



**CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA**

**SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA**

SEPTEMBER 2022

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Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ), documented **68 attacks and security incidents during the month of September 2022** in Venezuela.

We observe an increase in attacks against human rights individuals and organizations due to repressive and control measures against those who defend, demand, and promote human rights in the country.

Despite the complaints and recommendations made to the Venezuelan State by the international mechanisms for the protection of human rights and other actors of the international community, the deepening of restrictions on civic and democratic space continues, affecting the free and legitimate exercise of activities. humanitarian and human rights.

The Internal Enemy Thesis is the starting point to persecute and commit reprisals against civil society, especially in the framework of the criminalization of international cooperation.

In an adverse and restrictive context, the risks are increased for those who are in the first line of response to the social, political, and human rights crisis in the country, without adequate mechanisms for their protection.

01

ATTACKS CONTINUE AGAINST THOSE WHO DEFEND, DEMAND, AND PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS

68 new violations against the right to defend human rights in Venezuela during September 2022.

During September, an upsurge in attacks against human rights defenders and organizations was observed. The criminalization of their activities under the thesis of the Internal Enemy led to a new increase in acts of stigmatization, as well as intimidation and harassment.

Conditions for the free exercise of activities related to the documentation, denunciation, enforceability, and dissemination of human rights violations continue to be lacking.

The actions of human rights individuals and organizations continue to be limited and controlled, as a consequence of the repression and social control of the State, affecting not only their operations but also the accompaniment of the victims.

The State reinforces a hostile and adverse environment for exercising the right to defend rights.

ATTACKS SEPTEMBER 2022



68 attacks and security incidents documented during the month of September reflected a new increase in attacks, especially stigmatization and other acts of a more violent nature such as intimidation, harassment, and threats.

Judicial harassment against defenders, lawyers, and organizations is used as a mechanism of retaliation, as well as trying to have a frightening effect on other organizations, by using criminal law to criminalize under the logic of the enemy.

The stigmatization campaigns were the main way of attacking the defense, demand, and promotion of rights. Disqualifying and criminalizing speeches encourage violence, in addition to seeking to generate a dissuasive impact and create mistrust in the work of the civil society.

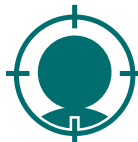
The 68 events documented during September were characterized by:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



ESTIGMATIZACIÓN

47



THREATS

4



HARASSMENT AND
INTIMIDATION

15



DIGITAL
ATTACKS

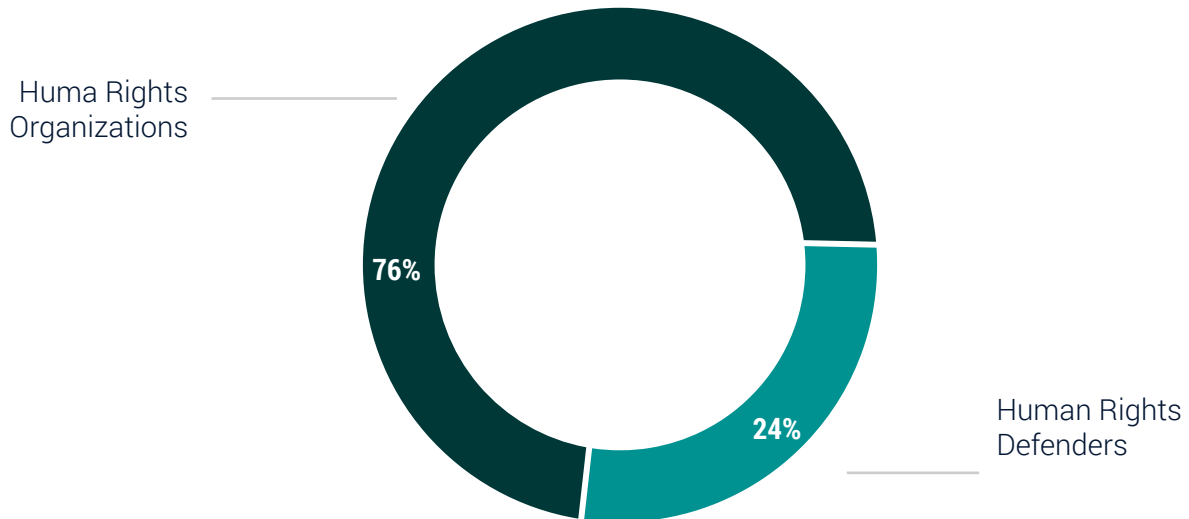
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The Criminalization Policy is consolidated. Stigmatization, disqualification and intimidation, harassment, and threats increase as a result of the advance of restrictions on civic and democratic space.

It is essential that human rights defenders and organizations can count on an enabling and safe environment to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals. **Defend human rights is not a crime.**

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total of the documented attacks during the month of September 2022, 52 were directed against human rights organizations and organizations that carry out humanitarian actions, equivalent to 76% of the total. While 16 were individualized directed against human rights defenders, representing the remaining 24%.



The generalized attack against the work of the organizations continues, mainly within the framework of the criminalization of international cooperation, as well as attempts to discredit their documentation and complaint processes, in addition to questioning their independence, especially for the cooperation and advocacy work with the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela.

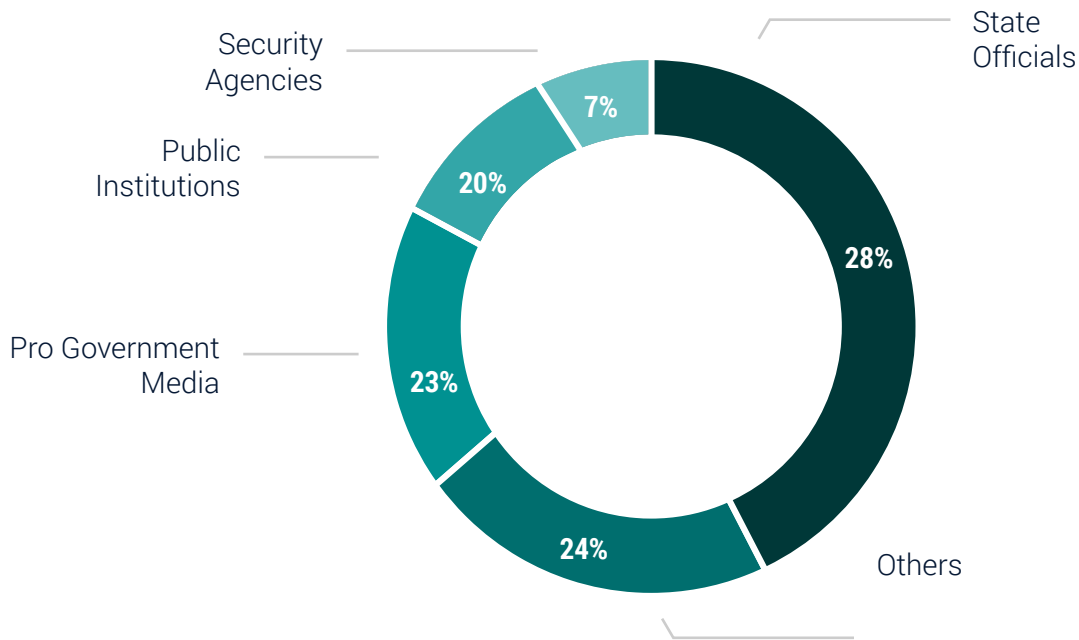
Among some of the cases documented in September, the systematic nature of the stigmatization and harassment campaigns against the organization Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA; the accusations against the organizations Transparencia Venezuela; Acceso a la Justicia, Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP), among others; threats and digital attacks on members of Promedehum. **The attempts to discredit the complaints about reprisals against the organizations Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS), Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA, and Foro Penal.**

Likewise, we highlight the continuity of judicial harassment against Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, and Omar García, members of the organization FundaRedes, as well as union leaders and defenders Gabriel Blanco and Emilio Negrín.

PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 19 (28%) of the acts were carried out by public officials, mainly deputies and members of the national executive, who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; 16 (24%) were carried out by people or groups affected by the political interests of the State; another 16 (23%) of the attacks were perpetrated from the state’s traditional and digital media outlets and their accounts on social networks; 12 (20%) were the responsibility of Public Institutions or government entities; Lastly, 5 (7%) of the events were the responsibility of state security agencies.



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

To the extent that the Criminalization Policy advances against the defense, promotion, and demand of human rights, the application of the Internal Enemy Logic deepens.

The Venezuelan State continues to criminalize the defense, demand, and promotion of human rights, in a context in which the closure of civic and democratic space continues to deepen and fundamental freedoms are curtailed. In this scenario, September is presented as the month with the highest number of attacks documented by the Center for Defenders and Justice so far in 2022.

Among the acts of intimidation, accusations, disqualifications, and registered incidents, some constitute retaliation in the framework of the presentation of the report of the Independent International Mission of the Facts about Venezuela, as well as in relation to the cases denounced and made visible in the report presented to the Human Rights Council by the Secretary General of the United Nations regarding acts of intimidation and retaliation for cooperating with the United Nations in the field of human rights.

Stigmatization was the main form of attack during the period, serving as the starting point for the materialization of other types of more violent acts that are part of the social control measures within the Criminalization and Repression Policy.

As part of the systematicity of this pattern of attack, the media that make up the National System of Public Media and those associated with the State, as well as the institutional and personal social network accounts of public officials and other actors related to the current administration, served platform to replicate and promote a discourse against non-governmental organizations in the country. Throughout the month, accusations of alleged links or political and foreign interests, promotion of interference and destabilization, and criminalization of cooperation, among others, were common¹.

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#HABLEMOSDDHH

¹See for example: Con el Mazo Dando. 07.09.2022. Minutes: 25:46 – 26:25. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySZh-68wonT4>; Tweet from William Castillo. 09.09.2022 Available at: <https://twitter.com/planwac/status/1568224200313212932?s=46&t=beZ2DAGHq2Kyl-Us0Vn1w>; Statement by Mario Silva during the broadcast of his program La Hojilla. 13.09.22. Available at: (1041) La Hojilla with Mario Silva, September 13, 2022, edited program (READ THE DESCRIPTION) - YouTube; Twitter. Tweet from Son Controversies. <https://twitter.com/SonPolemicas/status/1570040498701606912>; USAID CONFESSIONS: NEW STAGE OF PRESSURE AND INTERFERENCE AGAINST VENEZUELA. Mission Truth Journal. 20.09.22. Available at: <https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/confesiones-de-la-usaid-nueva-etapa-de-presion-e-injerencia-contra-venezuela> https://twitter.com/eochoa_antich/status/1572591788132814849; Interview of Tarek William Saab. 22.09.22. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ppa-NzRnOFU>; Tarek William Saab described the recent human rights report as propaganda against Venezuela. Agency Venezuela News. 22.09.22. Available at: <https://venezuela-news.com/tarek-william-saab-califico-propaganda-venezuela-reciente-informe-ddhh/>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Press release: Venezuela repudiates false accusations of alleged International Mission in pamphlet presented to the UN. 09.26.22. Available at: <https://mppre.gob.ve/comunicado/venezuela-repudia-acusaciones-falsas-mision-internacional-panfleto-presentado-onu/>; "False and baseless accusations": Venezuela by report of the International Mission to Determine the Facts. The Iguana TV. 09.26.22. Available at: <https://www.laiguana.tv/articulos/1083542-venezuela-informe-mision-internacional-determinacion-hechos/>; Statements by Eduardo Semtei, in an interview on the Kicosis program. Min. 5:13 - 5:45. 09.27.22. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6YM9M_HL6g; USA AND EUROPEAN UNION INCREASE PRESSURE ON VENEZUELA THROUGH NGOS. Mission Truth Journal. 09.28.22. Available at: <https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/euu-y-union-europea-aumentan-la-presion-sobre-venezuela-ong>

Similarly, they highlighted some expressions of discrediting the work and complaints of defenders' organizations and individuals after the publication of the reports of the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission, describing them as "unreliable or unreliable" sources, among others.

The criminalization of international cooperation has been one of the main elements that have characterized the systematic persecution of those who demand and defend human rights in the country. During the year there have been constant threats and the possible adoption of an international cooperation law. During the month of September, the criminalization of international cooperation against human rights defenders and organizations was evidenced as a result of their advocacy activities and collaboration with international bodies. Officials and institutions of the current administration² professed threats and expressions of discredit to the work of the organizations, as they were sources for the issuance of reports of the mechanisms³.

On the other hand, as part of the actions of the State to intimidate and generate fear in those who defend and demand human rights, acts of intimidation and harassment continued to be recorded. In particular, he highlighted the presence of members of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN), at the headquarters of the organization Venezuelan Program for Education-Action in Human Rights - PROVEA, during a press conference with relatives of victims of the cases of workers and leaders trade unionists arbitrarily detained; This occurred while the Fact-Finding Mission was presenting two reports, one of which is related to the role of the structures and individuals of the intelligence services in the commission of serious human rights violations and possible crimes against humanity.

Likewise, it highlights the intimidation and harassment against human rights defense lawyers of victims of the repressive policy in Venezuela.

In the same sense, the use of the criminal sphere for the criminalization of those who defend and demand human rights persists. Thus, in the month of September, the arbitrary prosecution proceedings against Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, Omar de Dios García⁴, and the union leaders and human rights defenders Daniel Blanco and Emilio Negrín⁵ continued. Both processes have been marked by irregularities contrary to due legal process, even the union leader Emilio Negrín was subjected to pressure to force him to accept public defense.

The accompaniment of victims, documentation, international cooperation and advocacy are legitimate tasks framed in the right to defend human rights. Far from being a crime, they are necessary activities for the recovery of democratic institutions and for the achievement of truth, justice, and reparation for the victims. The Venezuelan State must cease the policy of criminalization against the defense of human rights and guarantee favorable and safe environments so that those who exercise it can do so without fear of reprisals.

²See for example: Interview of Tarek William Saab. 22.09.22. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ppa-NzRn0FU>; A WebTV. 09.26.22. Minutes 12:21 – 17:56 Available at: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1w/k1wn26wgtw>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Press release: Venezuela repudiates false accusations of alleged International Mission in pamphlet presented to the UN. 09.26.220. Available at: <https://mppre.gob.ve/comunicado/venezuela-repudia-acusaciones-falsas-mision-internacional-panfleto-presentado-onu/>

³Twitter. Tweet from the Ministry of Communication and Information. 09.26.22. Available at: https://twitter.com/Mippcivzla/status/1574381440996966400?t=s60h_ToLoOwe8XrqnKG0eg&s=08

⁴https://twitter.com/FundaREDES_/status/1567673246350282756; https://twitter.com/FundaREDES_/status/1575202538822909952;

⁵https://twitter.com/_Provea/status/1574541973997817857; https://twitter.com/_Provea/status/157454197726955226

The defense, promotion, and demand of human rights is not a crime, any act committed in order to limit, affect or hinder these actions contravenes international obligations.

Therefore, we demand the immediate cessation of the Criminalization Policy and the construction of favorable and safe environments for the defense of human rights.

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

The situation of criminalization of the defense and demand for human rights in Venezuela continues to be a source of concern for the international community. International organizations and organizations for the protection of human rights and diplomatic actors continue to speak out in rejection of the attacks committed and demand that the State fulfill its duty to promote and protect the work of human rights defenders.

On September 20, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) expressed concern “before the appearance of agents from the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service, while a press conference was being held with victims of human rights violations”, at the facilities of the PROVEA organization⁶.

On September 20, the International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela presented two new reports on human rights violations in the country. In one of them, he highlighted cases of human rights defenders, particularly those from the organization *Azul Positivo* and the defender and journalist Luis Carlos Díaz⁷. In the press conference offered, they indicated that “*The SEBIN has tortured or inflicted ill-treatment on detainees -among them, opposition politicians, journalists, demonstrators, and human rights defenders- mainly in the “El Helicoides” detention center, in Caracas*”⁸.

On September 26, in the framework of the interactive dialogue held at the 51st session of the Human Rights Council, between its members and the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, various states spoke out regarding the restrictions on civic and democratic space, as well as the situation of criminalization of human rights defenders. Some states include Canada, the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, and Germany, among others⁹.

⁶ <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1572375865727782913>

⁷ A/HRC/51/CRP.3: Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: Crimes against humanity committed through the State's intelligence services: structures and individuals involved in the implementation of the plan to repress opposition to the Government: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffmv/2022-09-20/FFMV-CRP-3-Spanish.docx>

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2022/09/venezuela-new-un-report-details-responsibilities-crimes-against-humanity>

⁹ ID: Fact-finding mission on Venezuela - 22nd Meeting <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1w/k1wn26wgtw>

On September 29, at the 51st session of the Human Rights Council, the Secretary General of the United Nations presented a new report on acts of intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the United Nations Organization in the field of human rights. Cases from Venezuela were documented and reflected, among them are those of the organizations *Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)*, *Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA*, and *Foro Penal*, and *Azul Positivo*¹⁰. During the interactive dialogue that followed the presentation, the United States and the United Kingdom spoke about reprisals against human rights defenders in Venezuela¹¹.

Regarding the pronouncements of international organizations with a mandate to protect human rights defenders, the following pronouncements stood out:

On September 13, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) published a campaign to make visible and demand an end to reprisals against people and human rights organizations, in which they highlighted the cases of the Venezuelan organizations *Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)*, *Control Ciudadano*, *Espacio Público* and the *Centro Justicia y Paz (Cepaz)*¹². The international organization demanded an end to the stigmatization of organizations for cooperating with the United Nations.

On September 26, in the framework of the interactive dialogue held at the 51st session of the Human Rights Council, between its members and the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, the organization's Amnesty International, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT), among others, expressed their concerns and made the situation of human rights defenders visible¹³.

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2022/09/report-details-disturbing-trends-reprisals-continue-against-people>

¹¹ D: SG report on Reprisals - 28th Meeting, 51st... <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1z/k1z3irms97>

¹² <https://twitter.com/ISHRglobal/status/1569668582057058309>

¹³ D: Fact-finding mission on Venezuela - 22nd Meeting <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1w/k1wn26wgtw>

04 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are still no efforts to build favorable and safe environments for the promotion, defense, and demand of rights in Venezuela. On the contrary, the non-compliance of the State with its international commitments and obligations in the matter demonstrates the lack of interest in the effective protection of human rights.

To the extent that the reduction of civic and democratic space deepens, the challenges and risks for those who defend and demand human rights and for those who carry out humanitarian actions in the country will continue to increase.

The actions of documentation, denunciation, demand, and dissemination of the human rights situation, and the accompaniment of the victims are essential activities to advance in the solution of the structural problems that the country faces and that originate and perpetuate the crisis.

The work of human rights defenders and organizations is essential for the universal implementation of human rights, the validity of democracy, and the strengthening of the rule of law. For this reason, given the increase in aggressions, limitations, and obstacles against them, we reiterate the need to protect those who are on the front line of action, responding and attending to the socio-economic needs of the population and seeking the scope of justice and respect for fundamental freedoms and the need for the immediate cessation of aggression and reprisals against them.

They must immediately stop using the logic of the Enemy Within to criminalize and repress.

The United Nations reiterates its concern and denounces the reprisals against Venezuelan human rights organizations for cooperating with its protection and investigation mechanisms.

State actors, international organizations, and the international community must work to advance the construction of favorable and safe environments so that those who promote, demand, and defend rights can do so freely and without fear of being victims of reprisals.

We urge the State to fully comply with its international obligations to respect, protect and guarantee rights, including defending, demanding, and promoting human rights.

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.

CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA