



**CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA**

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

AUGUST 2022

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Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ) **registered 27 attacks and security incidents during August 2022** in Venezuela.

The risks continue for those who are on the front line of the response to the social, political, and human rights crisis in the country. The State deepens the Criminalization Policy against the promotion, defense, and demand of human rights, perfecting the Internal Enemy Logic with mechanisms to repress and control.

Actions aimed at reducing the civic and democratic space in the country and the lack of timely investigations to end the criminalization and repression against those who defend and demand human rights persist.

From the CDJ we reiterate the importance of the work of documentation, denunciation, visibility, and accompaniment, for the strengthening of society, democracy, the rule of law, and peace.

We call for effective promotion, protection, and respect without any type of retaliation for the actions of those who defend and demand human rights in Venezuela.

ATTACKS AUGUST 2022



27 ATTACKS

01

DOCUMENTING AND DENOUNCIING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IS LEGITIMATE

27 attacks and security incidents documented during the month of August show the increase in more violent aggressions such as acts of intimidation, harassment, and threats under the application of the logic of the internal enemy against those who carry out documentation activities and denounce the serious violations of human rights that occur in Venezuela.

This practice is accentuated due to the systematic campaigns of stigmatization and the accusations of hatred, disqualification, and intimidation, at the same time that the restrictions of the civic and democratic space advance and the use of regulations related to the control of terrorism and organized crime to persecute the human rights movement.

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

Stigmatization can also generate an impact to control the population by issuing “exemplary messages and punishments”.

The 27 events recorded during the month of August were characterized by:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



**HARASSMENT AND
INTIMIDATION**
13



STIGMATIZATION
9

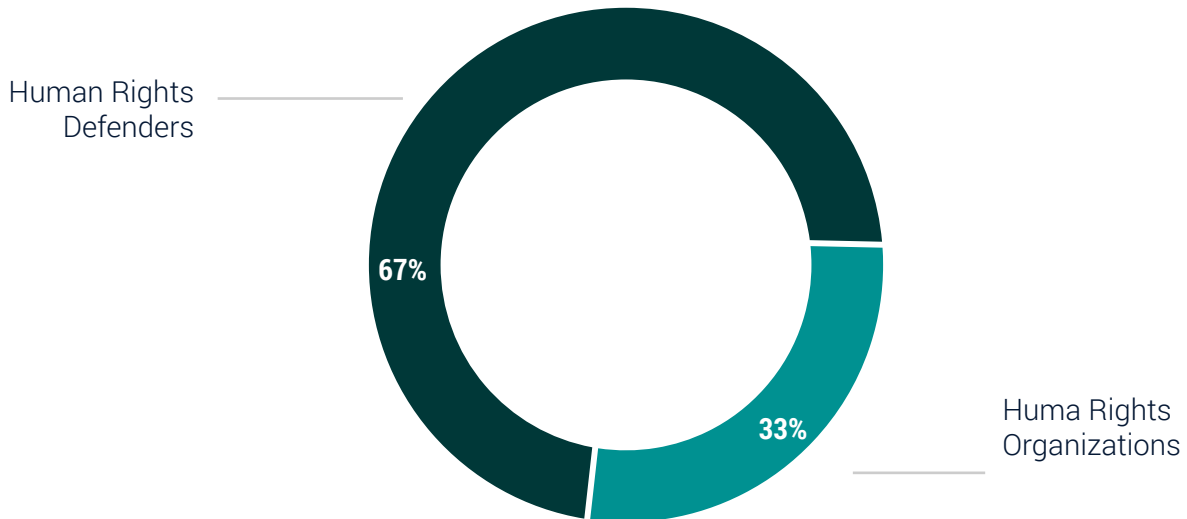


THREATS
5

Given the complexities that surround the Venezuelan sociopolitical environment, we reiterate that the work of promoting and defending human rights, as well as humanitarian action, are essential for the protection of human dignity. It is indispensable that effective mechanisms be created for the full and free exercise of human rights in a suitable and safe environment for it, as well as the protection of those who defend them.

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total number of documented attacks during the month of August 2022, 18 were individualized against human rights defenders, equivalent to 67% of the total. While 9 of the events were directed against human rights organizations, representing the remaining 33%.



During the month, the increase in acts of intimidation and harassment stood out, as well as the threats against people and organizations that defend human rights for their activities of documenting and denouncing human rights violations. The cases include that of the lawyers and members of the organization *Coalición por los Derechos Humanos y la Democracia*, Alonso Medina Roa, Ana Leonor Acosta, and Kelvi Zambrano; as well as new facts against the Mérida state organization *PROMEDEHUM* and the *Fundación de Derechos Humanos de los Llanos – Fundehullan*.

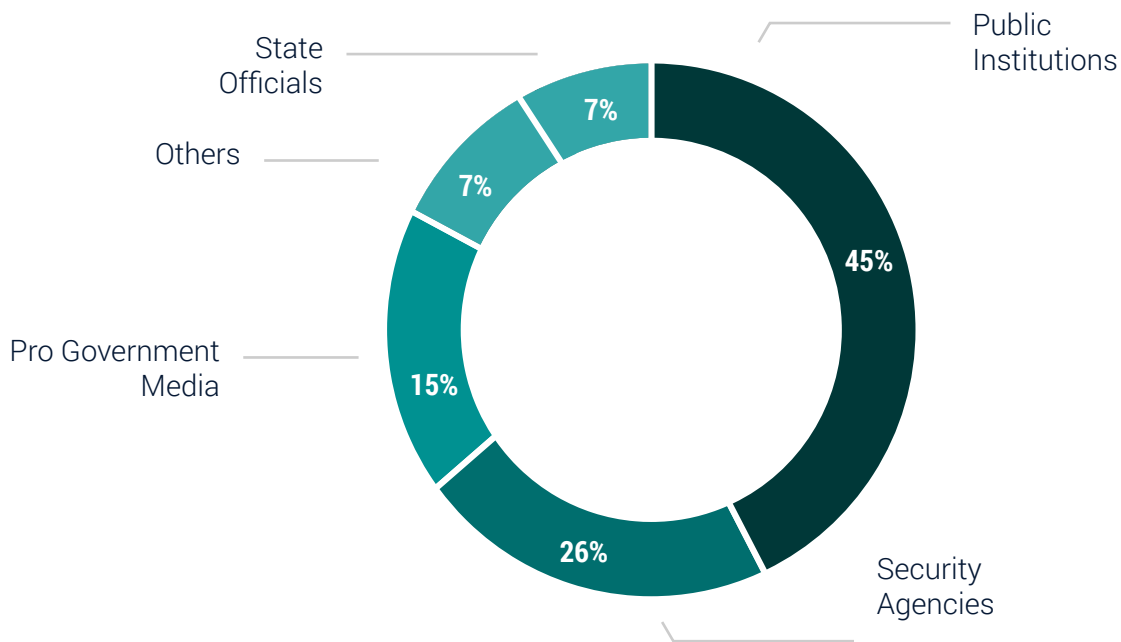
It highlighted the widespread stigmatization against human rights organizations, attempting to link their activities to illegal or destabilizing acts, as well as attempting to affect their credibility by questioning their independence by linking them to the interests of political parties.

Finally, the permanent judicial harassment against the defenders who are members of the organization *FundaRedes* Javier Tarazona, Omar de Dios García and Rafael Tarazona.

PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 12 (45%) of the events were the responsibility of Public Institutions or State entities, who have been executing arms of the State's repression, such as the Public Ministry and the Courts; 7 (26%) of the events were carried out by state security agencies, mainly the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN by its Spanish name) and the Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC by its Spanish name); 4 (15%) were made from the State's traditional and digital media and their accounts on social networks; 2 (7%) the attacks were perpetrated by public officials who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; Finally, 2 (7%) of the attacks were carried out by people or groups affected by the political interests of the State, which are part of the structures of the Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3 by its Spanish name), the aggressors mainly perpetrated acts of intimidation and harassment.



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

The Criminalization Policy against the defense, demand, and promotion of human rights does not cease. The patterns that make up this repressive and social control policy have as their main foundation and justification the logic of the “Internal Enemy”.

In this context, during the month of August, the CDJ continued to document attacks and aggressions that compromise the work, integrity, and security of those who defend and demand human rights in the country.

Although stigmatization had been presented during the year as the main form of attack, during the period under study it was the second most recorded pattern of aggression. Even so, we reiterate that disqualifying, hateful and discrediting speeches continue to be the starting point for the criminalization of the defense, demand, and promotion of human rights.

In August, the disqualifying discourse against defenders' organizations and persons persisted, mainly based on expressions of disrepute and unfounded accusations about the use of international cooperation for interventionist purposes, as well as the alleged existence of links between human rights organizations with purposes of the opposition parties in Venezuela.

Among the main perpetrators of these attacks during the month of August are the institutional platforms of public entities and high-ranking government officials, as well as the *Con el Mazo Dando*¹ program and the digital platform *Misión Verdad*², both belonging to the National Public Media System³.

We view with concern the increase in acts of intimidation and harassment, facts that continue to be used by the State and its structures, specifically those that are part of the Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3 by its Spanish name), and serve as mechanisms for social control. In particular, two human rights defenders were subjected to intimidation by members of the Bolívar and Chávez Battle Units (UBCH by its Spanish name)⁴ while they were on a work day in Apure. In this regard, from the CDJ we warn about the use of these groups to carry out “social intelligence” tasks to hinder, frighten and neutralize the work of those who defend human rights in the country.

During the month of August, the threats against human rights defenders stood out.

The attacks on lawyer Alonso Medina Roa, coordinator of the organization Coalition for Human Rights and Democracy, stand out. Roa was detained at the Maiquetía International Airport and they decreed a ban on leaving the country, by order of the Antiterrorism Division of the Scientific,

¹Twitter. Tweet from. The General Directorate of Regions for Assistance to Graduates and with Benefits of the Penal System.08.24.22. Available: https://twitter.com/mppsp_egresados/status/1562405629238583296?t=qz5jA9FWyy78hRjZfh_uPg&s=09
Tweet by Ricardo González Alvarado. 08.21.22. Available in:

<https://twitter.com/RicardoKonducta/status/1561438904284323845>

²Con El Mazo Dando. 10.08.22. Minutes 1:11:35 – 1:11:56. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSYAiEJ7AVA>

³Diario Misión Verdad Tweet. 29.08.22. Available at: https://twitter.com/Mision_Verdad/status/156438127775663106?t=1_Xil6MT0t-e5mHzpNDW_Q&s=19; Diario Misión Verdad Tweet. 08.29.22. Available at: https://twitter.com/Mision_Verdad/status/1564213014638870528?t=C4Bxia-lo7S59CgwR-1qPw&s=19 and <https://t.me/misionverdad/2329>

⁴<https://twitter.com/FundehullanVzla/status/1555610504504246275>

Penal and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC). The lawyer was able to access a file at the police headquarters in which he verified the existence of an investigation against him, as well as monitoring and follow-up documents from two other members of the organization, the lawyer's Ana Leonor Acosta and Kelvi Zambrano, who also they face the investigation process against them. The organization has denounced that the recent acts of criminalization and persecution against him are due to the publication of an investigative report on the use of torture in Venezuela⁵. From the CDJ we alert the increase in the use of criminal law under the logic of the enemy and the intention of the State to link the work of documentation and denunciation of human rights violations with terrorism.

The events that occurred to the detriment of the members of the Coalition for Human Rights and Democracy do not occur in isolation and represent an example of how stigmatization and hate speech against the defense of human rights materializes in actions that intend to neutralize the work of documentation and denunciation due to its criminalization.

The CDJ is concerned about the discretionary and arbitrary use of criminal law against individuals and organizations that defend human rights, which is also framed in a restrictive institutional context, in which even though laws the criminalization of defense is endorsed, justified, and encouraged, demand and promotion of human rights.

On the other hand, judicial harassment continues against the three members of the FundaRedes organization, Rafael Tarazona, Omar de Dios García, and Javier Tarazona, who as of the date of presentation of this report has been deprived of his liberty for more than 400 days⁶.

As long as the attacks against the human rights movement continue and impunity prevails over these events, there will be no eternally favorable and safe environment in Venezuela for the defense, demand, and promotion of rights, which not only results in harm to those who exercise that work but also in a greater vulnerability and lack of protection of the victims of human rights violations, who turn to the organizations to advance their search processes for truth, justice, and reparation.

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

On August 2, the United States Ambassador to Venezuela, James Story, made a publication in which he spoke about the case of Defender Javier Tarazona. In his message, he indicates *“the human rights defender of Fundaredes Javier Tarazona, has been arbitrarily detained for 13 months. No one should be detained for defending human rights, especially when their health is seriously deteriorated without receiving medical attention. The international community is attentive to what happens with Javier”*⁷.

On August 6, the Canadian Embassy ruled on the case of Javier Tarazona after serving 400 days of his arbitrary detention. They expressed concern about *“his health condition is delicate”* and asked for his release and for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to be allowed to visit him⁸.

On August 8, the delegation of the European Union in Venezuela made a public call through the social network Twitter in which they indicate that *“after 400 days of his detention, the European Union and its Member States present in Venezuela call for respect for due process in the case of J. Tarazona”*, in the message they also underline *“the fragile state of his health”* and urge the authorities *“to allow access to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights”*⁹.

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

On August 24, Amnesty International expressed its alarm at the acts of intimidation and threats against the lawyer and member of the Coalition for Human Rights and Democracy, Alonso Medina Roa. The organization indicated that it was *“alarmed by the travel ban for family reasons”* against Mr. Medina Roa and denounced that *“for guaranteeing the right to defense of those persecuted by the government of Venezuela, the Corps of Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations treats as a terrorist to a human rights defender”*¹⁰. Likewise, on August 25, he warned that *“attacks and threats continue against those who bravely defend human rights in the country”*. In addition, he denounced that *“it is an element of the policy of repression implemented by the authorities that have been worsening in recent years”*; it referred to the case of lawyer Medina Roa and urged the State to cease criminalization¹¹. On August 27, it indicated that the Amnesty International Regional Investigation Team *“received an Urgent Appeal from the Venezuelan Prison Observatory on behalf of Ana Leonor Acosta, Alonso Medina and Kelvin Zambrano defense attorneys, investigated in Venezuela for denouncing serious human rights violations”*¹².

⁷<https://twitter.com/usembassyve/status/1554453285700091905>

⁸<https://twitter.com/CanEmbVenezuela/status/1555953388906479616>

⁹European Union in Venezuela @UEenVenezuela: <https://twitter.com/UEenVenezuela/status/1556603680471801856>

¹⁰<https://twitter.com/GomezMarcos/status/1562443615401439233>

¹¹<https://twitter.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/1562851959253893121>

¹²<https://twitter.com/GomezMarcos/status/1563539226079412224>

04 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

To the extent that actions aimed at reducing civic and democratic space persist, there will continue to be risks for those who defend, demand, and promote human rights in the country.

Venezuelan citizenship requires the work and actions of documentation, denunciation, accompaniment, and assistance exercised by the human rights movement.

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, and immediately cease the Criminalization Policy.

We emphasize that acts of intimidation, harassment, stigmatization, aggression, threats, and other types of reprisals must be investigated and punished; 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 continue working for the establishment of mechanisms and public policies that seek and promote the protection of people and organizations that defend human rights in Venezuela.

CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA

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