out humanitarian actions, representing the remaining 47%.



During the period under study, we observed a continuity in the generalized accusations against the work of the organizations, specifically in the framework of the criminalization of international cooperation. Likewise, the efforts of the State persist in reducing credibility to the documentation and denunciation work of the organizations.

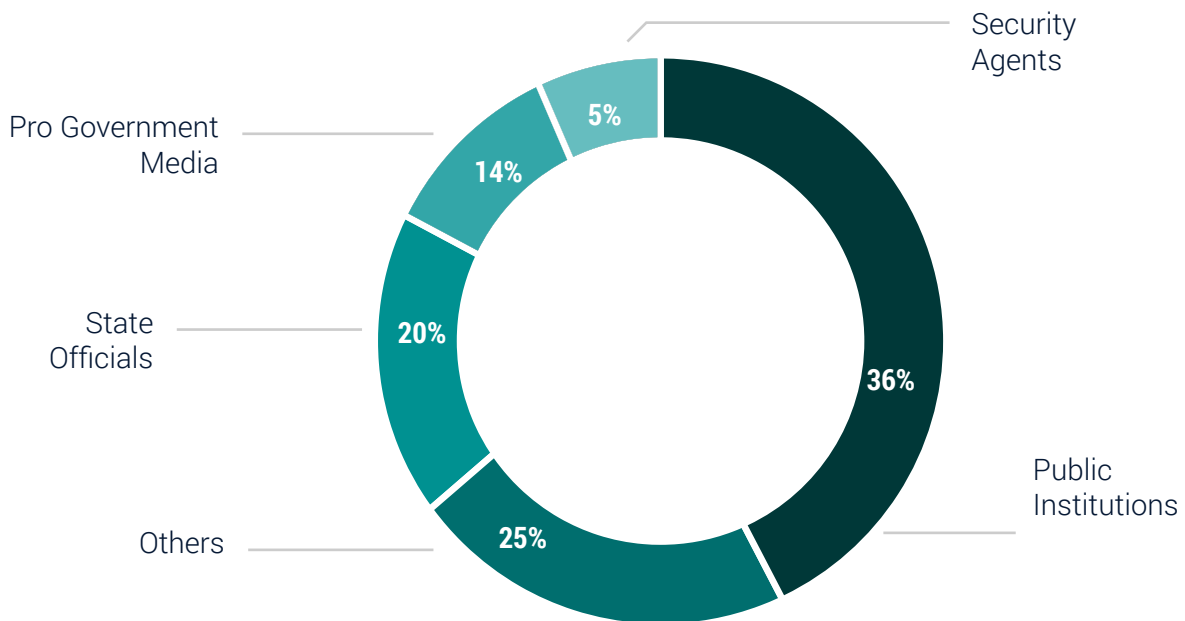
Some of the cases documented in October include the systematic nature of the stigmatization and harassment campaigns against the *Venezuelan Human Rights Education-Action Program - PROVEA*; the accusations to the detriment of the Transparency Venezuela organizations, *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS)*; acts of intimidation and threats against the organization for the *Promoción, Educación y Defensa en Derechos Humanos - PROMEDEHUM*, and *Fundación de Derechos Humanos de los Llanos – Fundehullan*.

We also highlight the increase in targeted attacks against defenders for the exercise of their activities. Some of the registered cases include Defender Rocío San Miguel, who was harassed and stigmatized; the judicial harassment against Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar García, members of the *FundaRedes* organization; threats against defenders Engels Puertas and Juan Carlos Barroeta of the organizations 100% Estrógeno and *Iciativa para una Justicia Igualitaria*; and acts of intimidation against members of the *Movimiento Vinotinto* organization.

PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 26 (36%) of the events were the responsibility of Public Institutions or government entities, including the Justice System; 18 (25%) were carried out by people or groups aligned with the political interests of the State, members of the associated entities or that make up the Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3), among others; 15 (20%) were made by public officials, mainly deputies and members of the national executive, who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; 10 (14%) of the attacks were perpetrated from the State's traditional and digital media and their social media accounts; finally, 4 (5%) of the events were the responsibility of State security agencies.



02 THE LOGIC OF THE INTERNAL ENEMY IS THE BASIS FOR THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE ACTIONS OF DEFENSE AND DEMANDING OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The defense of human rights remains under attack by the State. Efforts to criminalize organizations and defenders continue and deepen as the closure of civic and democratic space progresses. From the CDJ we warn on the enhancement of the aggression and attack patterns that are part of the systematic Criminalization Policy.

The environment for the defense and demand of human rights continues to be adverse and hostile for those who promote, defend and demand human rights in Venezuela. The 73 attacks and incidents documented in October demonstrate that the State continues to position defenders and civil society organizations as Internal Enemies that must be “neutralized” and consequently perfect the repressive mechanisms to limit and affect their actions.

Stigmatization continues to be the main form of attack within the different patterns used by the State to criminalize the promotion, defense, and demand of human rights in the country. In this sense, public officials, and members of the groups that make the life of the Popular Protection for Peace System (SP3), made use of their communication platforms and social networks, to point out, accuse, defame and threaten organizations and defenders of human rights.

During the period under analysis, the allegations were mainly oriented to questioning the independence of the organizations, the legitimacy of their work, and accusations of receiving foreign financing and participating in illicit corruption activities¹.

On the other hand, programs of the National System of Public Media, and other media of presumed private nature, but with a clear affinity to the communicational line of the State, also served as platforms to generate and disseminate opinion and research content against the work of the non-governmental organizations in the country. Consistent with the official discursive line, which identifies those who defend human rights as enemies, these media continued to reinforce the matrix of opinion that accuses organizations of receiving foreign funding, as well as responding to political interests and serving as “instruments” of national and international actors with interventionist and interference purposes. Among the main media, platforms, and institutes responsible for these events are *Zurda Konducta*, *Con el Mazo Dando*, *Lechuguinos*, *Correo Orinoco*, and the Samuel Robinson Institute².

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#HABLEMOSDDHH

¹Retweet by Larry Devoe. 13.10.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/PlasenciaFelix/status/1448383999412420611>

Tweet from Pedro Carvajalino. 15.10.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1448954010384355329>

<https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1448955705566838785>

Thread of tweets from Alejandro Yepez. 17.10.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/saltam0nte/status/1449805323531952134>

Tweet by Pedro Carvajalino. 18.10.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1450262324728766465>

User Tweet. 24.10.21. Available at: https://twitter.com/search?q=%2324Oct%20%20%40AlbertoRavell%20%2C%20%40rociosanmiguel%20%2C%20%40carlaangola%20%20y%20su%20jefecito%20%20%40juaideo%20%20los%20vende%20patria%20a%20servicio%20del%20imperio%20ya%20se%20les%20acabara%20la%20fiesta%20%23TarifadosDeIA%3%B1o&src=typed_query

User Tweet. 24.10.21. Available at: https://twitter.com/_Dios/status/1452340532487901191

User Tweet. 24.10.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/caballonegro606/status/1452317379661344771?s=24>

User Tweet. 24.10.21 Available at: https://twitter.com/search?q=EPA%20T%C3%A9A%20N0%20Y%20QUE%20DEFIENDES%20LOS%20DERECHOS%20HUMANOS.%20M%C3%8DTOMANA%20%20PALANGRISTA%20DE%20PROFESI%C3%93N.%20%20%20%20JAM%C3%81S%20QUISIERA%20PENSAR%20EL%20CAMINO%20DE%20LOS%20TRAIDORES.%20QUE%20POCA%20%20C3%89TICA%20%20FALTA%20DE%20CHERENCIA.%20PIENSO%20QUERES%20UNA%20LOCA%20M%C3%81S.&src=typed_query

Tweet by Gustavo Borges Revilla. 29.10.21. Available in: <https://twitter.com/GBorgesRevilla/status/1454438613165424651>

Tweet by Jorge Arreaza. 10.29.21. Available at: <https://twitter.com/jaarreaza/status/1454159351564877830?t=t8RszLV0X7GobV4j0uX2g&s=19>

²Samuel Robinson Institute addresses multipolarity and challenges of the global left. Orinoco Mail. 08.10.21. Available at: <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/instituto-samuel-robinson-aborda-multipolaridad-y-desafios-de-la-izquierda-mundial/>

The dance of dollars behind the “free press” and the destruction of democracies By: Ramón López Mena. Lechuguinos. 12.10.21.

Likewise, other actors through the media identified as “opponents of the government” issued accusations and accusations against the organizations and joined the speeches that criminalize international cooperation³.

As part of the concrete efforts aimed at criminalizing the defense and demand of human rights in Venezuela, threats of arrest and initiation of investigation processes were registered at the national level by public officials who have accused and identified individuals and organizations for carrying out activities for reporting and accompanying victims⁴. In this regard, intelligence agencies have also carried out investigations against defenders. This shows once again that the human rights movement and organized civil society are seen by the State as uncomfortable actors because, through their legitimate actions, they contribute to the fight against impunity, discretion, and arbitrariness of power.

October is presented as one of the months with the highest number of documented assaults so far this year. The documented situations showed a new peak in the increase in attacks and incidents and their nature, evidence that the State continues to improve its efforts to intimidate, intimidate and criminalize human rights defenders.

Intimidation, harassment, and threats from various actors against organizations and defenders show that the State aims to intimidate, frighten, inhibit and obstruct the work of those who defend and demand human rights, not only in a targeted manner, but also with the intention that each of their attacks can serve as exemplary messages towards the human rights movement in general.

Given the different situations documented during this period, the CDJ is concerned about the constant threats and calls for criminal investigations against the organizations, since the intention, will, and capacity of the State to make use of criminal law has been demonstrated as a mechanism to criminalize and neutralize who defend human rights.

The dance of dollars behind the “free press” and the destruction of democracies By: Ramón López Mena. Lechuguinos. 12.10.21.

Available at: <https://www.lechuguinos.com/danza-dolares-prensa-libre/>

Venezuela rejects the pronouncement of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Lechuguinos. 13.10.21. Available at: <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/venezuela-rechaza-el-pronunciamiento-de-la-oficina-de-la-alta-comisionada-de-la-onu-pa-ra-los-ddhh/>

Zurda Konducta. 15.10.21. Minutes. 1: 35: 41-1; 36: 37. Available at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x84whmo>

Con el Mazo Dando. 27.10.21. Minutes 53:25 - 53:56. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSvxxZ30IeY>

Zurda Konducta. 29.10.21. Minutes. 39: 50-40: 40. Available in:

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x856bnz>

³Fuera de Orden 70 | La Ñapa con Nehomar. 10.10.21. Minuts. 13:20-16:21. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SD-q6Pip3TCw>

⁴Frontlinedefenders. Urgent appeal “Intimidation and threat of arrest against human rights lawyers Engels Puertas and Juan Carlos Barroeta.” 12.10.21. Available at: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/intimidation-and-threat-arrest-against-human-rights-lawyers-juan-carlos-barroeta-rivas-and>

⁵Tweet de Fundaredes. 01.10.21. Disponible en: https://twitter.com/FundaREDES_/status/1443939591577276421?s=08

Tweet de Gonzalo Himiob. 14.10.21. Disponible en: <https://twitter.com/himiobsantome/status/1448707702742528007?s=27>

Tweet de alerta de Fundaredes. 21.10.21: https://twitter.com/FundaREDES_/status/1451294498227638273?t=BPEJlmCZFDWawm-RKM3pkAA&s=08

Tweet de Gonzalo Himiob. 28.10.21. Disponible en: <https://twitter.com/HimiobSantome/status/1453750555453632512?t=Bv4mcr-peBA1T5-hchneZdA&s=08>

A clear example of this is the arbitrary prosecution process against the members of the *FundaRedes* organization, Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García, who during the month of October continued to be subjected to judicial harassment in the framework of their process, mainly through 5 unjustified postponements of the preliminary hearing⁶. Although by the date of presentation of this report, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García were released under a presentation regime of 8 days; We emphasize that the process against them is still ongoing and, furthermore, the Director of *FundaRedes*, Javier Tarazona, continues to be illegally deprived of his freedom. The continuity of the prosecution process against the three defenders is a serious violation of human rights, especially the right to defend rights, and we reiterate the demand on the Venezuelan State to proceed with their immediate release, fully and without restriction.

We urge the representation of the Venezuelan State to immediately stop the attacks against human rights defenders and organizations. We insist on the need to create effective mechanisms for the investigation and punishment of those responsible for the violations against those who defend, promote and demand rights. Defending human rights is not a crime, and those who carry out this work, far from being enemies, are essential actors for society, consequently, it is imperative to build conducive and safe environments for the development of their work.

⁶Tweet de Fundaredes. 01.10.21. Disponible en: https://twitter.com/FundaREDES_/status/1443939591577276421?s=08

Tweet de Gonzalo Himiob. 14.10.21. Disponible en: <https://twitter.com/himiobsantome/status/1448707702742528007?s=27>

Tweet de alerta de Fundaredes. 21.10.21: https://twitter.com/FundaREDES_/status/1451294498227638273?t=BPEjlmCZFDWawm-RKM3pkAA&s=08

Tweet de Gonzalo Himiob. 28.10.21. Disponible en: <https://twitter.com/HimiobSantome/status/1453750555453632512?t=Bv4mcr-peBA1T5-hchneZdA&s=08>

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

The increase in the criminalization of the defense and demand of human rights in Venezuela continues to generate concern in the international community. International organizations and human rights protection organizations continue to express their concern and rejection of the attacks committed and urge the State to comply with its international obligations to promote, guarantee, respect, and protect the work of human rights defenders.

In this sense, on October 11, 2021, the Amnesty International organization took urgent action due to the case of the three defenders of the *FundaRedes* organization Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, and Omar de Dios García. The alarm expressed that the defenders had not been released after more than three months of arbitrary detention. The organization indicated that “their arbitrary detention and the subsequent criminal investigations against them must be brought to an immediate end”. Relevant elements of the case that generate concern were detailed and the State was urged to “immediately and unconditionally release Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, and Omar de Dios García, to close all criminal investigations on these human rights defenders and put an end to the harassment and the criminalization of non-governmental organizations in Venezuela”⁷.

For its part, Front Line Defenders (FLD) on October 12, 2021, issued an urgent appeal on behalf of human rights lawyers Engels Puertas and Juan Carlos Barroeta Rivas, due to acts of intimidation and threat of arrest against them. The organization condemned “*the improper use of the judicial system to criminalize the work carried out by human rights lawyers Engels Puertas and Juan Carlos Barroeta Rivas and urges the Venezuelan authorities to review the claims presented in their complaint to the General Inspectorate of Courts of Venezuela and that they withdraw the indictment of contempt against him*” (...). Likewise, among other requests, he urged the Venezuelan State to “*guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Venezuela can operate in a safe and conducive environment for the defense of human rights*”⁸.

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), made an urgent call regarding the complaint of hospitalization by COVID-19 of the defenders Rafael Tarazona and Omar García, members of the FundaREDES organization. In its communication, the Observatory urged the authorities “*to put an end to all kinds of harassment, including at the judicial level, against Rafael Tarazona, Omar García, and José Javier Tarazona and against their next of kin, and to take the necessary measures to guarantee the protection of FundaREDES membership, who are at serious risk of threats and harassment due to their work in defense of human rights*”⁹.

⁷Amnesty International. UA: 075/21 Index: AMR 53/4860/2021 Venezuela Date: October 11, 2021. URGENT ACTION VENEZUELAN DEFENDERS CONTINUE DETAINED. In: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/10/AMR5348602021SPAN-ISH.pdf>

⁸Front Line Defenders. Urgent Action. October 12, 2021 Venezuela: Intimidation and threat of arrest against human rights lawyers Engels Puertas and Juan Carlos Barroeta Rivas. In: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/flid_venezuela_12-10-21_spa_int.pdf

⁹Observatory 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). URGENT CALL. Venezuela: COVID-19 infection of FundaREDES members detained. In: <https://www.omct.org/es/recursos/llamamientos-urgentes/venezuela-infecci%C3%B3n-por-covid-19-de-los-miembros-de-fundaredes-detenido>

On October 27, 2021, Amnesty International once again spoke out in the case of the defenders of FundaRedes. In the urgent action issued, they expressed concern about the continued detention of defender Javier Tarazona while Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García were released under a regime of presentation and prohibition of leaving the country. Amnesty urged *“the immediate and unconditional release of Javier Tarazona, to close all criminal investigations into these three human rights defenders and also to end the harassment and criminalization of non-governmental organizations in Venezuela”*¹⁰.

04 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The defense and promotion of human rights is an essential element for the existence of democracy and the rule of law.

In a context such as the Venezuelan Complex Humanitarian Emergency, the human rights crisis merits an effective response to inaction and public mismanagement by the authorities. The actions taken by human rights defenders and organizations are essential to address the situation and protect the human dignity of Venezuelans.

The Venezuelan State must comply with its obligations to respect, guarantee and protect rights, including the right to defend human rights. To do this, to ensure the existence of conducive and safe environments in which the actions of documentation, denunciation, dissemination of the human rights situation, and the accompaniment of the victims can be exercised without fear of reprisals.

The work of human rights defenders and organizations is fundamental for the universal implementation of human rights, the validity of democracy, and the strengthening of the rule of law. The promotion, defense, and demand of rights are essential activities to advance in the solution of the structural problems that the country faces and that originate and perpetuate the crisis.

As the reduction of civic and democratic space deepens, the challenges and risks for the human rights movement deepen. The Criminalization Policy must cease immediately and the State must refrain from implementing the logic of the Internal Enemy. Acts of violence, repression, and social control by the State must be investigated and those responsible punished.

We insist on the importance of state actors, international organizations, and the international community working to advance the construction of conducive and safe environments so that those who promote, demand, and defend rights can do so freely and without fear of being victims of reprisals.

From the *Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia*, we insist on the need to include the human rights perspective in the processes of solving the political, economic, and social situation facing the country. The different political actors and the international community must ensure that a conducive and safe environment is established for the defense and demand of rights in order to guarantee that every person and organization that promotes, defends, and demands these rights does so without fear of reprisals. or arbitrary limitations.

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.

CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA