



**CENTRO PARA  
LOS DEFENSORES  
Y LA JUSTICIA**

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# **SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA**

**2021**

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# 01 743 VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS DURING 2021

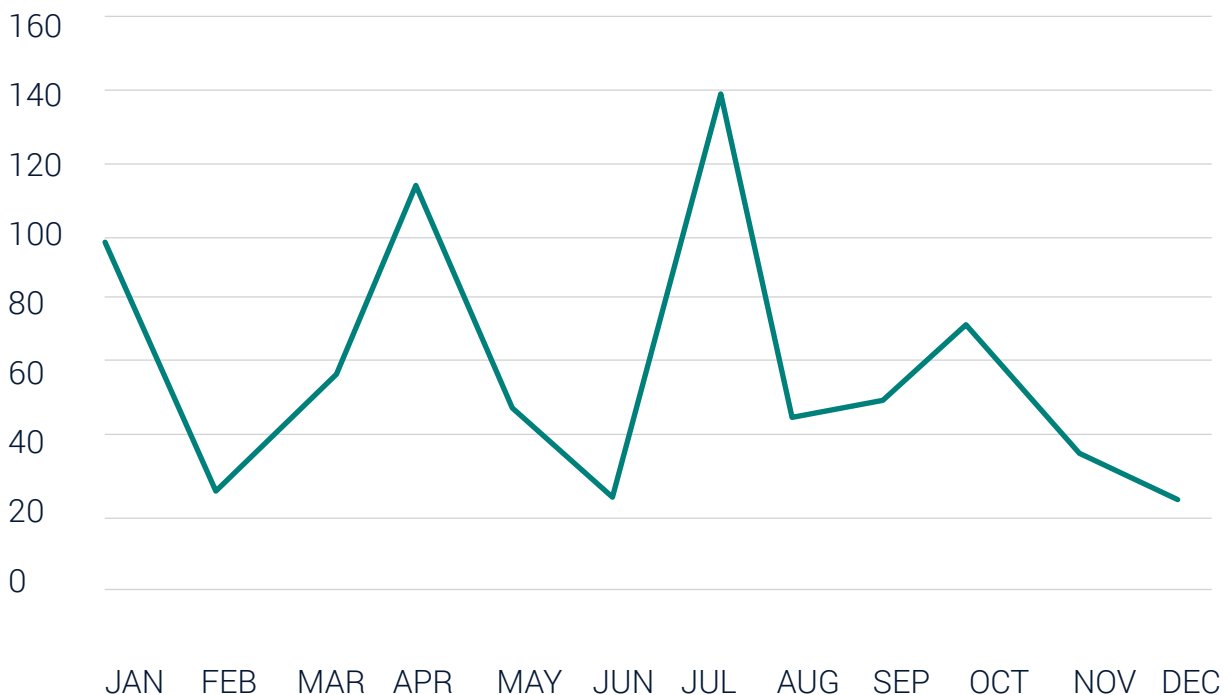
The Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ) documented **743 attacks and security incidents during 2021, which represents an increase of 145%** compared to the same period in 2020, when there were 303.

## ATTACKS 2021



2021 was marked by an increase of restrictions to civic and democratic space in Venezuela, with which Policy of Criminalization, Repression and Social Control intensified, generating serious violations of fundamental freedoms, mainly the rights to association, assembly, manifestation, expression, opinion and defense of human rights.

## DISTRIBUTION OF THE ATTACKS PER MONTH



Agressions and obstacles against people and organizations who defend human rights and humanitarian action increased, being one of the most complex and hostile years for the exercise of actions related to the defesed, demand and promotion of rights and humanitarian activity in the country.

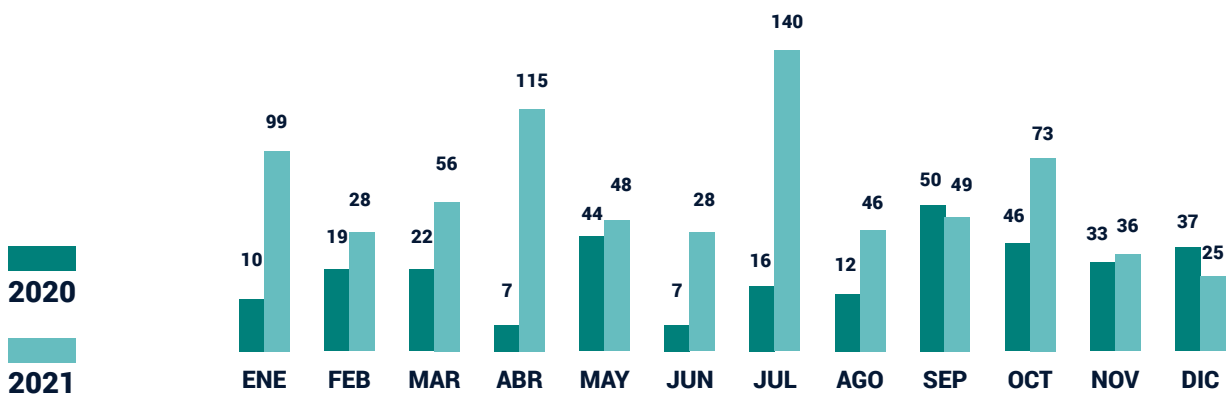
The Venezuelan State continued to apply the Internal Enemy Thesis and the National Security Doctrine through actions contrary to its international obligations, attacking those who are in the front line of action in response to the social and human rights crisis.

The levels of risks for the Human Rights Movement in the country augmented. The increase in use of criminal law to prosecute and the promulgation of new regulatory instruments associated with terrorism, organized crime and money laundering were used to justify the Internal Enemy Thesis, in addition to the lacks of mechanisms or public policies aimed at promoting and protecting the work of human rights defenders and organizations.

## 02 ATTACKS TO THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS INCREASED BY A 145% DURING 2021

The enviornment for defense, promotion and demand of human rights turned increasingly hostile and restrictive as days go by due to the different adverse circumstances that surround and condition the context in which those who defend and demand human rights in Venezuela operate.

During 2021, 743 events were documented that compromise and affect the right to defend human rights, representing an increase of 145% compared to 2020, in which 303 situations were recorded.



2021 was a year of great challenges and difficulties for the human rights movement in Venezuela. The entrenchment of criminalization as State Policy and the use of more violent, repressive and social control measures, resulting in at least 743 attacks and security incidents against human rights defenders and organizations in the country, reflect the lack of interest of the State in respecting democratic principles and the Rule of Law.

# 03 INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT AND THREATS AGAINST THOSE WHO DEFEND AND DEMAND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE ON THE RISE

The 743 attacks and security incidents documented during this period are mainly reflected in the following patterns of aggression.

## CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



In 2021 the environment for the defense of human rights and the response to the Complex Humanitarian Emergency, aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, became more hostile and restrictive for those defending and demanding rights in Venezuela. Increasing restrictions on civic and democratic space represented a serious threat to the defense, demand and promotion of human rights.

The exacerbation of violations against the right to defend human rights continued during the year. The State systematically applied different forms of violence to limit, hinder and affect the work of human rights defenders and organizations based on the Internal Enemy Thesis<sup>1</sup>.

The patterns of aggression and intimidation that are part of the Criminalization Policy reflect the repressive actions and social control exercised by the State in an environment of serious restrictions on civic and democratic space.

Stigmatization as the basis to endorse and facilitate criminalization, the different disqualifying speeches, calls for violence, accusations of “enemies”, “traitors”, “destabilizing agents” among others, added to the use of criminal legislation and other normative instruments. Contrary to the obligations of the State in the face of the promotion and protection of the defense of human rights, they were used in order to prevent, control and hinder the actions of documentation, denunciation, incidence, cooperation and humanitarian action, carried out by non-governmental organizations. to face the socio-political and human rights crisis existing in the country and assist and accompany the victims of abuses and crimes committed by the State in their processes of truth, justice and reparation.

The repressive measures and social control were applied with greater force against those who carry out activities related to the vindication and protection of rights. Increasing the violence against them. This is evidenced by the increase in acts of intimidation, harassment and the materialization of threats with the initiation of investigations and criminal proceedings, arbitrary detentions, raids, without the existence of effective mechanisms to guarantee the exercise of their work.

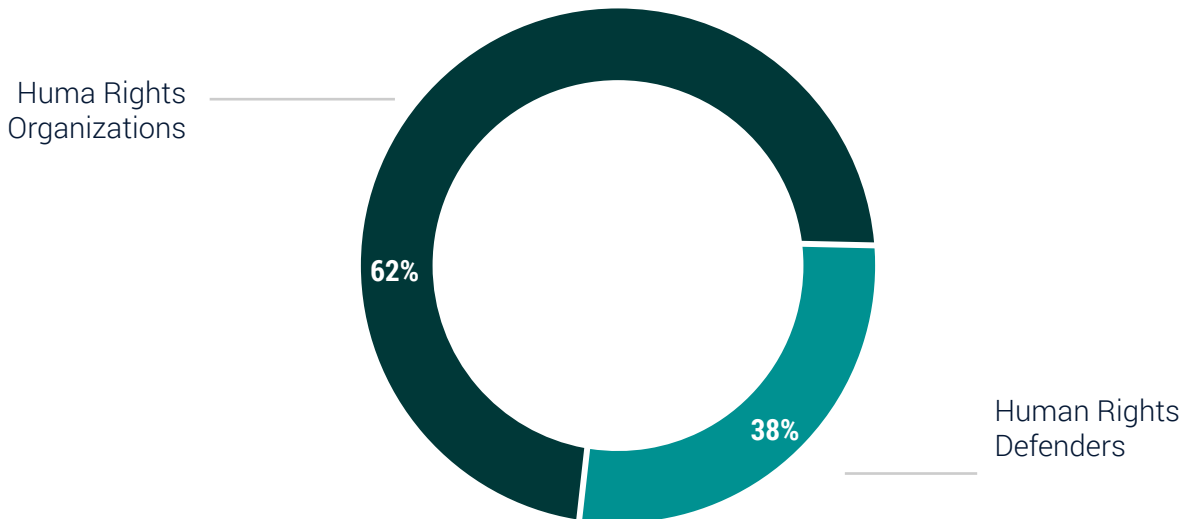
The State continues to fail to guarantee an enabling and safe environment for the human rights movement. The organizations and defenders are in a state of and absolute lack of protection, not only due to the absence of effective measures to guarantee their protection and that of their work, but also due to the lack of investigation and punishment of the situations occurred against them by the competent bodies, given the institutional breakdown and the cooptation of the public authorities.

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

<sup>1</sup> The Venezuelan State, within the framework of its repressive policy, has developed the thesis of the Internal Enemy, based on the doctrine of National Security. Accordingly, any person who dissents, opposes or challenges government management is considered an enemy of the interests of the State and a danger to national security. For this reason, those who carry out actions of documentation, denunciation, promotion and demand for rights face repressive actions, criminalization and social control as a form of retaliation.

**VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS**

During 2021, the community of human rights and humanitarian organizations operating in the country were the most affected, with 457 aggressions and threats against them, facing various acts exercised by the State in order to hinder or impede their work; equivalent to 62% of the total documented. Meanwhile, 286 of the situations recorded were committed individually against human rights defenders, representing the remaining 38%.



Of those affected, at least **15 were women defenders**, who repeatedly faced stigmatization campaigns, threats and situations of violence related to their work in the defense of human rights.

**VICTIMS PER MONTH**

| JAN              | FEB             | MAR              | APR              | MAY              | JUN              |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 59 NGO<br>40 HRD | 21 NGO<br>7 HRD | 40 NGO<br>16 HRD | 64 NGO<br>51 HRD | 31 NGO<br>17 HRD | 26 NGO<br>2 HRD  |
| JUL              | AUG             | SEP              | OCT              | NOV              | DEC              |
| 68 NGO<br>72 HRD | 46 NGO<br>0 HRD | 34 NGO<br>15 HRD | 34 NGO<br>39 HRD | 20 NGO<br>16 HRD | 14 NGO<br>11 HRD |



**MOST RELEVANT EVENTS THAT OCCURRED DURING THE YEAR**

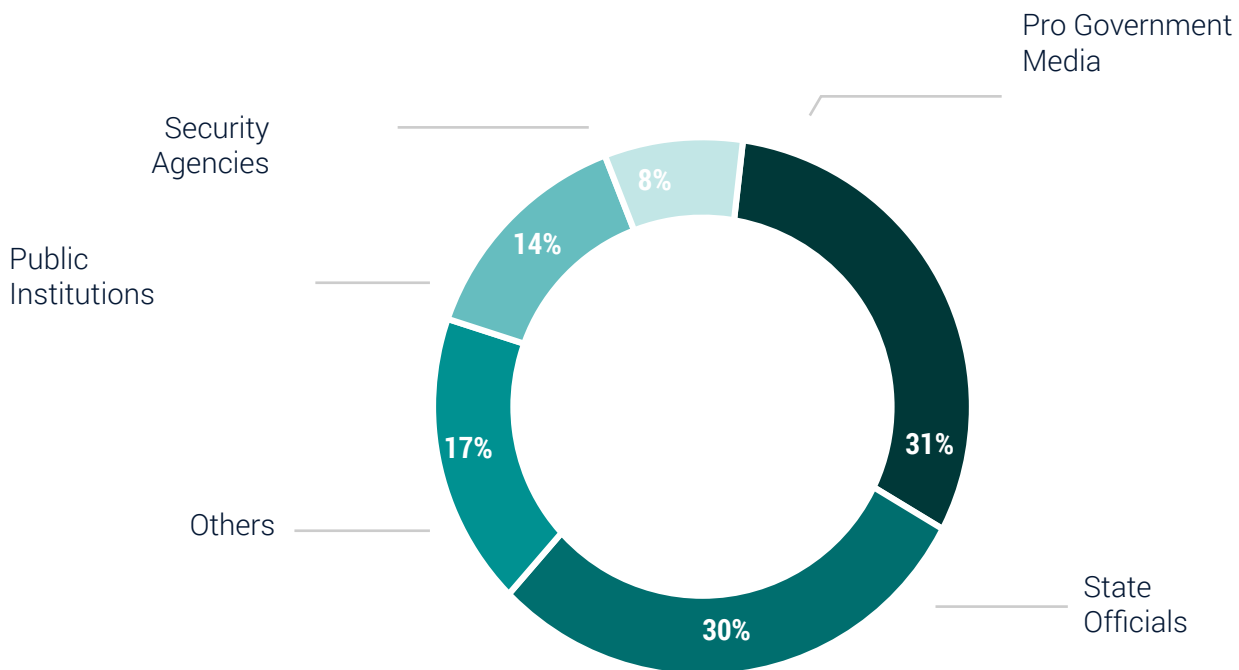
The raid of the humanitarian organization, *Acción Zuliana por la Vida (Azul Positivo)*, in Maracaibo, Zulia State, and the prosecution of five of its members, defenders Johan Manuel León Reyes, Layner Cristian Gutiérrez Díaz, Luis Ramón Ferrebus Cabrera, Alejandro Andrés Gómez Di Maggio, Yordi Tobías Bermúdez Gutiérrez and Miguel Guerra, The members of *Azul Positivo* were victims of arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, torture and were subjected to various irregularities in their trial after being charged with the crimes of money laundering, provided in Article 35 of the Law Against Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism; Association for the purpose of committing a crime, as provided for in Article 35 of the aforementioned law and Fraudulent handling of smart cards or similar instruments, as provided for in the Special Law against Computer Crimes, simply for carrying out humanitarian actions within the framework of the humanitarian response carried out in cooperation with United Nations agencies and international organizations. The 5 human rights defenders were arbitrarily deprived of their liberty for 30 days at the headquarters of the General Directorate of Military Counter Intelligence (DGCIM by its Spanish acronym) in Maracaibo, having been victims of various human rights violations. The 5 humanitarian workers were released with a substitute measure to the deprivation of liberty of having to appear every 30 days before the Court. At the date of publication of this report, the criminalization process continues, which has represented several obstacles for the free and fearless exercise of the organization's activities.

During the year, *FundaRedes* was the victim of constant aggressions against it. Stigmatization campaigns, threats and acts of intimidation were constant during the first half of 2021. Members of the organization were subjected to harassment, arbitrary detention and forced disappearance. The threats against them worsened between April and May as a result of the denunciations made by the organization regarding the events that occurred in the context of the armed conflict in the state of Apure<sup>2</sup>. As a result of the documentation and denunciation work carried out, at the beginning of July the aggressions materialized with the arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, and prosecution of three members of the organization, its Director, Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, and Omar de Dios García. Since their detention, the defenders have been subjected to an arbitrary judicial process against them, plagued with irregularities that have been detrimental to the right to due process, such as attempts to impose a public defense, unjustified deferrals of hearings, among others, as an evident form of judicial harassment. The three defenders were charged with the crimes of instigation to hatred, treason and terrorism. Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García were deprived of their freedom for 3 months until they were released in October under a regime of presentation every 8 days; Javier Tarazona has been detained for more than 200 days in the facilities of the Bolivarian Service of National Intelligence (SEBIN by its Spanish name) and has suffered serious damage to his health. We also highlight that in the framework of this process the headquarters of the organization and the residence of Javier Tarazona were raided and the accusations and stigmatization campaigns against him have not ceased. At the time of presentation of this report, the judicial process against the three members of *FundaRedes* is still ongoing, the judicial process against the three defenders is a serious violation of human rights, especially the right to defend rights and we reiterate the demand to the Venezuelan State to proceed to their immediate release in a full and unrestricted manner.

We also highlight the repeated threats and acts of stigmatization against the organization *Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos (Provea)* and two members of its coordination, human rights defenders Rafael Uzcátegui and Marino Alvarado; the systematic stigmatization campaigns against the woman human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, director of the organization *Control Ciudadano*; the repeated accusations against *Transparencia Venezuela* and acts of harassment against its team; accusations against the organizations *Amnesty International*, *Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)*, *Espacio Público (EP)*; *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS Venezuela)*; *Centro Justicia y Paz (Cepaz)*; *Foro Penal* and members of its board; intimidation, threats and digital attacks against *Asociación Civil Promedehum*; harassment and intimidation against the organizations *Convite A.C.*, *Movimiento Vinotinto* and *Fundación de Derechos Humanos de los Llanos – Fundehullan*, among others.

**PERPETRATORS**

A total of 229 (31%) of the attacks were perpetrated from the traditional and digital media of the State and its accounts in social networks; 221 (30%) of the acts were carried out by public officials, including members of the Executive, deputies, ministers, among others, who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; 127 (17%) of the attacks were carried out by people or groups linked by the political interests of the State, members of entities associated with or that make up the Popular System for the Protection of Peace (SP3 by its Spanish acronym)<sup>3</sup>, journalists and opinion-makers affiliated with the United Socialist Party from Venezuela (PSUV by its Spanish acronym); 103 were the responsibility of Public Institutions or government entities (14%); and other actors; and 63 events were carried out by State security agencies (8%).



<sup>3</sup>Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS). Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3), specifically of the Popular Subsystem that contemplates the participation of Communes, Communal Councils and Missions to carry out surveillance, security and social control tasks. <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/sin-categoria/aumenta-el-control-social-discriminacion-y-represion-en-venezuela-red-de-articulacion-y-asociacion-politica-raas>  
 Ver: <http://historico.tsj.gob.ve/gaceta/enero/1612015/1612015-4183.pdf#page=1>

The main perpetrators of the aggressions committed against those who defend and demand human rights identified, were mostly high-ranking State officials, the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches were among the main perpetrators, the Attorney General and the Ombudsman, also perpetrated attacks against those who defend, demand and promote human rights in Venezuela. They not only carried out systematic acts of stigmatization, but also promoted violence against defenders, through threats, incitement and acts of intimidation and harassment, as well as omitting their duties to act and investigate the aggressions committed against these people.

For their part, security agencies such as the Bolivarian National Police, the General Directorate of National Counterintelligence (DGCIM by its Spanish name), the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN by its Spanish name), stata police, perpetrated arbitrary detentions, arbitrary raids, ill-treatment and other acts of intimidation and harassment.

Programs televised and hosted by public officials or persons linked with the government, television channels and State media, radio stations and digital platforms, members of the national public media system served as a platform for stigmatization campaigns and calls for violence. Likewise, other media acting under State guidelines were used to discredit and attack the organizations. Among the most prominent are *Con el Mazo Dando*, *Misión Verdad*, *La Hojilla*, *Zurda Konducta*, *La Iguana.Tv*, *Aporrea*, *La Tabla* and *Correo del Orinoco*.

Other actors, including members of the Popular System for the Protection of Peace (SP3 by is Spanish name), such as *Colectivos*<sup>4</sup>, Bolivar Chavez Battle Units (UBCh by is Spanish name) , members of communal councils, members of the Articulation and Socio-Political Action Networks (RAAS by is Spanish name)<sup>5</sup> carried out violent actions, threats and acts of intimidation and harassment. Members associated to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV by is Spanish name)<sup>6</sup>, journalists identified with the ideals of the national Executive are also part of this group identified among the perpetrators of the violations.

# 04

## THE LOGIC OF THE INTERNAL ENEMY IS THE BASIS FOR THE CRIMINALIZATION OF ACTIONS IN DEFENSE AND DEMAND FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.

During the year 2021, the space for the defense, promotion and demand of human rights became increasingly hostile and adverse.

<sup>4</sup>Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS). The OVCS has defined paramilitary organizations as pro-government groups of armed civilians that act with the endorsement or tolerance of the representatives of public powers and in coordination with the State's public forces. It is noteworthy that the Paramilitary groups are also identified as "Colectivos" or Armed Collectives. These criminal paramilitary groups have been mixed and mimicked with expressions of organization and popular participation such as communes, community councils and social groups. <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/oc/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Informe-Manifestantes-en-la-mira-de-paramilitares.pdf>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.psuv.org.ve/temas/noticias/ubch/>

<sup>6</sup>Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS). It is defined by the government as a Superior Unit Model for the defense of the nation. <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/sin-categoria/aumenta-el-control-social-discriminacion-y-represion-en-venezuela-red-de-articulacion-y-asociacion-politica-raas>

Agressions increased as a result of the practical application and institutionalization of the internal enemy thesis. The 743 documented attacks show that, far from taking measures to guarantee the security and protection of human rights defenders, the Venezuelan State continues to strengthen the Criminalization Policy, attacking, obstructing and adopting increasingly restrictive measures to the right to defend human rights, freedom of association and assembly and freedom of expression.

**Stigmatization was the main form of attack.** The official discourse of the State in relation to the defense of human rights continued to be based on hate speech against defenders and organizations, accusing them of being “mercenaries” and “traitors to the country”, as well as of working with governments. foreigners to promote interventionist actions. Likewise, it is necessary to highlight that, during the year, the content of the official discourse escalated with threats, accusations, and accusations that sought to link the human rights movement with criminal activities related to corruption, organized crime, money laundering, and terrorism.

**The purpose of the accusations is to classify human rights defenders and organizations as “internal enemies” or “enemies of the country”,** thus creating not only a matrix of opinion that antagonizes their work, but also serving as justification for the commission of acts that seek to neutralize and limit their actions. In this way, the human rights movement, as well as organizations and defenders in particular, were subjected to stigmatization campaigns in social networks, media affiliated to the National System of Public Media, or those affiliated to the government, television programs and official speeches for the mere fact of carrying out their work.

Acts of stigmatization are the starting point for the increasingly severe application of the logic of the internal enemy. The accusations and calls and incitement to violence<sup>7</sup>, serve as triggers for other actors such as public institutions, members of the Popular System of Protection for Peace and third parties close to the government, to materialize acts of violence, reflected in actions that compromise the freedom, security and integrity of individuals and defense organizations.

What was described made it possible to document an evident increase in acts of intimidation and harassment, prosecutions, arbitrary detentions, raids, threats and other attacks in order to intimidate organizations and defenders, and to serve as an exemplary message addressed to the human rights movement. in order to make them feel afraid to carry out its activities for fear of reprisals.

On the other hand, the Internal Enemy Thesis has been used to deepen the strategies of criminalization of the international cooperation activities of the organizations, alleging the alleged use of funds from cooperation to “promote interference and activities associated with terrorism”. Based on this, the State not only continued to perfect the pattern of attack, but also justified in 2021 the adoption of new restrictive measures for the operation of the organizations.

In this context, after the installation of the National Assembly with a pro-government majority in January 2021, the threats for the approval of an International Cooperation Law increased, being announced in March 2021<sup>8</sup> by the National Executive, its inclusion in the legislative package proposed for approval for that year. In that same line, in April 2021 the Foreign Policy Commission of the National Assembly announced that the Bill will be presented “soon” before the plenary of the Assembly<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, it is necessary to remember that the attempts to approve a cooperation law date back to 2005, and only in the year 2020 there were 5 threats against civil society to be “severely” sanctioned under this regulation<sup>10</sup>.

As part of the reduction of the Civic and Democratic Space, the State kept adapting the legal and regulatory framework to control and restrict the work of the organizations. Under an apparent legal cloak, the state representation took actions tending to close the operative spaces of the organizations, establishing new requirements in an ambiguous and arbitrary manner, for their full legal functioning.

The adoption of Administrative Ruling No. *ONCDOFT-001-2021*, amended by No. *ONCDOFT-002-2021*<sup>11</sup>, obligates organizations to register in a Unified Register of Regulated Entities of the National Office against Organized Crime and Terrorist Financing and, among other things, to provide the office’s authority with information on their activities<sup>12</sup>. This instrument is evidence of the continuous efforts to link the legitimate actions of the organizations with alleged terrorism, as well as the progress in the measures to neutralize the work of the organizations through arbitrary limitations to international cooperation.

This new normative instrument, of sub-legal rank, pretends to regulate human rights, contrary to the principles of international law. This document is not presented as a new or isolated fact, but adds to another series of regulations and mechanisms that have been created since 2002<sup>13</sup> in order to endorse the State’s thesis that human rights organizations and defenders belong to illegal groups, also linked to terrorism and organized crime.

This fact materializes the systematic calls of officials on the regulation and control of human rights organizations that carry out actions within the framework of international cooperation, seeking to regulate not only the use of financial resources, but also to control the technical cooperation activities and alliances that the organizations have with international peers or other foreign actors or the international community.

<sup>8</sup>“Consejo de Ministros”. 02.03.21. Minutes 15:59 – 16:11 Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W44ijVZIHZE>

<sup>9</sup>“Asamblea Nacional”. They Will present a project in International Cooperation. 15.04.21. Available in: <http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/presentaran-proyecto-de-ley-de-cooperacion-internacional>

<sup>10</sup>Con el Mazo Dando, programa 289. Cartelera informativa. Minute 59:00:00 - 1:01:10. Available in: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bOU\\_oXX73M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bOU_oXX73M) Con en el Mazo dando, program 294. 28.03.20. Minutes 1:30:22 - 1:32:35 . Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFmNCoigjdk&pbjreload=10> Con el mazo dando. 04.11.20. Minutes 1:28:22 – 1:30:21 Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AasZ4SNI4Y4> Con el mazo dando. 18.11.20. Minutes 1:14:29 – 1:18:46. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw86eqoJ0kY> Con el mazo dando. 09.12.20. Minutes: 2:17:55 - 2:20:01. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcyJMjoeuGg>

<sup>11</sup>Gaceta Oficial Nro. 42.118 del 3 de mayo de 2021. Available in: [http://spgoin.imprentanacional.gob.ve/cgi-win/be\\_alex.cgi?Documento=T028700035845/0&Nombrebd=spgoin&CodAsocDoc=2526&TipoDoc=GCTOF&t05=png&TSalida=l&Session=164964439&T05=PDF&T04=0](http://spgoin.imprentanacional.gob.ve/cgi-win/be_alex.cgi?Documento=T028700035845/0&Nombrebd=spgoin&CodAsocDoc=2526&TipoDoc=GCTOF&t05=png&TSalida=l&Session=164964439&T05=PDF&T04=0)

<sup>12</sup>“Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia.” Situation of human rights defenders in Venezuela - First semester of 2021. 2021. Available in: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/?p=281>

<sup>13</sup>Visit Annual Report of the “Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ)”. Available in: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/INFORMECDJ-2020.pdf>

The attacks and harassment against those who defend, promote and demand, do not occur as an isolated event, but is configured as a systematic State Policy, applied in a context of authoritarianism and coopttion of the public powers. This is why the State persists and perfects its actions aimed at neutralizing the work of documenting and denouncing human rights violations.

The CDJ expresses its concern about the different situations documented during the year 2021, since, with the reduction of civic and democratic spaces, and the deepening of repressive patterns, criminalization and control of the human rights movement has raised the levels of risk for the exercise of their work; in addition, it sets a precedent for the possible increase of persecution during 2022.

As long as the Complex Humanitarian Emergency remains in force in the country, and abuses and arbitrariness, human rights violations and crimes against humanity continue to be committed, the work of documenting, denouncing, assisting and accompanying victims is vital for the vindication of their rights, the recovery of the rule of law and democratic principles. Therefore, those who carry out these activities must be able to do so safely, without arbitrary obstacles or limitations, and without fear of reprisals.

# 05 INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA

International human rights protection organizations, international organizations with a mandate to protect human rights defenders and representatives of the international community continue to follow up, monitor and accompany human rights defenders and organizations in the face of the worsening criminalization, stigmatization and harassment exercised by the State.

Given the worsening of the attacks on civil society and the increase in restrictions on civic and democratic space, during the year a series of pronouncements and actions were carried out demanding an end to the criminalization and persecution of human rights organizations and human rights defenders, as well as humanitarian organizations in Venezuela.

Among the main appeals registered are those related to the case of the *Asociación Civil Acción Zuliana por la Vida (Azul Positivo)*. Different instances such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) <sup>14</sup>; United Nations humanitarian agencies such as UNAIDS in Geneva and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordination Office (OCHA) in Venezuela ; the UN AIDS office in Geneva, the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization ; and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) , rejected the attacks against the organization and demanded the release of its members and an end to criminalization.

<sup>14</sup>See: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26660&LangID=S>

Nations Humanitarian Coordination Office (OCHA) in Venezuela<sup>15</sup>; the UN AIDS office in Geneva, the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization<sup>16</sup>; and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)<sup>17</sup>, rejected the attacks against the organization and demanded the release of its members and an end to criminalization.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued two press releases during the period in conjunction with its Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression (RELE), condemning the attacks against journalists, media and human rights defenders in Venezuela, pointing out that the closure of civic and democratic space leads to violations of the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association and the defense of human rights. The statements highlighted the patterns of aggression and urged the State to cease criminalizing the organizations; they also urged the State to repeal the Unified Registry of Obligated Parties of the National Office Against Organized Crime and Terrorist Financing (*ONCDOFT* by its Spanish acronym) and to guarantee freedom of association<sup>18</sup>. The organization also published its report on the human rights situation during 2020, including in Chapter IV B. a detailed analysis of the situation in Venezuela, which includes a specific section on the situation of human rights defenders in the country, highlighting the existence of a hostile environment for the defense of rights and demanded that the State adopt measures to guarantee and respect the human rights of human rights defenders<sup>19</sup>. In July, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its Special Follow-up Mechanism for Venezuela (MESEVE by its Spanish name) expressed concern over the detention of the members of FundaRedes and recalled that the defender Javier Tarazona is the beneficiary of precautionary measures granted by the international organization. They also recalled that *“the work of human rights defenders is essential for the construction of a democratic society”* and called on the Venezuelan State to *“protect and respect the life, integrity, and judicial guarantees through due process”*<sup>20</sup>.

On August 16, 2021, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued a new statement regarding the implementation of Administrative Ruling No. ONCDOFT-002-2021 and how it represents a systematic threat against the work of 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”*<sup>21</sup>. Finally, the Commission reiterated what it stated in its Press Release No. 108/21<sup>22</sup> in which, among other things, it urged the State to annul the Administrative Ruling, *“since it is of concern that these measures, in addition to reaffirming the breakdown of the rule of law and democracy, could be used to repress, and even delegitimize and stigmatize, the work carried out by human rights organizations”*.

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#HABLEMOSDDHH

<sup>15</sup>See: <https://twitter.com/onuvenezuela/status/1352238323834748930>

[https://twitter.com/OCHA\\_Venezuela/status/1352240655469338626](https://twitter.com/OCHA_Venezuela/status/1352240655469338626)

[https://twitter.com/ONUSIDA\\_VE/status/1349155309181411331](https://twitter.com/ONUSIDA_VE/status/1349155309181411331)

[https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2021/january/20210129\\_venezuela](https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2021/january/20210129_venezuela)

<sup>16</sup>See: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/noon-briefing-highlight?date%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=29%20January%202021>

<sup>17</sup>See: <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1349852822267953153>

<sup>18</sup>Visit: Press release 25/21. The IACHR and its RELE condemn attacks against human rights defenders and journalists, and warn of the closure of democratic spaces in Venezuela. February 5, 2021. In: <https://mailchi.mp/dist/cidh-y-rele-condenan-los-ataques-contradefensoreas-de-derechos-humanos-y-periodistas-y-advierten-sobre-cierre-de-espacios-democraticos-en-venezuela?e=8271a8a5d2> Organization of American States. Press Release No. 108/21. 30.04.2021. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE). “The IACHR and its RELE reject the registration of non-profit organizations before the National Office Against Organized Crime and Terrorist Financing of Venezuela.” In: <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2021/108.asp>

<sup>19</sup>Organization of American States. Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. In: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/annual/2020/capitulos/IA2020cap.4b-VE-es.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1411375453819092993> y <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1411375455198920707>

<sup>21</sup>Visit IACHR: <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1427342021354721284>

<sup>22</sup>The IACHR and the RELE reject the registration of non-profit organizations before the National Office against Organized Crime and Terrorist Financing of Venezuela. April 30, 2021. In: <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2021/108.asp>

United Nations (UN) bodies also made several statements regarding the situation of human rights defenders in the country.

In February, four Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council, including the Special Rapporteurs on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the situation of human rights defenders; and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, issued a joint statement in which they called for an end to the criminalization of civil society<sup>23</sup>. In April, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, Ms. Mary Lawlor, shared through her social networks the letter sent to the Venezuelan State for the intensification in recent months of pressure against civil society working to alleviate the humanitarian crisis<sup>24</sup>. The Rapporteur shared information on the communication sent in February jointly by different special procedures of the Human Rights Council<sup>25</sup>, to the Venezuelan State in relation to the cases of the organizations *Azul Positivo*, *Convite A.C.* and the woman human rights defender Vanessa Rosales. The Rapporteur reiterated that the defenders should never have been subjected to retaliation.

In March, Ms. Marta Valiñas, Chair of the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, made a statement at the 46th session of the Human Rights Council, denouncing that the Mission continues to document the ongoing repression against people perceived as “internal enemies” and the expansion of its use against human rights defenders and organizations in Venezuela<sup>26</sup>.

For her part, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, on March 11 *expressed concern about recent initiatives to impose undue restrictions on the ability of NGOs to operate, including frozen assets*. She also indicated that she is concerned about the increasing signs of shrinking civic space, stating that since September 2020, her Office has “*documented at least 66 cases of intimidation, harassment, disqualification and criminalization*”, including cases of human rights defenders, humanitarian actors, trade union leaders, among others<sup>27</sup>.

On July 5th, in the framework of the presentation of the Report on the situation of human rights in Venezuela at the 47th session of the Human Rights Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, indicated that: “*restrictions on civic spaces continue to be a cause for concern. I highlight, in particular, the stigmatization, criminalization and threats against dissenting voices, especially towards civil society, the media and members of the opposition*”. She expressed that her office between June 2020 and May 2021 was able to document 97 incidents “*related to human rights defenders, many charged with criminal offenses for legitimate forms of civic participation*”. Specifically, she spoke about the case of the 3 members of the FundaRedes organization, expressing that “*the arrest of three members of FundaRedes just three days ago is a worrying example. I take advantage of this intervention to request urgent access to defense attorneys of your choice*”<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup>Visit: Venezuela: Human rights defenders released but charges against them remain; The criminalization of civil society must end. GENEVA (February 18, 2021) . In: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26757&LangID=S>

<sup>24</sup>@MaryLawlorhrds: Press release: In recent months, #Venezuela has intensified pressure against civil society working to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. We urge the government to drop the charges against the 5 #defenders of #AzulPositivo. In: <https://twitter.com/MaryLawlorhrds/status/1362425419836911619>

<sup>25</sup>AL VEN 1/2021. En: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26005>

<sup>26</sup> Statement by Marta Valiñas, President of the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, at the 46th session of the Human Rights Council. March 10, 2021. Geneva, Switzerland. Available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26872&LangID=S>

<sup>27</sup> Speech by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. 46th session of the Human Rights Council. Geneva, Switzerland. Available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26874&LangID=E>

<sup>28</sup> Report on the situation of human rights in Venezuela. 47th session of the Human Rights Council. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Geneva, July 5, 2021. In: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27265&LangID=S>



On July 6th, at the closing of the interactive dialogue that followed the presentation of her report, the High Commissioner expressed in relation to the Administrative Ruling that, even when some requirements were relaxed, “the law project (as she referred to the administrative instrument), continued to establish exacerbated demands and limitations”, and urged the establishment of a dialogue between civil society organizations and the government. It also reiterated its concern regarding the case of the members of *FundaRedes*<sup>29</sup>.

On July 3rd, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its Special Follow-up Mechanism for Venezuela (MESEVE) expressed concern over the detention of the members of *FundaRedes* and recalled that the defender Javier Tarazona is the beneficiary of precautionary measures granted by the international organization. They also recalled that “*the work of human rights defenders is essential for the construction of a democratic society*” and called on the Venezuelan State to “*protect and respect the life, integrity, and judicial guarantees through due process*”<sup>30</sup>.

On September 13, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a new report prepared by her office at the 48th session of the Human Rights Council. The document reflects cases of aggression against defenders and among the recommendations of the report it states: *Immediately cease all acts of intimidation, threats and reprisals by members of the security forces against relatives of victims of human rights violations seeking justice*<sup>31</sup>.

On September 14, at a session of the Human Rights Council, representatives of different countries made statements on the presentation of the new report of the Office of the High Commissioner, some of the States expressed their concern about the restrictions on civic and democratic spaces in the country<sup>32</sup>.

On September 16, the second Conclusive Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela was published, this time focusing on the role of the justice system in the repression. Among the cases reflected are 3 cases of judicialization and judicial harassment against human rights defenders, specifically the cases of the journalist and defender Luis Carlos Diaz, the case of the five members of the organization *Acción Zuliana por la Vida (Azul Positivo)* and that of the defender of sexual and reproductive rights Vanessa Rosales. This report reflects how the repression, control and criminalization of the State also affects the work of human rights defenders who are victims of persecution for being considered or perceived as dissidents<sup>33</sup>.

On September 24, during the interactive dialogue on the report of the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission held at the session of the Human Rights Council, representatives of different countries expressed their concern about the attacks against civil society and what can be done to address the situation of human rights defenders and humanitarian actors<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>29</sup>CONTINUED - Presentation of report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, on the human rights situation in Venezuela, followed by an interactive dialogue <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1b/k1br6fmg8r>

<sup>30</sup>Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR). <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1411375453819092993> y <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1411375455198920707>

<sup>31</sup>A/HRC/48/19. Situation of human rights and technical assistance in the Bolivarian Republic

from Venezuela. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In: [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session48/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_48\\_19\\_UnofficialSpanishVersion.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session48/Documents/A_HRC_48_19_UnofficialSpanishVersion.pdf)

<sup>32</sup>3rd Meeting, 48th Regular Session Human Rights Council. <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1y/k1y9yum98f>

<sup>33</sup>A/HRC/48/CRP.5 September 16, 2021. Human Rights Council Forty-eighth period of sessions September 13 to October 8, 2021. Agenda item 4: Human rights situations that require the attention of the Council. Detailed conclusions of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. In : [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A-HRC-48-CRP5\\_SP.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A-HRC-48-CRP5_SP.pdf)

<sup>34</sup>19th Meeting, 48th Regular Session Human Rights Council. ID with Fact-finding mission on Venezuela. <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k19/k1966rofzk>

On September 29 was published the communication dated July 27 sent by 4 special procedures of the Human Rights Council, including the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association and the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism to the Venezuelan State due to the criminalization, attacks, harassment and threats against human rights defenders. The communication deals with the cases of Orlando Moreno, Gerardo Ernesto Carrero Delgado, Javier Tarazona, Rodney Antonio Álvarez Rodríguez, Guillermo Zárraga, Eudis Giro and Karen Caruci<sup>35</sup>.

On September 29, the United Nations Secretary General's report on Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights was also presented. It is noted that the organizations were labeled as "criminals", "mercenaries", "thieves", "terrorists" and "enemies of the State", even in UN forums and on government-affiliated online portals. Among some of the cases reflected are: the accusations against the *Comité de Familiares de Víctimas del Caracazo* (COFAVIC); the *Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social* (OVCS); the *Centro de Justicia y Paz* (CEPAZ); Control Ciudadano and its director Rocío San Miguel; and *Espacio Público* and its director Carlos Correa; as well as the arbitrary detention of the five members of the organization *Azul Positivo*<sup>36</sup>.

On November 24, a joint communication was published sent by the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, specifically the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; and of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; to the Venezuelan State by reason of pending or recently adopted legislation, regulations or policies on international cooperation and issues related to human rights, regulation and registration of organizations, organized crime and terrorism<sup>37</sup>. Specifically, reference is made to the following norms: Law for the Defense of National Sovereignty and Self-Determination; Decree No. 2323: Declaration of the State of Exception and Economic Emergency; Decree No. 4135: Creation of the National Anti-Terrorism Corps; Special Automated Registry of Non-Domiciled Non-Governmental Organizations (REGONG by its Spanish name); Circular SIB-DSB-CJ-OD-06524 (SUDEBAN by its Spanish acronym); Administrative Ruling No. ONCDOFT-002-2021; and the International Cooperation Law.

International organizations specialized in protection also expressed their concern over the increased criminalization of human rights organizations and humanitarian actors in Venezuela, and made urgent appeals to the State urging the due promotion and protection of the right to defend human rights.

<sup>35</sup>Venezuela: criminalization, attacks, harassment and threats against human rights defenders (joint communication) <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26550>

<sup>36</sup>A/HRC/48/28. Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights – Report of the Secretary-General [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session48/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_48\\_28\\_AUV\\_EN.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session48/Documents/A_HRC_48_28_AUV_EN.docx)

<sup>37</sup><https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26801>

Front Line Defenders (FLD) issued two urgent calls on January 13 and 19 due to the arrest and prosecution of *Azul Positivo* members<sup>38</sup>. On April 14, the organization issued a new statement regarding the case of human rights defender Vanessa Rosales<sup>39</sup>. On May 12, he gave an update on the case of the defender and coordinator of the organization *Foro Penal* Orlando Moreno<sup>40</sup>. On May 21, it ruled on the holding of the preliminary hearing of human rights defender Vanessa Rosales<sup>41</sup>. On these occasions, concern was expressed about the increase in intimidation and harassment of organizations and defenders in Venezuela. On October 12, 2021, it issued an urgent appeal on behalf of human rights lawyers Engels Puertas and Juan Carlos Barroeta Rivas, due to acts of intimidation and threats of detention against them<sup>42</sup>.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory), integrated by the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), also carried out several actions in the context of the increasing criminalization of human rights defenders in the country. On January 19, an urgent call for the criminalization of the members of *Azul Positivo*<sup>43</sup>. On January 18, he spoke out against the harassment of the Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA and two of the members of its coordinating team<sup>44</sup>. On May 11, it issued an alert due to the persistence of restrictions to the right of association in Venezuela, by virtue of Administrative Ruling No. ONCDOFT-001-2021, as amended by No. ONCDOFT-002-2021<sup>45</sup>. The observatory reiterated its concern over the patterns of criminalization against the defense of human rights in the country. In July it issued two urgent actions in relation to the case of the organization FundaRedes and its members Javier Tarazona, Omar de Dios García and Rafael Tarazona<sup>46</sup>. In August, it made two statements in relation to the case of the Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA<sup>47</sup>. In October, it issued a new urgent appeal regarding the case of the FundaRedes organization<sup>48</sup> and another on november<sup>49</sup>. Finally, on November 9, the Observatory, faced with the situation of harassment and intimidation against the human rights lawyer Theresly Malavé Wadskier<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup><https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/venezuela-detencion-arbitraria-de-integrantes-de-azul-positivo> y <https://www.omct.org/es/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/venezuela/2021/01/d26282/>

<sup>44</sup><https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/venezuela-hostigamiento-contra-la-membresia-de-provea>

<sup>45</sup>"El Observatorio." May 11, 2021. Pronouncement: Venezuela: Restrictions on the right of association persist. In: <https://www.omct.org/es/recursos/declaraciones/venezuela-persisten-las-restricciones-al-derecho-de-asociaci%C3%B3n>

<sup>46</sup>INTERVENCIONES URGENTES VEN 004 / 0721 / OBS 077. Venezuela: Arbitrary detention of three members of Fundaredes <https://www.omct.org/es/recursos/llamamientos-urgentes/venezuela-detenci%C3%B3n-arbitraria-de-tres-miembros-de-fundaredes>; URGENT INTERVENTIONS SEE 004 / 0721 / OBS 077.2. Venezuela: Illegal search of the headquarters of Fundaredes and the maternal home of its director <https://www.omct.org/es/recursos/llamamientos-urgentes/venezuela-allanamiento-ilegal-de-la-sede-de-fundaredes-y-de-la-casa-materna-de-su-director>

<sup>47</sup>Press 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>; The Observatory @OBS\_defenders: #Venezuela: Venezuelan authorities attack @Provea again with false accusations of drug trafficking and corruption (commander of the FAE). We urge the authorities to stop the attacks against Provea and all other civil society organizations! In: [https://twitter.com/OBS\\_defenders/status/1427312925342056455](https://twitter.com/OBS_defenders/status/1427312925342056455)

<sup>48</sup>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). URGENT CALL. Venezuela: COVID-19 infection of detained FundaREDES members. In: <https://www.omct.org/es/recursos/llamamientos-urgentes/venezuela-infecci%C3%B3n-por-covid-19-de-los-miembros-de-fundaredes-detenido>

<sup>49</sup><https://www.omct.org/es/recursos/llamamientos-urgentes/venezuela-jos%C3%A9-javier-tarazona-contin%C3%BAa-detenido-arbitrariamente>

Amnesty International (AI) on January 19, regarding the case of Azul Positivo, in view of the arbitrary detention of 5 defenders and humanitarian workers of the organization, declared them Prisoners of Conscience<sup>51</sup>. On April 9, the organization published its global analysis of the human rights situation in the world during 2020-2021, in the chapter on Venezuela it highlighted the increase in attacks against human rights defenders<sup>52</sup>. On April 22, it issued a worldwide urgent action in view of the promulgation of Administrative Ruling No. 001-2021, in which they indicated that both organizations and victims were under threat as a result of the regulations that the instrument intends to impose. The organization indicated that Venezuelan civil society is at serious risk of criminalization and reprisals and demanded the immediate repeal of the regulation<sup>53</sup>. It also issued several urgent actions regarding the case of FundaRedes, including its declaration as Prisoners of Conscience<sup>54</sup>.

Other international human rights organizations such as Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL); CIVICUS; Civil Rights Defenders; Conectas Diretos Humanos; Freedom House; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P); Human Rights Watch; International Commission of Jurists (ICJ); International Service for Human Rights (ISHR); People in Need (PIN); and Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), issued joint statements in which they expressed their support for Venezuelan civil society and denounced the criminalization and aggressions against them and promoted actions and statements for the cessation of the criminalization of civil society<sup>55</sup>.

Finally, we emphasize that the international community expressed its concern about the situation of human rights defenders in Venezuela. Within the framework of the sessions of the Rights Council, interactive dialogues were held in which various representatives of diplomatic delegations spoke out against the increase in attacks against human rights and humanitarian action organizations. Among those who spoke were the delegations of the European Union, Germany, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Albania, Uruguay, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Civil society also spoke out against the restrictions on them.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2021/01/venezuela-ampnia-internacional-nombra-presos-de-conciencia/>

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International Global Report. "America continues to be one of the most dangerous regions to defend human rights." Available in: <http://link.aiven.org/Air2021>

<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International: VENEZUELA: UA 46.21. April 22, 2021. In: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-ngos-and-survivors-under-threat-venezuela-ua-46-21/>

<sup>54</sup> Venezuela: Venezuelan defenders arrested. July 5, 2021 Index Number: AMR 53/4398/2021 <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/08/AMR5343982021SPANISH.pdf>; Amnesty International. AU: 075/21 Index: AMR 53/4923/2021 Venezuela Date: October 27, 2021

URGENT ACTION DEFENDER STILL DETAINED, TWO RELEASED. In: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/10/AMR5349232021SPANISH.pdf>; Venezuela: More information: Free Venezuelan prisoner of conscience December 20, 2021 <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/5121/2021/es/>

<sup>55</sup> Visit: Joint declaration. February 17, 2021. Solidarity with Venezuelan human rights defenders. In: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26874&LangID=S> [https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/solidaridad\\_con\\_las\\_personas\\_defensoras\\_los\\_derechos\\_humanos\\_venezolanas.pdf](https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/solidaridad_con_las_personas_defensoras_los_derechos_humanos_venezolanas.pdf)

Wola. May 26, 2021. Attacks on civil society in Venezuela: Driving peaceful change in the face of repression. In: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=mLHcfQsf8ik&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=mLHcfQsf8ik&feature=emb_logo); <https://cejil.org/comunicado-de-prensa/venezuela-organizaciones-internacionales-expresamos-preocupacion-por-puesta-en-marcha-de-providencia-administrativa-que-criminaliza-y-limita-la-labor-de-defensa-de-las-organizaciones-de-la-sociedad-c/>

## 06

## THE CDJ CONTINUED TO PROMOTE THE CONSTRUCTION OF PROPER AND SAFE ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ) held on Tuesday, March 30th its fourth panel of the series of talks on: Defending human rights in Venezuela during the Covid-19 pandemic and the Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela<sup>56</sup>. International and national experts analyzed the situation of the right to defend human rights and the importance of their promotion and protection.

Attorney Bruno Rodriguez, advisor to the Presidency of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, spoke about the standards of the International Court regarding the recognition, promotion and protection of human rights defenders, highlighting the importance of their role in strengthening and enforcing the rule of law and democracy. He also highlighted the importance of protecting their activities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Luis Enrique Eguren, Senior Advisor for Protection International, spoke on the importance of the promotion and protection of human rights defenders, highlighting the importance of the existence of favorable and safe contexts to promote the protection and defense of human rights. The expert emphasized the need to have the power to defend without undue hindrance, without reprisals and without discrimination. He stressed the importance of risk assessment and strategies to reduce vulnerabilities in the exercise of defense.

Lisseth Mogollón, human rights litigator, member of the organization Azul Positivo, highlighted the particular and additional challenges faced by defenders in Venezuela as a result of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency, aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting the situation of militarization, social control and repression. The criminalization of the five members of the organization and the different affectations to their right to defend and exercise humanitarian action were exposed.

Likewise, the situation of the deepening of the policy of criminalization of human rights defenders in Venezuela and the need to recognize and guarantee the right to defend human rights was presented, highlighting the obligation of the Venezuelan State to effectively protect those who demand and defend rights and to provide favorable and safe environments for the exercise of their work.

From the CDJ we thank those who accompanied us and reiterate our commitment to generate spaces for advocacy and action for the respect, guarantee and protection of the exercise of the right to defend human rights.

**We keep on working for those who defend and demand human rights in Venezuela.**

Defender derechos humanos en Venezuela durante la pandemia por COVID-19 y la Emergencia Humanitaria en Venezuela



Bruna Rodríguez R.  
Comité Interamericana de Derechos Humanos

Luis Enrique Eguem  
Protección Internacional

Lisseth Mogollón  
Azul Positivo

Marianna Romero  
CDJ

centrodefensores@gmail.com  
@DefensoresDDHH\_  
@centrodefensores  
#HablemosDDHH



# 07 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2021, new legal and factual actions were incorporated to facilitate and endorse the criminalization of the defense and demand for human rights. The increase in repressive measures, including those directed against organizations, human rights defenders and humanitarian actors, the deepening of social control and the lack of favorable and safe environments to defend rights are evidence of the strengthening of the Thesis of the Internal Enemy and the Criminalization Policy based on the *National Security Doctrine*.

The exercise of the legitimate right to defend human rights freely and without reprisals was threatened by greater restrictions and obstacles, actions that added to the precariousness of basic services and social conditions that further affected and conditioned the work of defenders and the full operation of their organizations.

The State must fulfill obligations to respect, guarantee and protect rights, including the right to defend human rights. To this end, it must ensure the existence of favorable and safe environments in which actions of documentation, denunciation, dissemination of the human rights situation, and accompaniment of victims can be carried out 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.

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

Given the various vulnerabilities of circumstantial, or structural nature or specific conditions identified, which affect the work of defenders in Venezuela, a timely, strong and clear response from the various actors that make up the international community, especially the international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, is indispensable and urgent.

From the Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ), we insist on the need to include the perspective of human rights in the processes of solving the political, economic and social situation that the country is currently facing. The different political actors and those of the international community must ensure that a favorable 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 to work 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.

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## CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA