



**CENTRO PARA  
LOS DEFENSORES  
Y LA JUSTICIA**

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# **SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA**

**FEBRUARY 2024**

## CONTENT

01

230 VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA DURING FEBRUARY 2024

PAG. 3

02

CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE, DEMAND AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

PAG. 7

03

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

PAG. 9

04

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PAG. 11

The Center for Human Rights Defenders and Justice (CDJ) documented 230 attacks and security incidents during February 2024 in Venezuela.

### ATTACKS FEBRUARY 2024



# 230 ATTACKS

During February the Policy of Criminalization, Repression and Social Control of the defense, demand and promotion of human rights was maintained.

The closure of Civic and Democratic Space deepens during the pre-electoral period.

The Venezuelan State continues to advance in the implementation of actions and measures that promote the closure of civic and democratic space, hindering the rights to free association, assembly and defense of rights.

The thesis of the Internal Enemy is reinforced by systematic stigmatization campaigns, affecting organizations and defenders for carrying out their activities of documentation, denunciation and demand, they are identified as "destabilizing agents", "injerencistas", "enemies", "terrorists", among others.

# 01

## 230 VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA DURING FEBRUARY 2024

The environment for the defense, demand and promotion of rights in Venezuela in an electoral context is increasingly restrictive and unfavorable, raising the level of risk for those who carry out these activities.

230 attacks and security incidents documented during the month of February show the continuity of the patterns of aggression and intimidation that make up the Criminalization, Repression and Social Control Policy.

The events registered during February were characterized by:

THE 97 EVENTS RECORDED DURING JANUARY WERE CHARACTERIZED BY:



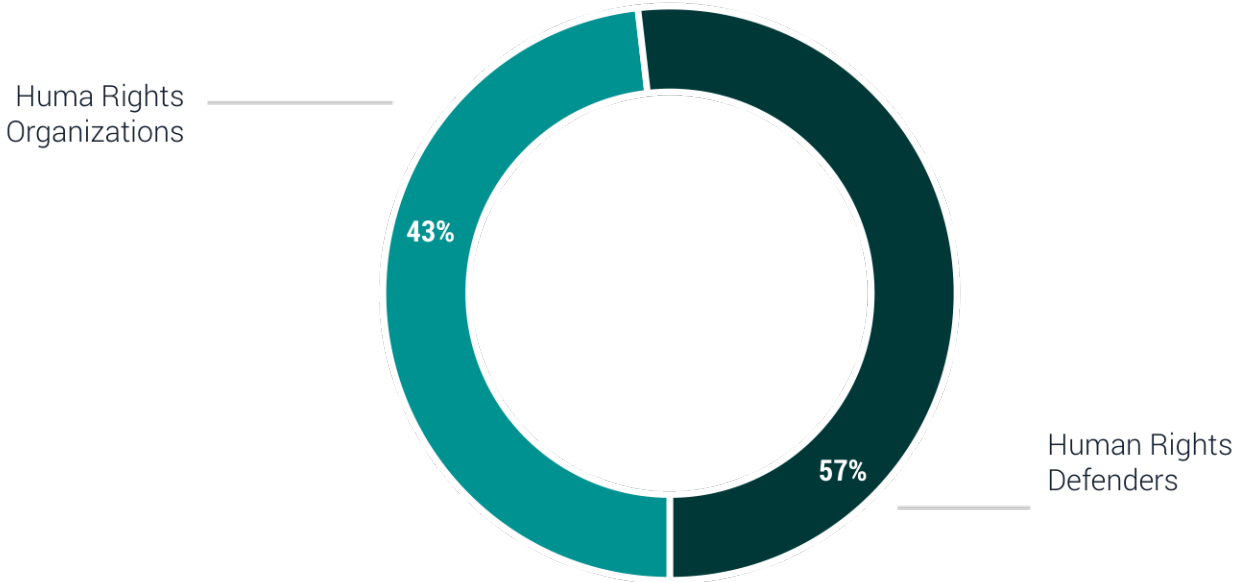
Stigmatization and acts of harassment and intimidation are presented as the main patterns of aggression implemented during the month. The discredit campaigns were aimed at discrediting the organizations, accusing them of being “destabilizing agents,” or of “supporting terrorists” among others, in order to attack those who spoke out in the case of **criminalization of the human rights defender Rocío San Miguel**.

The State deepens institutional violence as a way of hindering the legitimate exercise of the right to defend human rights, using actions to intimidate and harass civil society. These events, together with the threats, have been aimed at frightening organizations, in a context of increased repression and persecution. These actions are intended to have an intimidating, deterrent and control effect to neutralize civil society.

The repressive patterns that make up the Criminalization Policy for the defense, demand and promotion of human rights must stop. The State should comply with its international and constitutional obligations for guarantee the exercise and defense of rights without retaliation for this.

### VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total attacks documented during the month of February 2024, 131 were individualized against human rights defenders, equivalent to 57% of the total. While 99 were directed against human rights organizations, the remaining 43%



We view with concern the criminalization of human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, who, along with other members of her family and relatives, including her daughter and brothers, have been victims of arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, stigmatization, intimidation, harassment and judicialization process.

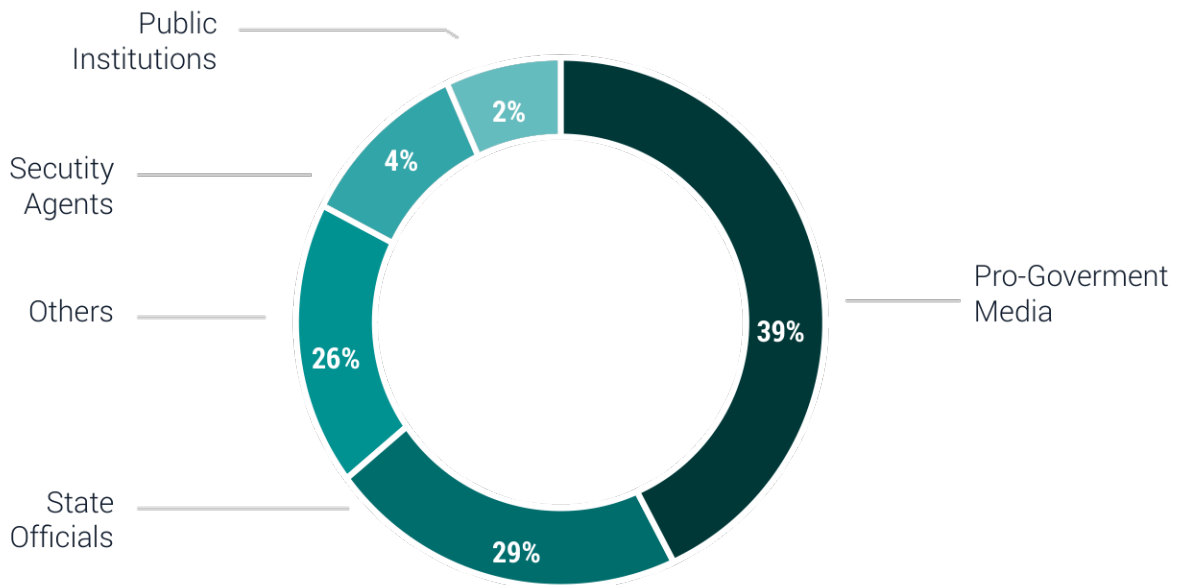
Likewise, we highlight the systematic nature of the stigmatization and criminalization campaigns of the work of human rights organizations, highlighting during the month accusations against the *Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA*, *Amnistía Internacional*, *Foro Penal*, *Control Ciudadano*, *Transparencia Venezuela*, *Sin Mordaza*, *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS)*. As well as the generalized stigmatization against the human rights movement for its promotion, defense and demand activities.

### PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 90 (39%) of the events were carried out from the State's traditional and digital media and their social media accounts; Another 66 (29%) of the attacks were perpetrated by State Officials, mainly deputies, ministers, members of the justice system, who made use of their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media, and institutional spaces to stigmatize, threaten and intimidate; 61 (26%) were carried out by people or groups affected by the political interests of the State; 9 (4%) were the responsibility of State security agencies; Finally, 4 (2%) of the events were the responsibility of Public Institutions or government entities.

**PERPETRATORS**



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 other people assigned to government entities. Likewise, institutions that are part of the Justice System present themselves as part of the aggressors.

Television programs, along with digital platforms, 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*, *La Iguana*, *TV*, *Correo del Orinoco*, *La IguanaTv*, and other programs on *Venezolana de Televisión (VTV)*, which were spaces used to discredit and attack organizations.

Various actors are responsible for actions of stigmatization, intimidation and harassment as part of the criminalization policy.



# 02 CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEFENSE, DEMAND AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The working conditions for those who defend and demand rights in Venezuela are increasingly hostile and unfavorable. The environment for human rights defenders and organizations is hostile, adverse and risky, as a result of the continuous restrictions.

Actions were documented to neutralize the human rights movement under the logic of the enemy. The repressive patterns of the State are used against civil society, affecting the rights to association, expression, defense, demand and promotion of rights. It was observed how the acts of intimidation and the accusations pursue a double purpose, directly affecting the victims and serving as a punishment and exemplary message for the rest of the human rights movement, with the aim of inhibiting them from continuing acting out of fear.

We see with concern that during the month this practice gained strength, and was mainly reflected in the case of human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, president of the organization *Control Ciudadano*, victim of a criminalization process in which serious violations of her human rights, starting with an arbitrary detention at the Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía on February 9, which was not recognized or notified until days after it occurred and in the meantime there was denial of the defender's whereabouts by of State security and intelligence agencies. In light of the facts, international mechanisms such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights indicated that *"his detention could be classified as a forced disappearance"*; For its part, the Independent International Mission to Determine the Facts about the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela pointed out that *"in accordance with the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, of which Venezuela is a part, one of the constitutive elements of forced disappearances is the denial of information about the whereabouts of the person, which prevents the exercise of legal remedies and the relevant procedural guarantees"*.

Five members of the family and relatives to San Miguel, including her daughter and two brothers, were also victims of these facts<sup>2</sup>.

After 48 hours of San Miguel's arrest, she and her family were presented before the Second Court with jurisdiction against Terrorism. The Public Ministry requested a measure of preventive judicial deprivation of liberty against the human rights defender for the alleged commission of the crimes. of *Treason to the Homeland, Conspiracy, Terrorism and Association* and the Court ruled the deprivation of liberty in the facilities of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN), one of her relatives was given also custodial measure and the other four family members were conditionally released, with precautionary measures of periodic presentation, among others<sup>4</sup>. This case shows how the State, within the framework of the repressive Policy, uses the Justice System to strengthen and materialize criminalization.

<sup>1</sup><https://twitter.com/UNHumanRights/status/1757307231614202368>

<sup>2</sup><https://waps.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/02/venezuela-fact-finding-mission-expresses-profound-concern-over-detention-02/13/24>. Communiqué from the Public Ministry. Rocío San Miguel Case. Available at: <https://twitter.com/TarekWilliamSaab/status/1757451120522178839?t=dgAWcDemKAYyPDL-WRq8xg&s=08>

<sup>4</sup>usdem

Statements by Tarek William Saab. February 14, 2024. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KJG6JGQOE>

Statements by Tarek William Saab. February 19, 2024. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daEzmKUb\\_rA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daEzmKUb_rA)

Conspiracy: MP will charge Rocío San Miguel and 5 other people in the "White Bracelet" case. The Iguana TV. 02/13/24. Available

Additionally, after the arrest, the human rights defender and the organization she represents were subject to constant threats, acts of intimidation and stigmatization campaigns; Various actors echoed the accusation with hate messages that sought to justify both the opening of the investigation against them and the persecution of the human rights movement.

The judicial process against San Miguel does not occur in isolation, but rather follows a line of previous attacks and threats against her for the work she does, and is framed in a context of increased persecution against society civil in Venezuela. It is also necessary to remember that San Miguel has been the object of constant attacks in various forms, among the most recent being a systematic campaign of stigmatization and intimidation against it, questioning its knowledge in the military area, among others<sup>5</sup>.

As of the date of presentation of this report, San Miguel remains deprived of liberty without having been able to name a defense she trusts, violating her right to a fair trial and due procedural guarantees.

On the other hand, it should be highlighted that during the period stigmatization was the main modality of attack. The discredit campaigns and public accusations focused on unfounded accusations against human rights defenders and organizations, attempting to link their actions to political proselytism, international interference and activities associated with organized crime<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, within the framework of the judicialization and criminalization of the defender, Rocío San Miguel, state officials and other actors discredited the complaints, campaigns and actions carried out by the human rights movement in favor of her freedom<sup>7</sup>. These activities were taken, again, as actions to promote “international interference”.

The threats against the human rights movement continued to be linked to the approval of the Law for the Supervision, Regulation, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations, whose process is still ongoing despite complaints that it is a highly restrictive instrument and violating the right to freedom of association.

The Center for Human Rights Defenders and Justice warns about the increase in attacks and institutional violence against those who defend, demand and promote human rights in the country. It is worrying that in an electoral context, restrictions on civic and democratic space continue to increase and acts of criminalization against civil society continue to materialize.

The activities of human rights defenders organizations defending rights in a context like the Venezuelan one are of vital importance for the establishment and strengthening of a democratic and participatory society.

# 8

#HABLEMOSDDHH

<sup>5</sup> See: Center for Human Rights Defenders and Justice. Situation of human rights defenders - Years 2017 - 2021. Page 15. Available at: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/InformeEspecialCDJ-2017-2021.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The main media outlets responsible for these events were Correo del Orinoco, Con el Mazo Dando, Venezuela Agency News and the social media accounts of senior government officials. See, for example: <https://www.conelmazodando.com.ve/entienda-como-han-ido-mutando-las-ong-y-por-que>

Publication by Jorge Arreaza. 02/13/23. Available in: <https://x.com/jaarreaza/status/1757562866620592291?s=20>

With the Gavel Giving. 02/13/2024. Gil: The US is complicit with the intellectual and material authors of acts of terrorism in Venezuela.

<https://www.conelmazodando.com.ve/gil-eeuu-es-complice-de-autores-intelectuales-y-materiales-de-actos-de-terrorismo-en-venezuela>

With the Gavel Giving. 02/13/2024. Nãñez: NGOs use their narrative to ignore the country's laws. Available in: <https://www.conelmazodando.com.ve/nanez-ong-utilizan-su-narrativa-para-desconocer-leyes-del-pais>

Orinoco Mail. 02/13/2024. Minister Nãñez questions the NGO's shameless narrative regarding the Rocío San Miguel case. Available in: <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/ministro-nanez-questiona-descarada-narrativa-de-ong-ante-caso-de-rocio-san-miguel/>

<sup>7</sup> See: Orinoco Mail. 02/13/2024. MP: Presentation hearing held for those involved in the "White Bracelet" Conspiracy Plot. Available in: <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/mp-audiencia-presentacion-involucrados-en-la-trama-conspirativa-brazalete-blanco/>

Venezuela Agency News. 02/13/2024. The US rejects the arrest of Rocío San Miguel, linked to the assassination attempt against Nicolás Maduro. Available in: <https://venezuela-news.com/eeuu-rechaza-detencion-de-rocio-san-miguel-vinculada-a-intento-de-magnicidio-contra-nicolas-maduro/>

Tweet by Mario Silva. 02/13/2024. Available in: <https://twitter.com/Mippcivzla/status/1757408030587785584?t=ne2WEkpTpuSC6v0lr-nUH5g&s=19>

Tweet Pedro Carvajalino. 02/13/2024. Available in: <https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1757374961415577669>

Tweet Alfred Nazareth. 02/13/2024. Available in: <https://twitter.com/luchaalmada/status/1757423449927032902>

Tweet Pedro Carvajalino. 02/13/2024. Available in: <https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1757451589898379573>



## 03

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

The situation of criminalization of defenders and the closure of civic and democratic space in Venezuela remains a focus of concern for the international community.

Human rights protection mechanisms, diplomatic actors and international organizations 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 recorded during February are:

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 innocence<sup>8</sup>.

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. It 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, 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*”<sup>9</sup>.

On February 13, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights spoke out regarding the case of human rights 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*”<sup>10</sup>.

In relation to the statements of international organizations:

On February 11, the organization Amnesty International spoke out on the case of human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, requesting her immediate and unconditional release and stating that they were “*monitoring the complaint of San Miguel’s forced disappearance*”. The organization joined

<sup>8</sup><https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1757157849153589756>

<sup>9</sup><https://waps.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/02/venezuela-fact-finding-mission-expresses-profound-concern-over-detention>

<sup>10</sup><https://twitter.com/UNHumanRights/status/1757307231614202368>

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 members<sup>11</sup>. 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 guaranteed<sup>12</sup>.

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 victim<sup>13</sup>.

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"*<sup>14</sup>.

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 human rights defender's case 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, it urged the Venezuelan authorities to *"guarantee the security, 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"*<sup>15</sup>.

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"*<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup><https://twitter.com/amnestia/status/1756689884192895433>

<sup>12</sup><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/>

<sup>13</sup>[https://twitter.com/fidh\\_es/status/1757149420708135179](https://twitter.com/fidh_es/status/1757149420708135179)

<sup>14</sup><https://twitter.com/cejil/status/1757147930014720206>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/venezuela-desaparicion-cortada-y-detencion-arbitraria>

<sup>16</sup><https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/incomunicado-detention-woman-human-rights-defender-roc%C3%ADo-san-miguel>

# 04 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The State must provide a free and safe civic and democratic space for the strengthening of democracy and the consolidation of the rule of law. Given the electoral context, it is essential to end the Policy of Criminalization and repression against civil society and to guarantee favorable and safe environments for the defense, demand and promotion of human rights.

The State must refrain from attacking and hindering the actions of those who document, denounce, and make visible the human rights crisis. The repressive patterns based on the logic of the internal enemy and the closure of the Civic and Democratic Space continue to strengthen and human rights defenders face greater risks when carrying out their activities to demand, promote and protect human rights.

Given the various circumstantial, structural and legal violations identified, which affect the work of people and defense organizations in Venezuela, a timely response from the international community is essential and urgent to ensure the effective protection of those who defend human rights in the country.

From the CDJ We reaffirm our commitment to defenders for the construction of a favorable and safe environment, which allows them to carry out their activities freely, fully and without fear of suffering reprisals.

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