



**CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA**

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

JULY 2022

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The *Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ)* documented **50 attacks and security incidents during July 2022** in Venezuela.

The Criminalization Policy against human rights defenders and organizations continues to advance. The thesis of the Internal Enemy represents a serious threat in the framework of closing the civic and democratic space in the country.

The risks for those on the front line of action defending, promoting, and demanding human rights do not cease.

State violence, repression, and social control continue to be used to intimidate and as a way to limit the actions of human rights defenders and organizations.

ATTACKS JULY 2022



50 ATTACKS

50 attacks and security incidents documented during the month of July show the systematic patterns of aggression that are part of the Criminalization Policy, based on the logic of the Enemy Within that is applied against people and organizations that defend human rights and humanitarian action.

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS

The 50 events registered during the month of July were characterized as follows:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



01 JULY REFLECTS THE INCREASING CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE PROMOTION AND DEMAND OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The 50 events documented during July 2022 show that the right to defend, demand, and promote human rights is under constant attack by the State. The environment for its exercise is more hostile and adverse as the Criminalization Policy deepens and restrictions on civic space persist.

The patterns of aggression were applied with greater force against those who carry out activities related to the claim and protection of rights. People and organizations that watch over the protection of human dignity faced different patterns of violence, repression, and intimidation, without the existence of effective mechanisms that guarantee the exercise of their work.

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

New arbitrary arrests were registered and new judicial processes were initiated. Likewise, judicial harassment and the use of criminal law to criminalize under the logic of the enemy persisted.

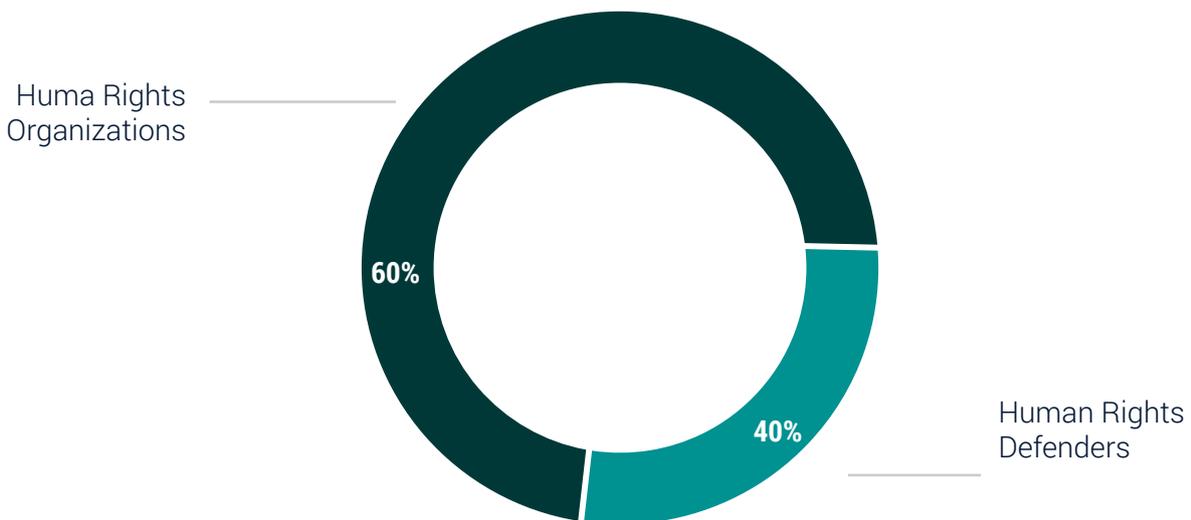
The stigmatization campaigns do not stop, the threats and acts of intimidation and harassment have increased, and the actions aimed at hindering the work of defenders are intensifying and remain unpunished, in a situation of lack of protection for those who defend and demand human rights.

The union leadership was the victim of an increase in persecution and repression in retaliation for their demanding activities for the vindication of social rights.

The risks of the possibility of approval of a new International Cooperation Law remain in view of the advances in the approval of its statement of reasons, according to the official information given by the Foreign Policy Commission of the National Assembly at the beginning of the month. Faced with a socio-political environment in crisis and a complex humanitarian emergency, the work of defense, demand, and promotion of human rights and humanitarian action is more necessary, for which it is essential that measures be established that allow their actions without reprisals or arbitrary limitations.

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total of the documented attacks during the month of July 2022, 30 were directed against human rights organizations, equivalent to 60% of the total. While 20 were individualized against human rights defenders, representing the remaining 40%.



Among some of the cases, we highlight the systematicity of the stigmatization campaigns against human rights organizations, which are criminalized for having actions within the framework of international cooperation. The accusations and threats against the organizations *Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA*, *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS-Venezuela)*, *Espacio Público*, *Transparencia Venezuela* and *Sin Mordaza*.

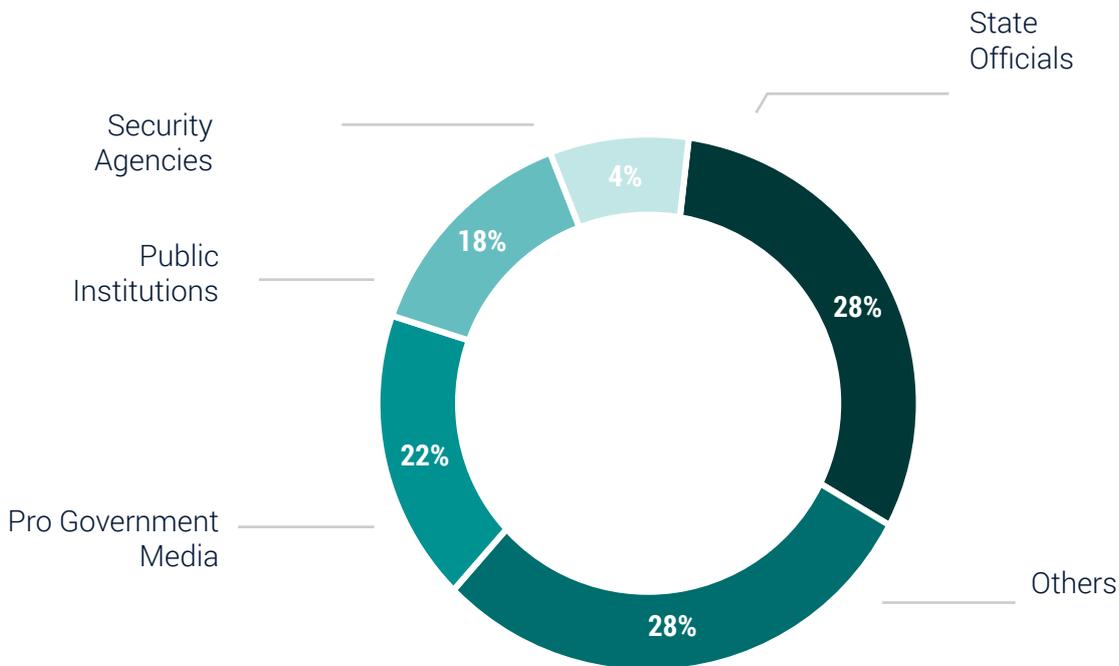
Likewise, the cases of arbitrary detention and prosecution of trade union leaders and human rights defenders Emilio Negrín and Gabriel Blanco stand out. The continuity of the judicial harassment against the members of the organization *FundaRedes* Rafael Tarazona, Omar de Dios García, and Javier Tarazona who has been deprived of their freedom for more than a year.

PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 14 (28%) attacks were perpetrated out by public officials who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; 14 (28%) of the attacks were carried out by persons or groups affected by the political interests of the State, and unidentified armed actors, the aggressors mainly perpetrated threats and acts intimidation and harassment; 11 (22%) of the events were carried out from the state’s traditional and digital media and their social media accounts; 9 were the responsibility of the Public Institutions (18%), who have been executing arms of the State’s repression, such as the Public Ministry and the Courts; Finally, 2 (4%) of the events were carried out by state security agencies, General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM by its Spanish name) and the Bolivarian National Police (PNB by its Spanish name).

PERPETRATORS



02 THE LOGIC OF THE INTERNAL ENEMY APPLIED AGAINST THE DEFENSE AND DEMAND OF HUMAN RIGHTS

To the extent that the State continues to restrict civic and democratic space in the country, actions to criminalize the defense, demand, and promotion of human rights increase. Under the logic of the Internal Enemy, the Venezuelan State insists on locating those who defend rights as actors that must be neutralized, and attacks are committed in retaliation for the exercise of their work, for being activities that according to the State are contrary to peace and National security.

Based on the patterns of aggression and intimidation, the systematic nature of the criminalization and repression of the defense and demand for human rights is strengthened. During the month of July, the use of stigmatization persisted as a starting point for the Criminalization Policy, with the main responsible for these attacks being State officials, and the communication platforms belonging to the National System of Public Media, as well as those related to the government party.

The hate speech and discredit against those who defend and demand human rights continue. The organizations and defenders were accused of promoting interfering activities in the country, of being terrorists, and destabilizing, and the independence and autonomy of their work were questioned. The main platforms responsible for acts of stigmatization in the month of August were the television program *Zurda Konducta*, *Lechuguinos*, *Misión Verdad*, and *Venezuela News*, as well as the institutional and personal accounts of officials on social networks¹.

In this regard, we reiterate that expressions of hate and discredit create a matrix of negative opinion against defenders' organizations and individuals, which can motivate other actors to materialize threats and attacks as a form of retaliation to neutralize and hinder the work of those who defend. rights and make visible the human rights situation in the country.

During the month of July, the use of criminal law as a tool to materialize the criminalization of human rights defenders and justify legal proceedings against them was again evident. This was observed, for example, in the cases of arbitrary detention of union leaders, Emilio Negrín and Gabriel Blanco, who, by virtue of the opening of arbitrary criminal proceedings against them, face charges of criminal association, conspiracy, and terrorism².

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#HABLEMOSDDHH

¹Twitter. Tweet by Rondon Alert. 11.07.22. Available at: <https://twitter.com/RondonAlerta/status/1545117823437049864>
 Twitter. Tweet from William Castillo. 07.13.22. Available at: <https://twitter.com/planwac/status/1547286348905779202>
 : Twitter. Tweet from Son Polemics. 15.07. Available at: <https://twitter.com/SonPolemicas/status/1547912053578297348> : Twitter.
 Tweet from William Castillo. 07.15.22. Available at: <https://twitter.com/planwac/status/1548026500175147013> : Twitter. Tweet from Son Polemics. 07.15.22. Available at: <https://twitter.com/SonPolemicas/status/154791925104176332> ; DISGUSTING LONGIST! Co-founder of Armando.info confesses financing from North American NGOs to attack Alex Saab (+ Video). Lettuce. 20.07.22. Available at: <https://www.lechuguinos.com/co-fundador-armandoinfo-confiesa-financiamiento-para-atacar-a-alex-saab/> ; Tweet by Larry Devoe. 07.14.22. Available at: <https://twitter.com/LarryDevoe/status/1550554425218965505>; Statements by Ricardo Gonzalez, during the broadcast of the program *Zurda Konducta*. Min. 47:33 – 47:48. 07.26.22 Available at: *Zurda Konducta* | Russia protects the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk from attacks by the Ukrainian regime - video Dailymotion; VenezuelaNews. The War for the truth in Venezuela: who finances "independent" journalism in Venezuela?; Tweet by Pedro Carvajalino. 07.29.22. Available at: <https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1553197510168137729>; Twitter. Tweet from William Castillo. 30.07.22. Available at: <https://twitter.com/planwac/status/1553506272233889792>
²Provea Statement: .07.07.22. Available at: <https://provea.org/actualidad/gobierno-detiene-al-sindicalista-y-trabajo-humanitario-gabriel-blanco-en-medio-de-nueva-ola-represiva/> ; <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/oficiales-de-la-dgcm-detener-al-dirigente-sindical-emilio-negrin/>

These facts not only show the entrenchment of the persecution as a State Policy against the activities demanding the rights of the trade union movement, but they are also an example of the institutionalization of the stigmatizing discourse to adapt to the logic of the internal enemy under which the State justifies repressive actions.

Despite the fact that the State has tried to show itself with a position of support and support for workers' movements and union organizations, the reality is that the policy of criminalization, repression and social control has also been applied against people who, in the framework of these movements, defend and demand the vindication of labor rights. Regarding this, we highlight that the workers and the union movement have been the main leaders of the social protests in Venezuela during 2022 according to the *Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)*³ and their struggle continues to be persecuted and criminalized⁴.

At the same time, we highlight the judicial harassment against defenders Omar de Dios García, Rafael Tarazona, and Javier Tarazona, whose hearing was again postponed without justification⁵. We also highlight that Javier, at the date of presentation of this report, has been deprived of liberty for more than a year and his health has deteriorated due to the conditions of detention and the effects on his integrity.

From the CDJ we warn that the cessation of arbitrary arrests and judicial processes against human rights defenders is necessary. Those who are deprived of liberty and subjected to criminal proceedings for carrying out activities of defense, promotion, and demand for rights must be fully released. **Defend human rights is not a crime.**

We reiterate our concerns about the legislative advances that contribute to the closure of the civic and democratic space in Venezuela. The threat of approval of the International Cooperation Law is still in force and the risks before it continues to be high. At the beginning of the month, advances regarding the approval of the explanatory statement of the regulatory proposal were officially announced on the website of the National Assembly⁶, without the approved text being published. We recall that the draft bill⁷ was released unofficially last May and that from the motif exposition it contemplates highly restrictive provisions on the right to freedom of association and defense of human rights.

Those who work to defend and demand human rights should not be described as enemies; On the contrary, they are essential actors in the recovery of democratic institutions and in the advancement of processes of justice, truth, and reparation for the victims of human rights violations. It is the obligation of the State to guarantee favorable environments for the exercise of this work and to dismantle any measure or practice that could compromise the safe development of the activities of defense and demand for rights.

³OVCS. Social conflict in Venezuela in the first half of 2022. In: <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/destacado/conflictividad-social-en-venezuela-en-el-primer-semester-de-2022>

⁴Odevida | Violence against union leaders: The retreat of the working class in Venezuela. At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4ow4usY5gc>

⁵<https://evtv.online/deferred-audiencia-de-juicio-contra-javier-tarazona-y-dos-activistas/>

⁶National Assembly. Foreign Policy Commission debates Bill on International Cooperation. 07.07.22. Available at: <https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/comision-de-politica-exterior-debate-proyecto-de-ley-de-cooperacion-internacional>

⁷See the content of the law at: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/BorradorProyectoLeyCooperacionInternacional2022.pdf>

03

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 organisms and international organizations for the protection of human rights continue to speak out in rejection of the attacks committed and demanding that the State complies with its duty to promote and protect the work of human rights defenders.

Among the actions taken during July by international organizations are the following:

On July 5, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) condemned the murder of indigenous leader and defender Virgilio Trujillo Arana, of the Uwottuija people, which occurred on June 30, in the state of Amazonas. He urged the State to investigate quickly, seriously, and impartially, and punish those responsible, considering *“his belonging to the indigenous people and his work in defense of the lands and territories as the main hypothesis of the crime”*⁸.

Along the same lines, on July 8 the European Union (EU) and the Embassies of the Member States in Venezuela published a statement on the assassination of indigenous leader and environmental defender Virgilio Trujillo Arana. They firmly condemned the murder of Trujillo Arana and reiterated *“support for the work of indigenous, territorial and environmental leaders in defense of their territories, and for all human rights defenders”*⁹.

On July 22, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, Clément Voule, expressed his concern about the arrests and persecution of the trade union movement in Venezuela. The expert indicated *“I am very concerned about the arrest of several members of #civil society, including trade unionists and opposition leaders, in early July. I urge the authorities to guarantee freedom of association and a safe environment for dissenting voices”*¹⁰.

For their part, international organizations continued to speak out against the criminalization of human rights defenders:

On July 2, Amnesty International spoke out for the anniversary of the arbitrary arrest and deprivation of liberty of Javier Tarazona. The organization demanded his release and stated that *“it contradicts the recommendations given by international justice mechanisms on Venezuela”*¹¹.

⁸IACHR: #Venezuela #IACHR condemns the murder of indigenous leader Virgilio Trujillo Arana, of the #Uwottuijael people, #30Jun, in the state of Amazonas, and urges the State to investigate quickly, seriously and impartially, and punish those responsible. <https://twitter.com/IACHR/status/1544478099844235264>

⁹Local declaration of the European Union and the Embassies of the Member States in Venezuela, on the assassination of the indigenous and environmental leader Virgilio Trujillo. 07.08.2022 At: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/venezuela/declaracion-local-de-la-uni-europea-y-las-embajadas-de-los-estados-miembros-es>

¹⁰<https://twitter.com/cvoule/status/1550472161256783875> and <https://twitter.com/cvoule/status/1550471873212866561> <https://twitter.com/amnistia/status/1543248137975767042> and <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/amnistia-internacional-exige-liberacion-de-javier-tarazona-a-who-was-declared-a-prisoner-of-awareness/>

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

On July 15, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint program of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT), spoke out regarding the arbitrary detention of the trade unionist and humanitarian worker Gabriel Blanco and requested your urgent intervention in the following situation in Venezuela¹².

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¹²VEN 001 / 0722 / OBS 061 Arbitrary detention / Criminalization Venezuela July 15, 2022. Venezuela: Arbitrary detention of trade unionist and humanitarian worker Gabriel Blanco <https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-libertas-humanos/venezuela-arbitrary-arrest-of-the-unionist-and-worker>

04 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Human rights defenders and organizations continue to be victims of the logic of the Internal Enemy.

The violence, repression, and social control of the State continue to generate negative impacts on the enjoyment of human rights in Venezuela and restrict civic and democratic space.

The lack of conducive and safe environments in Venezuela represents a great challenge and risk for those who defend, demand, and promote human rights in the country.

Venezuelan society requires the work and actions of documentation, denunciation, accompaniment, and assistance carried out by the human rights movement, for this reason, from the CDJ we demand guarantees for the exercise of the defense, demand, and promotion of human rights without fear and without reprisals.

We urge the State to fully comply with its international obligations to respect, protect and guarantee rights, including the defense of human rights and humanitarian action, refrain from classifying people who work within the framework of these as enemies, and immediately cease the Policy of criminalization.

We insist that acts of intimidation, harassment, stigmatization, aggression, threats, and other types of reprisals must be investigated and punished in accordance with international standards and regulations.

The 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 the Constitutional mandates.

From the CDJ we reaffirm our commitment and work for the establishment of mechanisms and effective public policies that seek and promote the effective protection of people and organizations that defend human rights in Venezuela.

CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA