



**CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA**

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

JULY 2023

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The Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ) **documented 20 attacks and security incidents during July 2023 in Venezuela.**

The Criminalization Policy against organizations and human rights defenders continues to advance in the framework of the continuous closure of the civic and democratic space in the country.

The risks for those on the front line of action defending, promoting, and demanding human rights persist.

State violence, repression, and social control continue to be used to intimidate and as a way of limiting the actions of civil society.

ATTACKS JULY 2023



The 20 attacks and security incidents documented during the month of July reflect the systematicity of the patterns of aggression that make up the Criminalization Policy.

The stigmatization campaigns do not stop while the acts of intimidation, harassment, and threats continue to attack the work of people and organizations that defend human rights. The systematicity of these facts is worrying. The lack of a free and safe civic space in the context of electoral events represents a high risk for the development of civil society activities.

The 20 events registered during the month of July were characterized by the following:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS

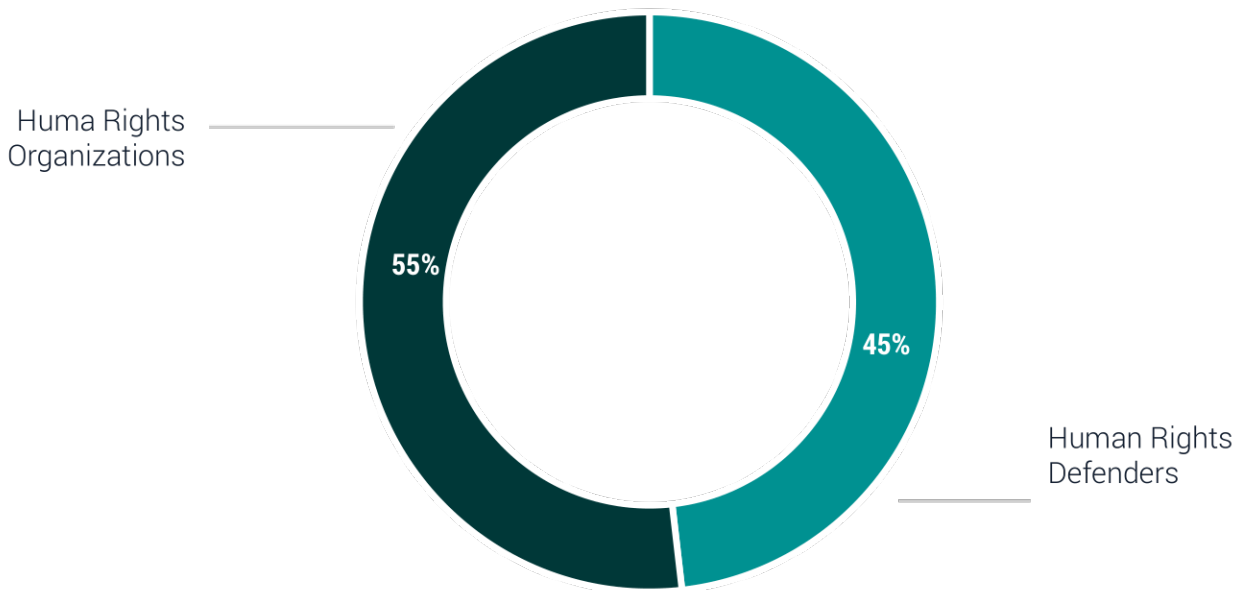


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In July, the use of communication platforms to intimidate and stigmatize people and organizations was constant to distort their activities under the logic of the internal enemy. Likewise, acts of intimidation, harassment, and threats remain constant as part of the State's repressive response.

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total attacks documented during the month of July 2023, 11 were directed against human rights organizations and organizations that carry out humanitarian actions, equivalent to 55% of the total. While 9 were individualized against human rights defenders, representing the remaining 45%.



Among some of the cases, we highlight the systematic stigmatization campaigns against the organizations *Programa Venezolano para la Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA*; the stigmatization and intimidation of defender Rocío San Miguel; as well as the disqualification, threats of generalized intimidation against the work of human rights organizations in the country.

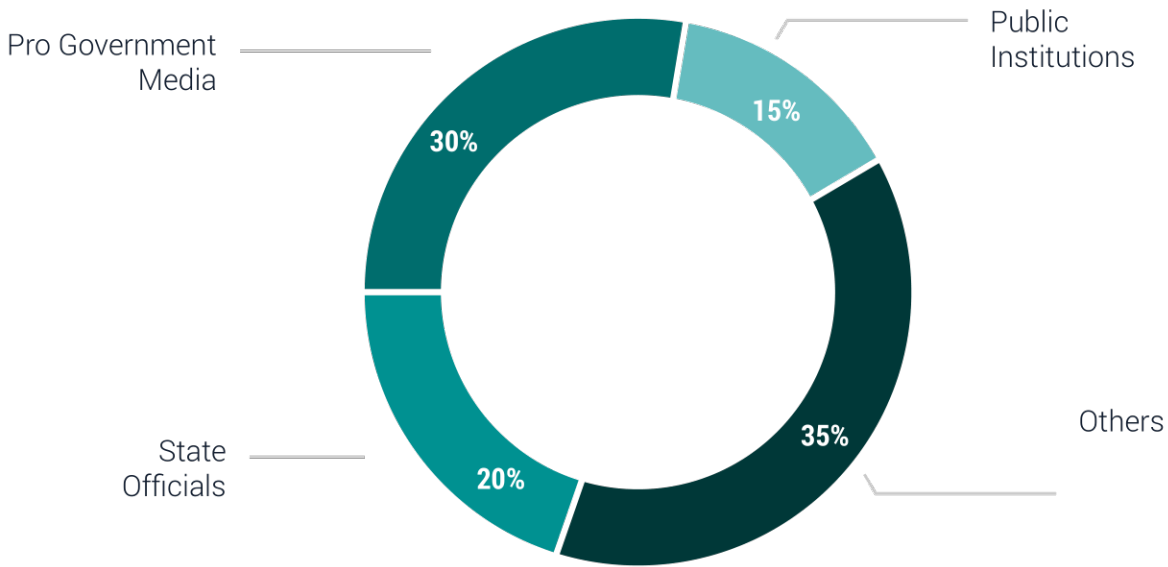
Likewise, the restart of the trial of human rights defenders and members of the organization *FundaRedes* Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García is worrying. The judicial harassment against them must stop and Javier Tarazona must be released.

Finally, we warn of the attacks against indigenous defenders in their fight to defend their land and territory.

PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 7 attacks (35%) were carried out by other actors related to the government or associated with the structures of the Popular System of Protection for Peace (Sp3); 6 of the acts were perpetrated from the traditional and digital media of the State and its accounts on social networks (30%); another 4 of the attacks were carried out by public officials, who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize and intimidate (20%); and 3 were the responsibility of Public Institutions (15%).



01 CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE, DEMAND AND, PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The 20 events documented during July 2023 reflect that the right to defend, demand and promote human rights is under constant attack by the State.

Measures contrary to the civic and democratic Space continue to be adopted, which makes the environment for the exercise of activities by civil society, and in particular by human rights organizations, increasingly adverse and hostile, while the Policy deepens. of Criminalization.

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The patterns of aggression continue to be applied with force against those who carry out activities related to the claim and protection of rights. People and organizations that ensure the protection of human dignity face attacks and intimidation, without effective mechanisms that guarantee the exercise of their work.

The stigmatization campaigns do not stop, and on the contrary, a discourse that tries to link the work of human rights organizations with “destabilization”¹ activities and disqualifies them in the framework of international cooperation activities is intensifying².

On the other hand, the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) modified the jurisdiction of the Court that heard the criminal case of the members of the organization FundaRedes, Javier Tarazona, José Rafael Tarazona, and Omar de Dios García, which meant a new restart of the trial for defenders³. Based on the principle of immediacy established in the Organic Code of Criminal Procedure, the new competent court and judge must be aware of and witness the entire trial debate without interruptions, therefore, with the change of jurisdiction, it must start from scratch. The fact is a new impact on the right to due process of the victims who have been arbitrarily subjected to judicial harassment and criminalization since 2021.

We warn about the continuous threats and attacks on indigenous leaders and defenders, who, for defending and demanding respect for their territories, have been victims of serious damage to their lives and integrity.

Finally, we express our concern that, at the close of this report, two situations occurred that violated the right to defend human rights and freedom of association.

Six union leaders were sentenced to 16 years in prison for the crimes of “conspiracy and association to commit a crime”, the fact demonstrates the increase in persecution and repression in retaliation for their demanding activities for the claim of social rights.

On the other hand, the intervention of a non-governmental organization by the Supreme Court of Justice violates freedom of association and represents a serious precedent and threat to the rest of civil society.

Given the continuity of the socio-political crisis and the complex humanitarian emergency, the work of defense, demand and promotion of human rights, are more necessary, so it is essential that measures be established that allow their action without reprisals or arbitrary limitations.

¹Diario Misión Verdad: <https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/sin-plan-economico-la-estrategia-opositora-para-las-primarias> ; <https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/se-viene-un-nuevo-conflicto-en-venezuela>

²<https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/la-proxima-agresion-que-eeuu-prepara-para-contra-venezuela>; <https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/las-primarias-como-producto-del-ecosistema-usaid>

³<https://supremainjusticia.org/y-el-debido-proceso-tsj-obliga-a-comenzar-de-cero-los-juicios-contra-ronald-carreno-y-javier-tarazona/>

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

Faced with the advances of 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.

Among the main actions and calls by international organizations registered during the month of April are:

On July 5, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, at Session No. 53 of the Human Rights Council, presented an update and follow-up report on recommendations made to the Venezuelan State. In the text, he expressed concern about the effects on peasant defenders, threats, and intimidation of indigenous defenders. It was also warned that *“during the reporting period, OHCHR continued to document restrictions on civic space, including restrictive legal frameworks that remained in place, which limited the work of civil society organizations and allegations that dissident voices they were subjected to arbitrary judicial and administrative procedures, as well as stigmatization. OHCHR documented 21 reports of threats and harassment, 46 cases of stigmatization on social media or public broadcasts by state officials, and 17 cases of criminalization, including 10 cases of arbitrary detention against human rights defenders, journalists, and other societal actors. civilian, including eight women. OHCHR encourages Venezuela to intensify its efforts to guarantee an open and pluralistic civic space” (...)*. Likewise, a series of recommendations were issued aimed at the protection of defenders and the exercise of their rights⁴.

Same, in the framework of the presentation of the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at Session No. 53 of the Human Rights Council, different countries such as Belgium on behalf of various countries, the Delegation of the European Union, Portugal, Peru, Ecuador, France, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Spain, Georgia, Australia, and Uruguay, spoke out about the closure of the civic and democratic space in Venezuela, particularly about the importance of respecting the work of organizations and defenders and cease attacks against them⁵.

Regarding international organizations, the interventions of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) stand out, which warned of the closure of civic space and the attacks on defenders and union leaders; the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), who spoke out for the protection of human rights defenders and civic space; Civicus who exposed cases of defenders and union leaders' victims of criminalization. Amnesty International, spoke out against the threats to civil society and the case of Javier Tarazona; the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) expressed concern about the situation of defenders in the pre-electoral context; and the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) who ruled on the criminalization of defender⁶.

03 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The violence, repression and social control of the State continues to generate negative impacts on the enjoyment of human rights in Venezuela and restrict the civic and democratic space. We insist that within the framework of a pre-electoral context, respect for the exercise of activities to defend, promote and demand human rights must be fully guaranteed and without reprisals.

The State must advance in the construction of favorable and safe environments, to minimize and mitigate the risks that currently exist for those who defend, demand and promote human rights and 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 these activities.

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, to refrain from classifying the people who work within the framework of these as enemies and to 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 restoration of democratic institutions and the rule of law in accordance with the Constitutional mandates.

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