



CENTRO PARA  
LOS DEFENSORES  
Y LA JUSTICIA

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

**APRIL 2024**

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The Center for Defenders and Justice (CDJ) **recorded 63 attacks and security incidents during April 2024** in Venezuela.

The civic and democratic space in Venezuela is reduced within the framework of the electoral context, organizations and people defending human rights are in a situation of risk as a result of the systematic violations of the right to defend, promote and demand human rights.

Discussions and actions related to the promulgation of restrictive legislative instruments aimed at exercising greater discretionary controls and regulating civil society organizations are resumed. Acts of intimidation, harassment and threats occur in an environment of institutional violence that seeks to neutralize civil society through fear.

The State must guarantee a favorable and safe environment for those who defend, demand and promote rights in the country. The events documented during the month of April show that the risks for those who carry out these actions in Venezuela are increasing.

### ATTACKS APRIL 2024



# 63 ATTACKS

There are a total of 63 attacks and security incidents against people and organizations defending human rights.

As a result of the continuous closure of civic and democratic space, people and defender organizations find themselves in a situation of vulnerability to the materialization of patterns of aggression implemented to neutralize and affect their actions.

The situations documented during April show that there is a policy of systematic criminalization, repression and control.

The 63 events recorded during the month of April were characterized by:

## ATTACK CHARACTERIZATION:



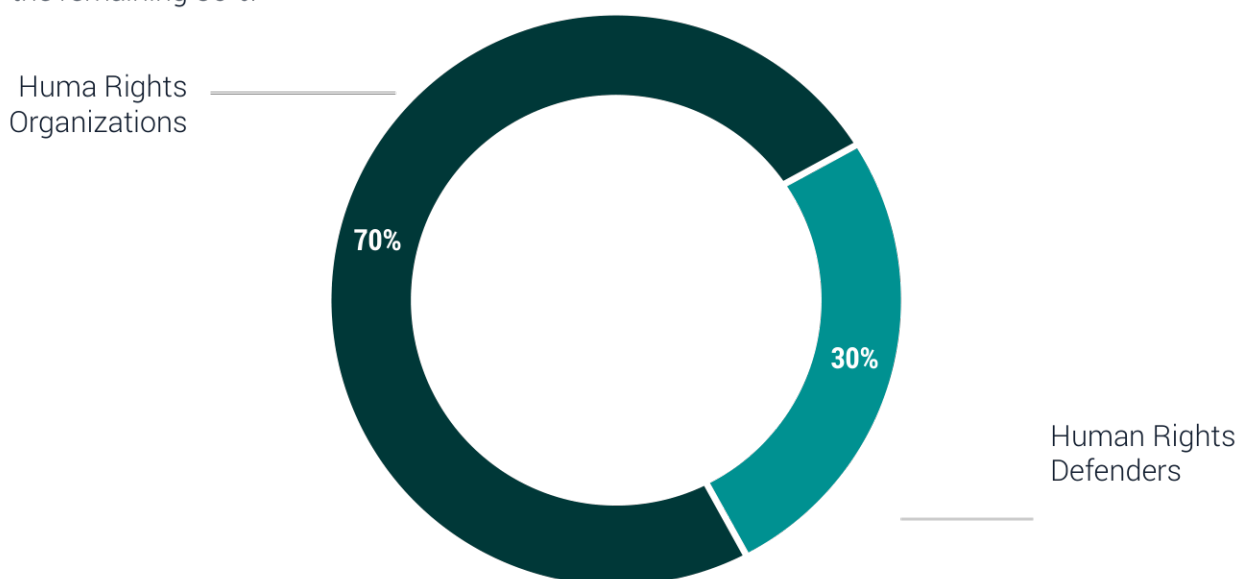
Systematic stigmatization campaigns by various state actors do not stop. Through official speeches, social networks and television programs, the work of those who defend, demand and promote rights is criminalized. The purpose of intimidation, disqualification and discredit is to distort and neutralize the impact of the activities of those who defend rights under the logic of the internal enemy.

Actions aimed at hindering and limiting the work of human rights organizations persist; acts of intimidation, harassment and threats accompany stigmatizing speeches to intimidate and promote the inhibition or inaction of organizations as part of the State's repressive response.

Parliament is advancing in the development, discussion and presentation of restrictive regulatory instruments that are detached from international standards in order to hinder the defense and demand of rights.

## VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total attacks documented during the month of April 2024 , 44 were directed against human rights organizations and organizations that carry out humanitarian actions, equivalent to 70% of the total. While 19 were individualized against human rights defenders, representing the remaining 30%.



## SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

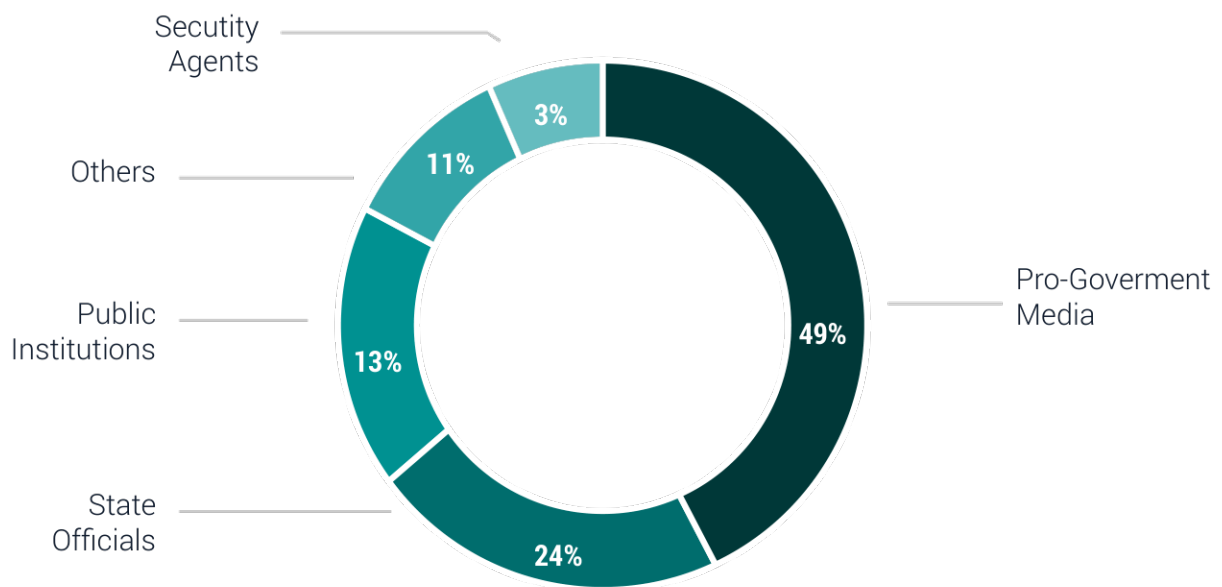
Among some of the cases we highlight threats and acts of intimidation and harassment the organization Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA; as well as disqualification, threats of widespread intimidation against the work of human rights organizations in the country including Ventana a la Libertad, Un Mundo Sin Mordaza, among others.

Likewise, we reiterate our concern about the continuity of judicial harassment and the judicialization of the human rights defenders of the FundaRedes organization Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, Omar de Dios García; and the defender Rocío San Miguel.

### PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 31 attacks (49%) were carried out by traditional and digital state media and their social media accounts; another 15 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 (24%); 8 were the responsibility of Public Institutions (13%); other actors related to the government or associated with the structures of the Popular Peace Protection System (Sp3) perpetrated 7 attacks (11%); and 2 of the events were carried out by State security agencies (3%).



## 01

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

During April, attacks against people and organizations defending human rights in the country continued to be documented.

Despite the repeated complaints of the human rights movement and the demands and recommendations of international protection organizations and other actors in the international community, the logic of the internal enemy was implemented and sustained the State Policy of criminalization, repression and control. social.

The stigmatizing speeches were reiterated during the month. The message and narrative against human rights people and organizations was based on unfounded accusations related to the fact that they allegedly carry out *“illegal activities aimed at destabilizing the country.”* Different actors that are part of the state apparatus took part in the generation and dissemination of these messages, including senior officials, pro-government media and those associated with the National Public Media System, thus demonstrating that communication structures are an essential instrument to strengthen the Policy. of criminalization<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, the main media responsible for these events are: *Misión Verdad, Correo del Orinoco, La Hojilla, Con el Mazo Dando and Zurda Konducta.*

On the other hand, threats against defender organizations and individuals accompanied the stigmatization. Messages calling for investigations to be carried out and for the adoption of regulatory instruments for the control and regulation of organizations and defenders characterized the month of April. Evidence that the criminalization of international cooperation in Venezuela does not cease and deepens with the passage of time.

Likewise, acts of intimidation and judicial harassment persisted during the month. These events were carried out not only by senior officials in public media, but also by security officials carrying out surveillance work on defenders and specific organizations.

## 6

#HABLEMOSDDHH

<sup>1</sup> Tweet from @ErikaOSanoja. 02.04.2024. Available in: <https://twitter.com/ErikaOSanoja/status/1775131759656456652>; Statements by Diosdado Cabello in the National Assembly. 02.04.2024. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_By-S-2zXNg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_By-S-2zXNg); Statements by Mario Silva during the broadcast of the La Hojilla program. 41:30-42:15 Available in: La Hojilla with Mario Silva April 2, 2024 (youtube.com); Statements by Mario Silva during the broadcast of the La Hojilla program. Min. 2:06:12-2:06:20. Available in: La Hojilla with Mario Silva April 2, 2024 (youtube.com); Tweet from Mario Silva. 03.04.2024. Available in: <https://twitter.com/hojillasilva/status/1775607123801526705>; Pound. Available at: <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a329792.html>; Tweet from Pedro Carvajalino. 03.04.2024. Available in: <https://twitter.com/hojillasilva/status/1775607123801526705>; Statements by Mario Silva during the broadcast of his program La Hojilla. Min. 25:10-25:54. Available in: La Hojilla with Mario Silva April 23, 2024 (youtube.com); With the Gavel Giving. 04/26/2024. Vice Minister Castillo: Even the hostile IACHR admits the impact of the sanctions against Venezuela. Available in: <https://mazo4f.com/viceministro-castillo-hasta-la-hostil-cidh-admite-impacto-de-las-sanciones-contra-venezuela>; Statements by Mario Silva in La Hojilla. Min. 55:10-55:30. Available at: (227) La Hojilla with Mario Silva April 13, 2024 - YouTube; The puppet box. Mission Truth Newspaper. 04/15/2024. Available at: <https://misionverdad.com/chavismo/la-caja-de-titeres>; Orinoco Mail. 04/23/2024. President Maduro announced the opening of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available in: <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/presidente-maduro-anuncio-la-apertura-de-la-oficina-del-alto-comisionado-de-ddhh-de-la-onu/>



We reiterate our concern about the repeated use of the justice system to criminalize and persecute, using criminal law under the logic of the enemy to initiate and maintain active arbitrary criminal processes, contrary to due judicial guarantees and due legal process. As of the date of presentation of this report, defenders Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García continue to face a judicialization process, within which the hearings were unjustifiably deferred on two occasions during the month of April. On the other hand, the process against the defender Rocío San Miguel continues, and in April, the Public Ministry presented a tax accusation against her. Four months after her arbitrary detention, the defender still has not been able to appoint her trusted lawyers.

To the extent that the State continues to profile those who defend, demand and promote rights as enemies, and attacks continue to be perpetrated against them in a reduced civic and democratic space and in a hostile environment, the risks will continue to increase.

We remember that defending human rights is a right and a legitimate and necessary activity for the recovery of democratic institutions and the strengthening of the rule of law.

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

Faced with the advances of the Criminalization Policy to 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 April 25, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) published its annual report, in which part of the content of its chapter IV.B highlights the situation in Venezuela, and states that the country is included in its analysis *“due to the complete erosion of the democratic system and the serious human rights situation. Throughout these years, the progressive concentration of power in the hands of the Executive Power and the absence of the rule of law”*. The analysis highlights the situation of defenders, and the concern that the IACHR maintains, while acts of persecution against them continued to be documented, indicating that during 2023 *“an adverse environment for human rights defenders persisted.” and those who exercise union leadership. This was characterized by public smear campaigns promoted by senior State officials, stigmatization, acts of harassment and criminalization processes in retaliation for their work”*<sup>2</sup>. The report refers

to cases and situations that occurred during the year 2023 and reiterated *“that human rights defenders and those who exercise union leadership face an active public policy of persecution, discrediting and criminalization by the State. It is important to remember that defenders, as well as civil society organizations, are fundamental pillars in any democratic society. “Therefore, it is crucial that Venezuela urgently refrains from taking actions or measures that may represent a disproportionate restriction on the right of association and that may negatively impact the free exercise of the defense of human rights”*<sup>3</sup>. Finally, the Commission reiterated that: *“In light of the aforementioned facts, the IACHR reiterates that human rights defenders play a fundamental role in the consolidation of both a democratic society and the rule of law, which is why the State has the obligation to guarantee a favorable environment for the exercise of their work. Likewise, remember that freedom of association is a fundamental tool to fully and completely exercise the work of human rights defenders”*<sup>4</sup>.

On April 30, the IACHR published the extension of the Precautionary Measures of the *Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – PROVEA*. The Commission stated in the resolution that it was motivated by an analysis of the continuity of a risk situation for the coordinators of PROVEA and concluded that this risk extends to the other people who make up the organization, in a context of persecution against defenders of human rights and against those who express their disagreement with the government. The IACHR expressed particular concern that the alleged threats have been attributed to state agents in Venezuela. Despite the actions taken to achieve a response from the State, no recent information was received indicating that protection measures are being taken in favor of the beneficiaries. On the contrary, the available information indicates that state agents, including high authorities, are taking actions against them, which has intensified the risk situation. Consequently, the Commission decided to require Venezuela to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and personal integrity of the identified people, so that the beneficiaries can carry out their activities as human rights defenders without being subjected to acts of violence, threats and harassment, that agrees on the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives, and reports on the actions implemented to investigate the alleged events and prevent their repetition<sup>5</sup>.

On April 30, the experts of the Working Group on Forced or Involuntary Disappearances of the United Nations, Ms. Aua Baldé (President), Ms. Gabriella Citroni (Vice President), Ms. Angkhana Neelapaijit, Mrs. Grażyna Baranowska and Mrs. Ana Lorena Delgadillo Pérez, spoke regarding Venezuela. They expressed concern that *“since December 2023, there has been a worrying increase in forced disappearances in Venezuela that affects citizens who exercise their right to freedom of expression, association and participation in matters of public interest”* and spoke out on the effects that this type of practices can have in an electoral context<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding the actions of international organizations:

On April 15, the organization Amnesty International published a public statement about Venezuela in the face of the *“Alarming Escalation of Persecution Against Critical and Dissident Voices.”* They indicate that *“since the beginning of this year, there have been numerous attacks against civic space and against people who are perceived as critical of the government. Bills have also been presented that threaten freedom of association and expression, arbitrary detentions, improper use of criminal law, violations of the guarantees of due process and fair trial, stigmatizing campaigns and disclosure of confessions of guilt obtained without mechanisms of protection against possible acts of torture”*.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Paragraph 36

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. Page 75

<sup>5</sup><https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2024/083.asp>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/04/alarming-rise-enforced-disappearances-ahead-venezuelas-presidential-poll-un>



They refer to some specific cases, among them that of the defender Rocío San Miguel.

On April 24, the organization Amnesty International published its annual global report, in the analysis of the situation in Venezuela it included its concern. To the situation of human rights defenders, expressing “The human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Javier Tarazona, director of the NGO FUNDAREDES, remained arbitrarily detained after having been arrested in 2021 on charges related to terrorism. *“The Center for Defenders and Justice recorded 524 threats against human rights defenders between January and November, including smear and stigmatization campaigns carried out by pro-government media and on social networks”*<sup>7</sup>.

# 03

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In an electoral context, the defense, demand and promotion of human rights in Venezuela is a risky task. Defender organizations and individuals must carry out their activities facing an increasingly hostile and restrictive environment.

The limitations and violations of the Civic and Democratic Space hinder the legitimate work of civil society, and serve to implement greater social control exercised by the State within the framework of a Systematic Criminalization Policy.

The State insists on pointing out enemies, traitors and committing destabilizing, interfering, criminal or terrorist acts, exposing them to situations of violence and discrimination.

The rights to freedom of association, assembly, peaceful demonstration, and expression must be fully respected with a view to guaranteeing democratic environments; actions aimed at their arbitrary restriction are contrary to international law and result in the establishment of State responsibility.

The policy of criminalization, repression and social control used by the State must stop.

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