



**CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA**

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

**FIRST QUARTER
2024**

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01

418 VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA DURING THE FIRST TRIMESTER OF 2024

The Center for Human Rights Defenders and Justice (CDJ) documented 418 attacks and security incidents during the first quarter of 2024, evidencing the systematicity of the Criminalization Policy against those who promote, defend, and demand human rights in Venezuela.

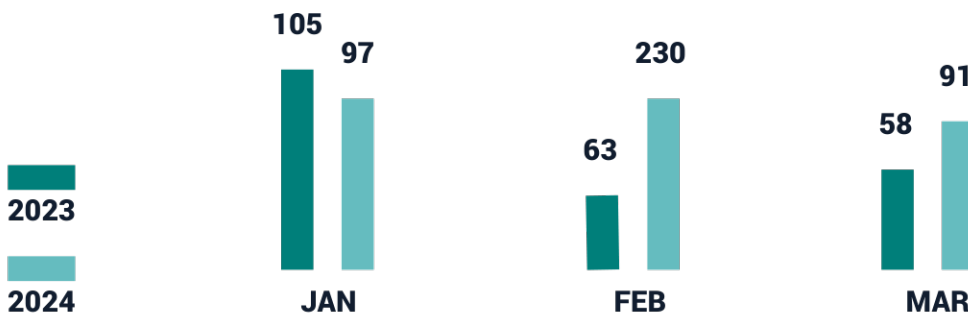
ATTACKS FIRST QUARTER OF 2024



During the first trimester of 2024, the closure of the Civic and Democratic Space deepened, within the framework of a pre-electoral context, affecting the actions of people and civil society organizations.

Between January and March 2023, 418 new events were documented that compromise and affect the right to defend, which represents an increase of 85% in relation to the same period in 2023 when 226 situations were recorded.

DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACKS PER MONTH



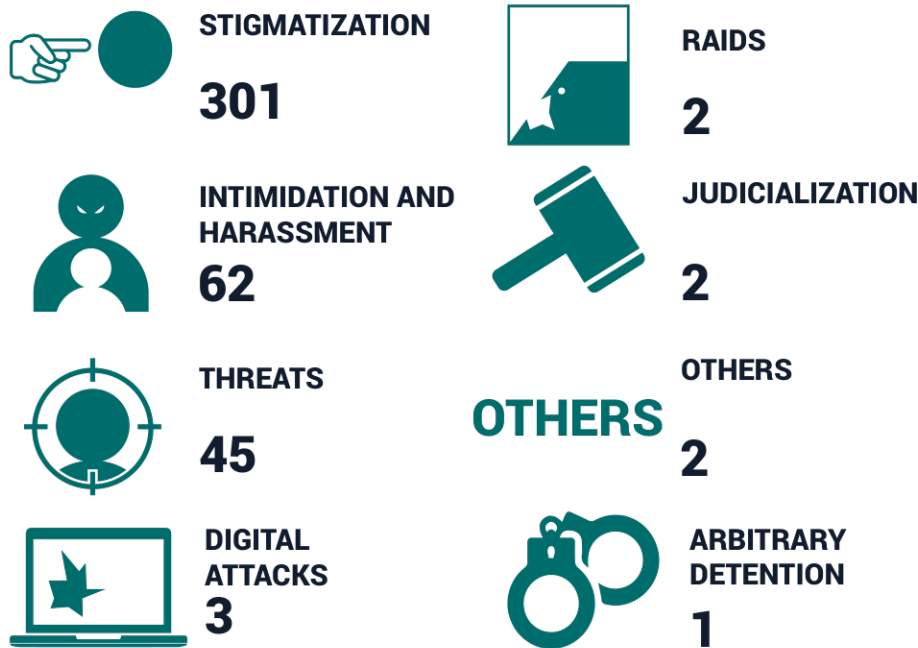
The Venezuelan State applied the repressive patterns that make up the Policy of criminalization, repression and social control against those who are on the front line of action, defending, demanding and promoting human rights.

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During the period, new regulatory advances were generated aimed at restricting civic freedoms in the country. The draft *Law on Supervision, Regularization, Performance and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations* and the draft *Law against fascism, neo-fascism and similar expressions* represent new threats to the work of civil society and increase the level of risk for organizations and people defending human rights.

The 418 security attacks and incidents documented reflect the following among the main patterns of aggression and intimidation:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



During the quarter, the CDJ documented speeches and stigmatization campaigns, systematically pointing out non-governmental organizations as terrorists, destabilizing agents and traitors, being the main pattern of attack, as a way of intimidating.

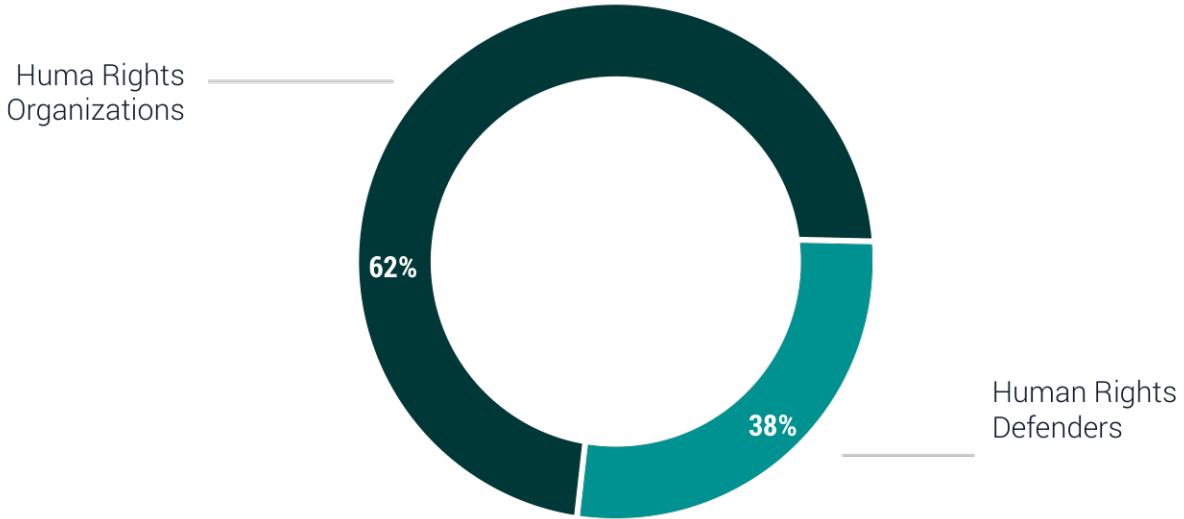
This type of aggression is aimed at neutralizing defender organizations and individuals, identifying them according to the government narrative as enemies of the country. Additionally, stigmatization manifests itself as an element that leads to the materialization of other types of attacks, such as threats, acts of harassment and intimidation, and arbitrary detentions.

The work of organizations and people defending human rights is affected as different instances of the Public Power attempt to link them to criminal activities, destabilization and attacks on the peace of the country; as well as seeking to associate them with opposition political parties, in order to question their independence, using restrictive laws and criminal law to judicialize, persecute and criminalize under the logic of the internal enemy.

Digital attacks and other violations of personal freedom and integrity were also documented, events that affect the exercise of the promotion, defense and demand of human rights.

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total attacks documented during the first quarter of 2024, 259 were directed against human rights organizations and organizations that carry out humanitarian actions, equivalent to 62% of the total. While 159 were identified against human rights defenders, the remaining 38%.



Among the victims of the attacks, the following stand out: threats, intimidation, harassment and acts of stigmatization to the detriment of the organization *Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – Provea*; Accusations and harassment against organizations such as *Espacio Público (EP)*, *Transparencia Venezuela*, *Foro Penal*, *Control Ciudadano*, *Amnesty International*, *Sin Mordaza*, *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela (IPYS)*, among others.

Likewise, we highlight the increase and systematicity of campaigns to stigmatize and criminalize international cooperation, and describe their activities as interfering and destabilizing. Systematic threats to civic and democratic space and the actions taken to limit it even further, standing out as the main events recorded in the trimester.

Finally, we highlight the continuity of the process of judicialization, criminalization and other acts of intimidation committed against human rights defenders Javier Tarazona and Rocío San Miguel.

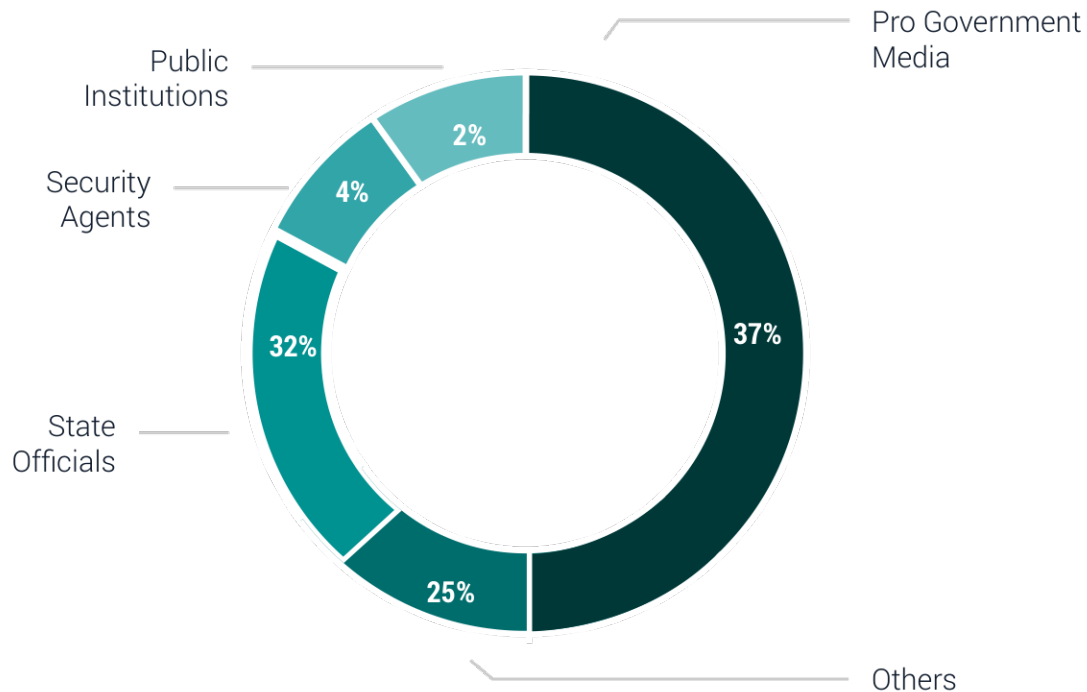
PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 155 (37%) of the attacks were perpetrated from the State communication platform; another 136 (32%) 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 and institutional spaces to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; 104 (25%) were carried out by people or groups

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affected by the interests of the State; 15 (4%) of the events were the responsibility of State security agencies; Finally, Public Institutions or government entities were responsible for 8 (2%) events.



The main people responsible for the attacks committed against those who defend and demand identified human rights include members of the National Executive, ministers, deputies of the National Assembly (AN), among others. Likewise, institutions that are part of the Justice System present themselves as part of the aggressors.

Radio and television programs along with digital media, members of the national public media system and media associated with the State, continue to be used as a platform for stigmatization campaigns and calls for violence. They stand out: *Con el Mazo Dando*, *Misión Verdad*, *Venezuela Agency News*, *Correo del Orinoco*, and other programs on *Venezolana de Televisión (VTV)*, which were spaces used to discredit and attack organizations.

Other actors, following the government line, joined in the actions of stigmatization, intimidation and harassment as part of criminalization.

02 THE CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC SPACE IN VENEZUELA CONTINUES TO BE THREATENED

The environment for the defense, demand and promotion of rights continues to be adverse and hostile. The implementation of legal and factual measures that are restrictive and contrary to civic and democratic space increase the risks for people and organizations defending human rights.

The first quarter is characterized by new threats coming from the Legislative Branch. During the month of January, parliament moved forward with the draft Law on Supervision, Regularization, Performance and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Related Organizations, and the announcement of the presentation of a new regulatory project entitled *Law against fascism, neo-fascism and expressions of similar*.

In relation to the draft Law on Supervision, Regularization, Performance and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Related Organizations, we have warned since 2023 of the negative implications it has for the exercise of the rights to free association and the possibility of independent action of civil society. As of January 12, of this year, under a series of irregularities in the process, the regulatory text was subjected to debate and consultation, for subsequent review and presentation to the plenary session for its second discussion. As of the date of the presentation of this report, the Domestic Policy Commission of the National Assembly publicly announced that it had completed its report for presentation and progress in its approval¹, highlighting the incorporation of new articles not contemplated in the draft proposal that circulated during the public consultation process.

State officials have stated that the purpose of the rule is “to establish a legal framework for registration, review and audit of the funds received by these non-governmental organizations” and that “it establishes the registration parameters of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which must explain their financing methods, national or international”. However, we are concerned when analyzing in detail that the provisions contained in the regulatory text are characterized by having ambiguous and imprecise wording, which increases the risk of being interpreted with a wide field of discretion. Likewise, the explanatory memorandum reflects the characteristic language of the internal enemy thesis aimed at protecting National Security against the possibility of foreign intervention and interference. Same language that has been used in other restrictive legislation in Venezuela.

From the CDJ we have recorded how for several years there have been repeated threats of the need to approve a Law so that it can serve to control civil society organizations, under the argument of the need to create an instrument to control organizations that carry out activities contrary to national peace, that serve as destabilizing agents and promote foreign interference, as a central element of the criminalization of international cooperation².

¹ National Assembly. 04.04.2024. Domestic Policy Commission completes report for second discussion of law on NGOs. At: <https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/comision-de-politica-interior-culmina-informe-para-segunda-discusion-de-ley-sobre-ong>

² See Center for Defenders and Justice. Situation of human rights defenders in Venezuela 2017-2021. Available at: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/InformeEspecialCDJ-2017-2021.pdf>

We reiterate that, although according to international standards, the registration of organizations does not limit per se the right to association, said registration cannot in any way imply a regime of authorization for the work or existence of the same, and neither can it impose extraordinary or impossible requirements for them. As we have denounced from the CDJ and other organizations, the Draft Law on Supervision, Regularization, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Related Organizations, in the terms in which it has been presented, fails to comply with these precepts and moves away from the standards of international law. from the human rights.

On the other hand, on March 24, the Executive Branch announced the creation of a High State Commission against Fascism and Neofascism and the National Assembly was required to present a regulatory project to confront all expressions of fascism in the exercise of politics and national life³: in this regard, the justification of these new measures focused on *“consideration of the international situation, whose peace and stability are threatened by neo-fascist expressions festering in centers of power at the service of the global north⁴, and that it seeks to protect the country from acts of violence and “the serious consequences for the country’s economy, sovereignty and territorial integrity compromised by extremist factors that took over the Venezuelan parliament in 2015 to strip Venezuela of its resources and create internal destabilization”⁵. These events led to Parliament announcing that a new regulatory project titled *Law against fascism, neofascism and similar expressions would be presented*, which was submitted for first discussion at the beginning of April⁶. In this regard, we highlight that the ambiguity of its provisions and its general application represents a risk for defender organizations and individuals, as well as for independent media. This, therefore, in a broad, ambiguous and imprecise way, seeks to sanction speeches, activities and demonstrations that, arbitrarily, are considered “fascist” from an ideological point of view. Likewise, it is important to remember that labels such as “fascists”, “traitors” and accusations of hate crimes are elements systematically used to stigmatize and criminalize those who defend, demand and promote human rights in the country.*

Both regulatory proposals constitute the most recent advances of the State in deepening the closure of the Civic and Democratic Space. If its approval and entry into force are finalized, the legal operation of human rights and civil society organizations in Venezuela is put at risk, who are once again exposed to attempts to criminalize their work within the framework of the exercise of cooperation and their advocacy activities. denounce, defend and demand rights and increase the possibilities of criminalization under the logic of the enemy, protected by these laws.

Despite the progress, the texts are not available in official spaces and the projects have only been known unofficially. The highly restrictive and punitive provisions of the right to freedom of association and, consequently, the work of non-governmental organizations, and the excessive restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and peaceful demonstration, are of concern, as they violate human rights. Ambiguous and imprecise wording increases the risk of being interpreted with a wide field of discretion.

We warn that the justification of this type of legislation focused on the need to protect the nation and its sovereignty against interventionist, destabilizing and terrorist attacks, based on the thesis of the internal enemy aimed at the protection of National Security, increases the risks for the civil society, and is the basis for the materialization of attacks. within the framework of the existing

³TalCual Newspaper. 03/24/2024. Maduro proposes a law against fascism “against its expressions” in national politics. At: <https://talcualdigital.com/maduro-propone-ley-contra-el-fascismo-frente-a-sus-expresiones-en-la-politica-nacional/#:~:text=El%20mandatario%20Nicol%C3%A1s%20Maduro%20cre%C3%B3,pl%C3%ADtica%20y%20la%20vida%20nacional>

⁴Eiusdem

⁵Eiusdem

⁶National Assembly. 02.04.2024. AN approves the Bill against Fascism in its first discussion. At: <https://www.asambleanacional.gov.ve/noticias/an-aprob-en-primera-discusion-proyecto-de-ley-contra-el-fascismo>

Criminalization, Repression and Social Control Policy. Following the announcements of these regulatory advances, not only is the operational capacity of organizations within the framework of legality and independently threatened, but it has also led to the increase and materialization of other attacks and incidents. Highlighting in the quarter was the persistence of stigmatization, the increase in intimidation, harassment and threats.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Legislative Branch also proposed to the Permanent Commission on Internal Policy to create a Law against traitors to the Homeland, alleging that parliament is *“obliged to make that law, a severe, draconian law, which punish the traitors, punish the traitors. It’s good that they dare to attack the sacred interests of the country”, (...), “...so that crimes against sovereignty, against cultural values and against our integrity are severely punished”*⁷. There is concern that this other proposal could also be used to apply greater controls and repression against civil society actors, under arguments of protection of national sovereignty.

As long as there is no conducive and safe environment for the exercise and defense of human rights, and as long as the restrictive measures of civic and democratic space remain in force, people and organizations defending human rights in Venezuela will continue to face serious risks and remain exposed to possible be committed different types of attacks and retaliation for the exercise of their work.

03

CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE, DEMAND AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

At the end of the first quarter of the year, the Criminalization Policy of the defense, demand and promotion of human rights remains in force and the materialization of violent acts increases. Factual and legal measures continue to be implemented to restrict the work of organizations and individuals defending human rights under the improvement of the application of the internal enemy thesis.

In the period, stigmatization remains the main modality of the attack pattern. As a result of these systematic discredit campaigns and accusations related to treason, interference, terrorism and destabilization, they have served as a basis to support and justify actions contrary to freedom and personal integrity, as well as to establish greater, arbitrary and discretionary, to the defense, demand and promotion of human rights.

The disqualifying speech was focused on accusations related to the use of international financing for political and interventionist purposes, also being linked to the pre-electoral context. This narrative was widely replicated in the media and communication platforms related to the government, and those that make up the National Public Media System, expanding its reach and thus strengthening a contrary and criminalizing message of the actions carried out by people and human rights organizations⁸.

⁷ National Assembly. 03/19/2024. Deputy Jorge Rodríguez proposes creating a Law against traitors to the Homeland. Available in: <https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/diputado-jorge-rodriguez-propone-crear-ley-contra-los-traidores-de-la-patria>

⁸Center for Defenders and Justice. Situation of human rights defenders in Venezuela - February 2024. Available at: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CDJReporteFebrero2024.pdf> Center for Defenders and Justice. Situation of human rights defenders in Venezuela - January 2024. Available at: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CDJReporteEnero2024.pdf>

The first quarter of the year was also characterized by threats and acts of intimidation and harassment carried out against the human rights movement, actions that directly compromise the integrity and security of people and defending organizations; and are constituted as actions designed to generate fear among civil society so that it inhibits itself from acting for fear of being a victim of repressive policies, criminalization and social control. In this regard, we remember that the Public Powers and various government entities are responsible by action and by omission for the materialization of attacks and execution of the patterns that make up the criminalization policy.

Threats materialize, increasing the risks for defenders. An example of this is the case of the criminalization of defender Rocío San Miguel, who, along with other members of her family and close friends, including her daughter and brothers, have been victims of arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, stigmatization, intimidation, harassment and judicialization process. For years, San Miguel has been the object of stigmatization, threats, intimidation and attacks. After these constant attacks, in the month of February, she was arbitrarily detained and accused of alleged acts of terrorism, treason, conspiracy and association to commit a crime⁹. As of the date of presentation of this report, San Miguel remains deprived of liberty, with a tax accusation and without having been able to name a defense she trusts, violating her right to a fair trial and due procedural guarantees.

The Venezuelan State continues to take actions against civil society as the country approaches the electoral events to be held in the second half of the year. From the CDJ we insist that the work carried out to protect rights in a context like the Venezuelan one is vital for the recovery of democratic institutions and the obtaining of justice, truth and reparation for the violations committed.

From the CDJ we call to guarantee a favorable and safe environment for the exercise of these. The State and all actors acting with its consent and acquiescence must immediately cease acts of intimidation, harassment, stigmatization and threats. Restrictive regulations must be repealed.

04

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY REMAINS ALERT AND CONDEMNS THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA

The international community continues to monitor the human rights situation regarding the criminalization of the defense and demand for human rights in Venezuela. International organizations and human rights protection bodies and diplomatic actors 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 pronouncements registered between January and March 2023 are:

On January 26, through a press release, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE)¹⁰ regarding the new advances in the approval of the law that seeks to control organizations, called on the State of Venezuela to *"refrain from approving a bill that would have the effect of limiting the right of association, citizen participation in matters of public interest and the defense of human rights"*. Expressing concern about a bill that limits the activities of non-profit organizations and grants state authorities the power to unilaterally dissolve those that participate in political activities or that threaten national stability and the institutions of the Republic. This project is part of a series of government acts that seek to control and limit the work of civil society organizations and restrict civic space. The IACHR and the RELE expressed their concern about the stigmatizing statements made by pro-government deputies towards NGOs, describing them as "enemies", "destabilizers", "traitors of the country" and "party facades". These statements show a climate of hostility towards people and organizations that defend human rights or practice journalism in Venezuela. This Commission continues to urge the Venezuelan State to refrain from approving legislation that arbitrarily limits the right of association, freedom of expression and participation in matters of public interest. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of the work of defenders in building a solid and lasting democratic society.

On February 12, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ruled on the case of defender Rocío San Miguel, denouncing its "condemnation of the forced disappearance of the defender, beneficiary of Precautionary Measures", and urged the State to report on her whereabouts and ensure respect for their judicial guarantees and presumption of innocence¹¹

On February 13, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (FFM) issued a statement in which it expressed its deep concern about the detention of human rights defender Rocío San Miguel. He also urged the Government to stop the growing wave of repression that is being observed in the country. The Mission expressed regarding the case that *"these are not isolated incidents, but rather a series of events that appear to be part of a coordinated plan to silence critics and those perceived as opponents"*. Likewise, he indicated that *"it is up to the Government to refrain from using repressive measures contrary to its obligations in terms of international human rights law and international criminal law"*. Finally, the experts pointed out that *"in Venezuela, measures of repression and intimidation aimed at reducing civic space - now at greater risk with the upcoming approval of the law that regulates non-governmental organizations and that affects their independence - continue to combine with other very serious measures of repression"*¹².

On February 13, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights spoke out regarding the case of defender Rocío San Miguel, stating *"We follow with deep concern the detention of human rights defender Rocío San Miguel. His whereabouts remain unknown, which could qualify his detention as a forced disappearance. We urge her immediate release and respect for her right to legal defense"*¹³.

On March 13, the European Parliament discussed a proposed resolution on the situation of prisoners for political reasons in Venezuela. In the debate, the case of Defender Rocío San Miguel stood out. Their freedom and restoration of their rights were demanded¹⁴.

¹⁰ <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/CIDH/prensa/comunicados/2024/022.asp>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1757157849153589756>

¹² <https://waps.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/02/venezuela-fact-finding-mission-expresses-profound-concern-over-detention>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/UNHumanRights/status/1757307231614202368>

¹⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2024-0179_ES.html

On March 19, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a new oral update before the Human Rights Council, among its concerns it expressed that “ as Venezuela enters an electoral cycle, with presidential elections scheduled for March 28 July of this year, I am very concerned about measures to unduly restrict civic and democratic space, including cases of detention, intimidation and stigmatization” ; He also referred to cases of criminalization of human rights defenders, denouncing that “ Human rights defenders continue to face repression, arbitrary detention and threats, among them Javier Tarazona and Rocío San Miguel . ” Finally, he called on the authorities to refrain from adopting the Bill on Supervision, Regularization, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Related Organizations in Venezuela, since “it could prevent the delivery of vital humanitarian aid and assistance”¹⁵.

On March 20, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela presented a new oral update to the Human Rights Council. The case of defender Rocío San Miguel was among her main concerns, indicating that the events against San Miguel and her family “respond to a pattern already reported in previous reports from the Mission.” Likewise, he spoke about the draft Law on Inspection, Regularization, Performance and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Related Organizations, recalling that it was the same one that was questioned in 2023 by the Mission and that “it is an attempt to further restrict the “ability of civil society actors to operate freely and independently in the country”¹⁶.

During the Session of the Human Rights Council, in the interactive dialogues that followed the oral updates from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, different delegations from the Council countries As member countries of the European Union, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Canada, among others, spoke out against the closure of the Civic and Democratic space and the situation of criminalization of people and organizations defending human rights¹⁷.

In relation to the pronouncements of international organizations:

On January 12, the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) stated that they were “ seriously concerned about the reopening of the discussion of a bill that has the practical effect of criminalizing and hindering the legitimate work of civil society organizations.” civil society in that country ” and in the face of the stigmatizations made during the debate they indicated “ as part of their obligations to create an environment conducive to the defense of rights, Venezuelan state actors must refrain from contributing to rhetoric that insults or stigmatizes defenders ”¹⁸.

On January 17, the international organizations Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), Human Rights Watch, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) (within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders), and the Foundation for Due Process of Law (DPLF), issued a statement expressing their concern about legislation that seeks to criminalize and hinder the work of civil society in Venezuela, warned that “ If enacted, this law would seriously hinder freedom of association and the free and independent functioning of civil society organizations by requiring them to request government authorization for their operations and disclose any foreign financing.” . The vague and

¹⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/es/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/deputy-high-commissioner-updates-human-rights-council-venezuela>

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/es/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/statement-marta-valinas-chair-independent-international-fact>

¹⁷ <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1i/k1jtwz8c6> and <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19r5gjq82>

¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/cejil/status/1745935746987405667>

ambiguous language of the current draft bill raises fears of further persecution of human rights defenders, with possible fines, cancellations of registrations and even criminal charges. *"The bill's explicit emphasis on foreign funding and labeling NGOs as "foreign agents" adds to its troubling features"*¹⁹.

On January 18, the organization Fundación Paz y Reconciliación expressed its concern about legislative advances that could affect the right to association of organizations in Venezuela²⁰.

Amnesty International, in a call not to approve the Law on supervision, regularization, performance and financing of non-governmental and related organizations, on January 18 made a call regarding regulatory advances: It is extremely worrying that the National Assembly of Venezuela has resumed the discussion of the bill aimed at non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the country. This bill represents another attempt to control, limit and possibly criminally prosecute NGOs, which play a fundamental role in Venezuelan society. This is especially serious in the context of the possible presidential elections that will take place this year 2024. (...). The content of this bill contradicts international human rights norms and standards, and constitutes a serious threat to the work of NGOs, humanitarian organizations and other members of civil society in Venezuela. Furthermore, it represents a shameful effort to limit their valuable work supporting the most vulnerable people in the country. The letter ends with a strong call to immediately end this bill in the National Assembly, and ensure that stop all efforts aimed at attacking, controlling, prosecuting or censoring civil society organizations that work hard to protect the rights of all people in Venezuela, especially those who need it most²¹.

On the other hand, on January 19, Amnesty International published a news item regarding the imminent approval of this law, for which Ana Piquer, Director for the Americas of this organization, expressed that "If approved, this law would have devastating consequences for the most vulnerable populations. vulnerable, affected by the humanitarian crisis, migratory expulsion factors, and daily abuses of power. This law would outlaw all civil associations and, therefore, all citizen initiatives that have sought to contain and reverse the very serious human rights situation and institutional challenges in Venezuela. "We demand in the strongest terms that the bill be stopped immediately." Furthermore, countries and international organizations that have facilitated conversations between different groups in Venezuela with the aim of improving the human rights situation in the country must protect civil society organizations due to their fundamental role in supporting the Venezuelan population. which is in a situation of great vulnerability. Piquer and Amnesty International are confident that they will not remain silent or be complicit in any attack on civic space in Venezuela.

On February 11, the organization Amnesty International spoke out on the case of defender Rocío San Miguel, requesting her immediate and unconditional release and stated that they were *"monitoring the complaint of San Miguel's forced disappearance"*. The organization joined the calls for respect for their rights, the precautionary measure of protection issued in their favor by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), as well as access to lawyers and family members²². In this same order of ideas, on February 13, Amnesty published an urgent global action establishing that San Miguel, a renowned activist for her defense of human rights, demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Rocío and that her personal integrity be guaranteed²³.

¹⁹<https://dplf.org/en/news/international-organizations-express-concern-over-legislation-aiming-criminalize-and-obstruct>

²⁰<https://twitter.com/parescolombia/status/1748089453107642641/photo/1>

²¹<https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/7602/2024/es/>

²²<https://twitter.com/amnestia/status/1756689884192895433>

²³<https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2024/02/venezuela-la-escalada-de-represion-del-gobierno-e-intentos-de-evadir-el-escrutinio-enfrentan-el-forceful-rejection-of-international-civil-society/>

On February 12, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) through an alert demanded the immediate release and respect for the health and physical integrity of defender Rocío San Miguel. In its publication, the international organization referred to the history of San Miguel and the history of attacks of which it has been a victim²⁴.

The Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) on February 12 expressed: "We join the international community and Venezuelan civil society to condemn the detention and criminalization of human rights defender, Rocío San Miguel. *"We demand to know her whereabouts, her immediate release and the cessation of harassment against her and her family"*²⁵.

On February 13, 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), issued an Urgent Alert regarding the case of defender Rocío San Miguel. The Observatory condemned *"the forced disappearance of Rocío San Miguel and her family members, which appears to have the sole objective of punishing her for her legitimate activities in defense of human rights, and expresses its deep concern about the risks to her health, including the increased risk of being subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment or acts of torture."* Likewise, he urged the Venezuelan authorities to *"guarantee the safety, physical integrity, and psychological well-being of Rocío San Miguel and that of her relatives, to reveal their fate and whereabouts and to release them immediately and unconditionally"*²⁶.

On February 16, the organization Front Line Defenders issued an urgent call regarding the case of Defender Rocío San Miguel, expressing its concern in relation to the detention and incommunicado detention of the defender, as well as *"the series of irregularities in the process in against him and his relatives, as he considers that it constitutes another attempt to stop his legitimate work in defense of human rights in Venezuela"*. The organization also specified that they note *"with concern the use of punitive measures by the government of Venezuela to discourage, sanction or prevent the exercise of the right to defend human rights in the broadest sense, as well as the widespread attempts to criminalize the work of women, human rights defenders in the country"*²⁷.

On March 5, the organization Civicus Alliance, in its Civic Monitor program that monitors the situation of the Civic and Democratic Space, expressed "deep concerns about the exercise of civic freedoms in Venezuela" after going from being considered repressive to being classified as closed, the worst rating, according to their standards²⁸.

During the Session of the Human Rights Council, in the interactive dialogues that followed the oral updates of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, different international organizations spoke before the situation of criminalization of people and organizations defending human rights and expressed concern about the proposed law against NGO²⁹.

²⁴https://twitter.com/fidh_es/status/1757149420708135179

²⁵<https://twitter.com/cejil/status/1757147930014720206>

²⁶<https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/venezuela-desaparicion-forzada-y-detencion-arbitraria>

²⁷<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/incomunicado-detention-woman-human-rights-defender-roc%C3%ADo-san-miguel>

²⁸<https://monitor.civicus.org/watchlist-march-2024/es/>

²⁹<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1i/k1ijtzw8c6> and <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19r5gjq82>

05 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To the extent that the State continues to adopt measures aimed at closing civic space, the risks for civil society will continue to increase. We reiterate that activities to defend, demand and promote human rights are not a crime and the necessary measures must be taken to guarantee their safe exercise without fear of reprisals.

Aggressions and attacks continue that affect the life, freedom and personal integrity of the victims. The actions of the State aimed at reducing civic and democratic space that seriously affect the operational capacities and possibilities of action of organizations and people defending human rights, who have to carry out their activities under the fear of being victims of the Policy of criminalization, repression and social control.

From the CDJ we insist that the work of those who document, denounce, and disseminate the violations committed by the State and those who provide assistance in the face of social needs are essential for respect for human dignity and reprisals should not be committed against them.

We urge the Venezuelan State to comply with the recommendations of the international community and its obligations to protect, guarantee and respect rights and immediately cease the criminalization of defenders and stop legislative advances that seek to control, limit and criminalize civil society in Venezuela.

All necessary measures must be adopted to advance the construction of conducive and safe environments that allow the right to defend human rights to be exercised without fear of being a victim of attacks or reprisals.

CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA

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