



CENTRO PARA  
LOS DEFENSORES  
Y LA JUSTICIA

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# SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

FIRST SEMESTER OF  
2024

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The Center for Defenders and Justice (CDJ) documented **592 attacks and security incidents during the first half of 2024**, in Venezuela.

The Policy of Criminalization, Repression and Social Control against those who promote, defend and demand human rights is deepening, as a result of the continuous actions of the State aimed at closing the Civic and Democratic Space in the country.

With the approach to the electoral event, the calls by the State for the action of the so-called “Bolivarian Fury” to protect the interests of the nation against possible acts of destabilization increased the risks and the level of institutional violence, including attacks against of people and human rights organizations.

### ATTACKS FIRST TRIMESTER OF 2024



# 592 ATTACKS

# 01

## ATTACKS ON THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS INCREASED 92% DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 2024

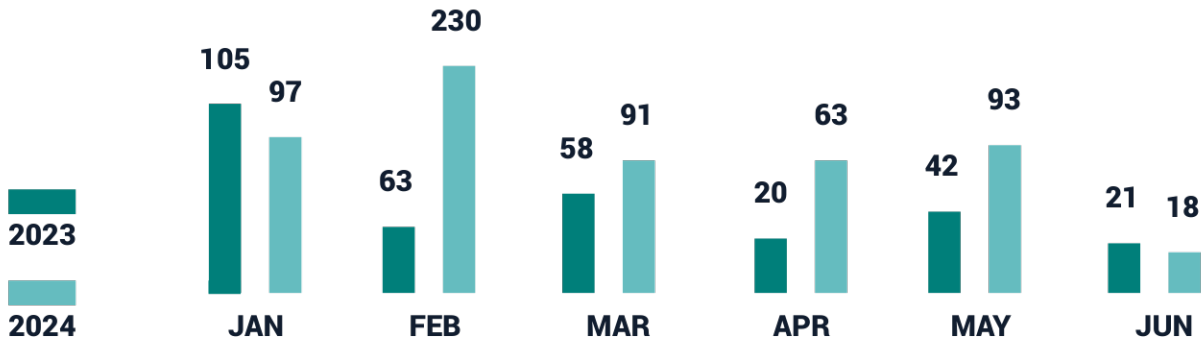
The 592 attacks and incidents documented in the period compromise and affect the rights of people and organizations defending human rights, and represent an increase of 92% compared to the same period in 2023, in which 309 situations were recorded.

Between January and June 2024, the Venezuelan State advanced in the execution of patterns to hinder, limit and affect the activities of those who document, defend, demand and promote rights, generating impacts on accompanying the victims of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency and the systematic human rights violations that persist in Venezuela.

New shelters in the logic of the internal enemy were documented, increasing the levels of risk for people and defense organizations in the country.

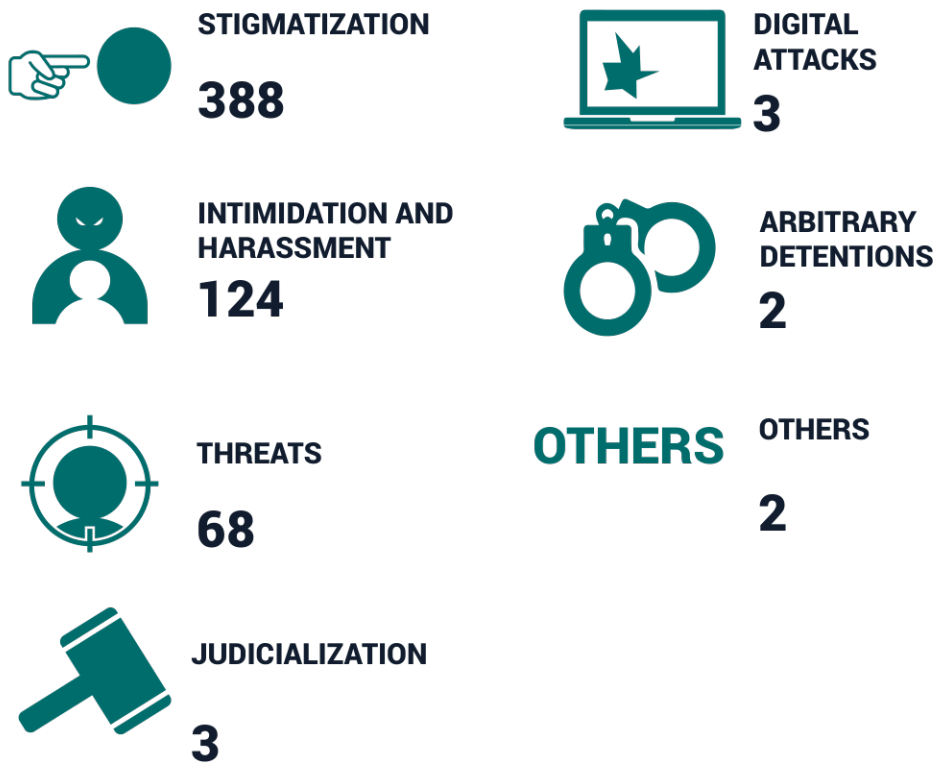
New regulatory advances and the use of mechanisms detached from the law contributed to the increase in criminalization.

DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACKS PER MONTH



The 592 documented security attacks and incidents reflect the following among the main patterns of aggression and intimidation:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



During the first half of 2024, the Center for Defenders and Justice documented the increase in repressive and criminalization actions by the State. Threats, acts of intimidation and the use of the state apparatus to persecute those who defend, demand and promote human rights in the country. The Venezuelan State continued its efforts to neutralize and punish the exercise of civic freedoms to assert and demand human rights.

The attack pattern used focuses on the application of the logic of the internal enemy, under which people who demand rights and question the actions of the authorities are identified as terrorists, destabilizers, enemies, among others, and from different instances of the Public Power. Actions are taken to neutralize him or limit and control his actions.

# 02 CLOSURE OF THE CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC SPACE A THREAT TO THE DEFENSE AND DEMAND OF RIGHTS

Between January and June, new obstacles and attacks were recorded against the right to defend, promote and demand human rights, including progress with two legislative projects whose purpose is aimed at criminalizing the actions of civil society actors.

In the electoral context, the CDJ documented and analyzed the different patterns used by the State to criminalize, repress and attempt to control organizations and people defending human rights under the logic of the Internal Enemy. Likewise, an increase in repression was recorded after calls by the authorities for the action of the “Bolivarian Fury” by the Venezuelan authorities<sup>1</sup>, resulting in a worrying increase in violence by the groups that make up the System. Popular Protection for Peace (Sp3), mainly groups of armed civilians known as “paramilitary collectives.”

The State maintains a position detached from the international obligations it has contracted and continues to ignore the numerous international recommendations and standards related to the protection of civic and democratic space, deepens and perfects the state policy of criminalization, repression and social control and distances itself from accountability and monitoring by international organizations, an example of which is the expulsion in February of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)<sup>2</sup> after the publication of messages demanding respect for human rights in Venezuela.

There continue to be risks and challenges for human rights defenders and organizations, given the lack of guarantee of a favorable and safe environment for the exercise of the rights of association, expression, assembly and defense of rights, and in general the activities of the independent civil society. Highlighting the increase in threats, intimidation and stigmatization of those who carry out actions related to international cooperation and strategic litigation and advocacy before international protection mechanisms, as well as organizations and people documenting incidents in the electoral context.

The patterns of aggression, intimidation and repression are systematic, causing people and organizations that ensure the protection of human dignity to face a situation of high risks for the exercise of their activities, while progress in construction continues to fail to materialize. and design of effective mechanisms that promote and guarantee the exercise of their work, without criminalization or reprisals.

<sup>1</sup>01/19/2024 VENEZUELA | Maduro activates the “Bolivarian Fury” and warns with a military plan against terrorists. At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfbaqvG7FtA>

<sup>2</sup>Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Relations (MPPPRE). Venezuela announces suspension of the activities of the Technical Advisory Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Caracas. 02/15/2024. In: <https://mppre.gob.ve/publicacion/2329-venezuela-anuncia-suspension-de-las-actividades-de-la-oficina-tecnica-de-asesoria-del-alto-comisionado-de-la-un-for-the-human-rights-in-caracas>

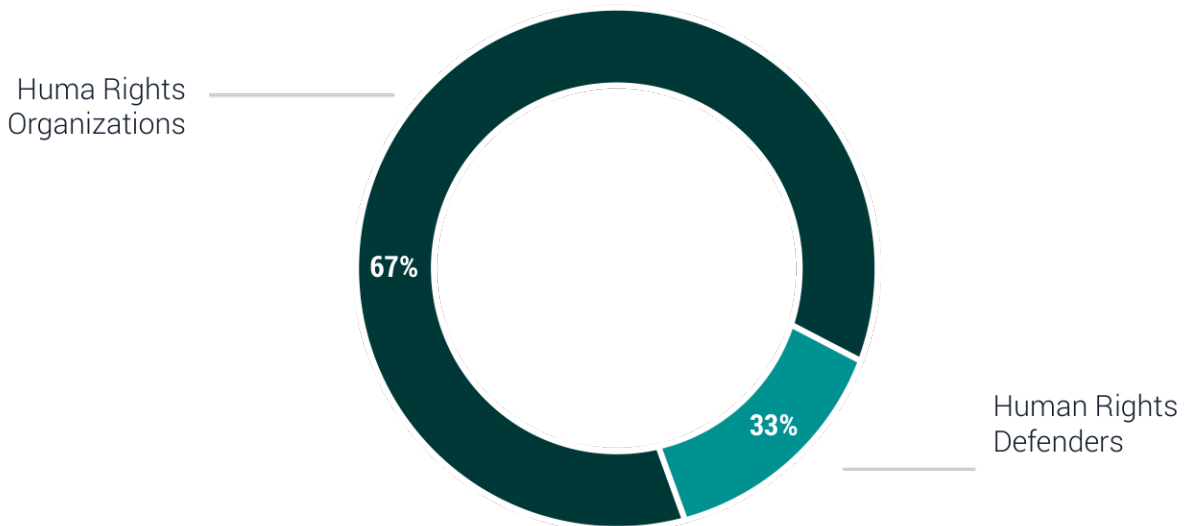
## SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

The restrictive legal framework remains in force, administratively, civil and criminally, contrary to the obligations of the State regarding the promotion and protection of the defense of human rights, they are the main tools used by the State in order to control and hinder the actions of documentation, denunciation, advocacy, cooperation and humanitarian action, carried out by non-governmental organizations to confront the socio-political and human rights crisis existing in the country and assist and accompany the victims of abuses and crimes committed by the State in its processes of truth, justice and reparation. Criminal law is used, especially the norm that classifies the crime of defamation, laws against terrorism and organized crime to prosecute.

The State moved forward with the creation of measures aimed at limiting and hindering the work of human rights organizations, and civil society in general, through the creation and possible imposition of new requirements for full functioning within the framework of new discretionary controls and contrary to international law that seek to be imposed through the *Bill on Supervision, Regularization, Performance and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and related organizations*<sup>3</sup>, which has been trying to be approved since 2023<sup>4</sup>, and the draft Law against Fascism, *Neofascism and other Similar Expressions*<sup>5</sup>.

The strengthening of the Criminalization Policy, which in the past has led to the materialization of attacks that compromise the operation and integrity of organizations and defenders, is still in force and constitutes a serious impact on the rights, freedom of association, expression, and defense of rights.

### VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS



<sup>3</sup>See draft of the project at: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/LEY-DE-FISCALIZACION-REGULARIZACION-ACTUACION-Y-FINANCIACION-DE-LAS-ORGANIZACIONES-NO-GUBERNAMENTALES-Y-AFINES-v24.01h2.00-2.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>See: Center for Defenders and Justice (CDJ). SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA – Annual Report 2023. At: [www.centrodefensores.org.ve](http://www.centrodefensores.org.ve)

<sup>5</sup><https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/an-aprob-en-primera-discusion-proyecto-de-ley-contra-el-fascismo>

## SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

Of the total attacks documented during the semester , 395 attacks and threats against them, facing various acts carried out by the State in order to hinder or impede their work; equivalent to 67% of the documented total. While 197 of the recorded situations were committed individually against human rights defenders, representing the remaining 33%.

Among the victims of the attacks, the following stand out : threats, intimidation, harassment and acts of stigmatization to the detriment of the organization Venezuelan Human Rights Education-Action Program – Provea ; acts of intimidation against Access to Justice. Accusations and harassment against organizations such as Espacio Público (EP), Transparencia Venezuela, Foro Penal, Control Ciudadano, Voto Joven, Sin Mordaza, Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (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 quarter.

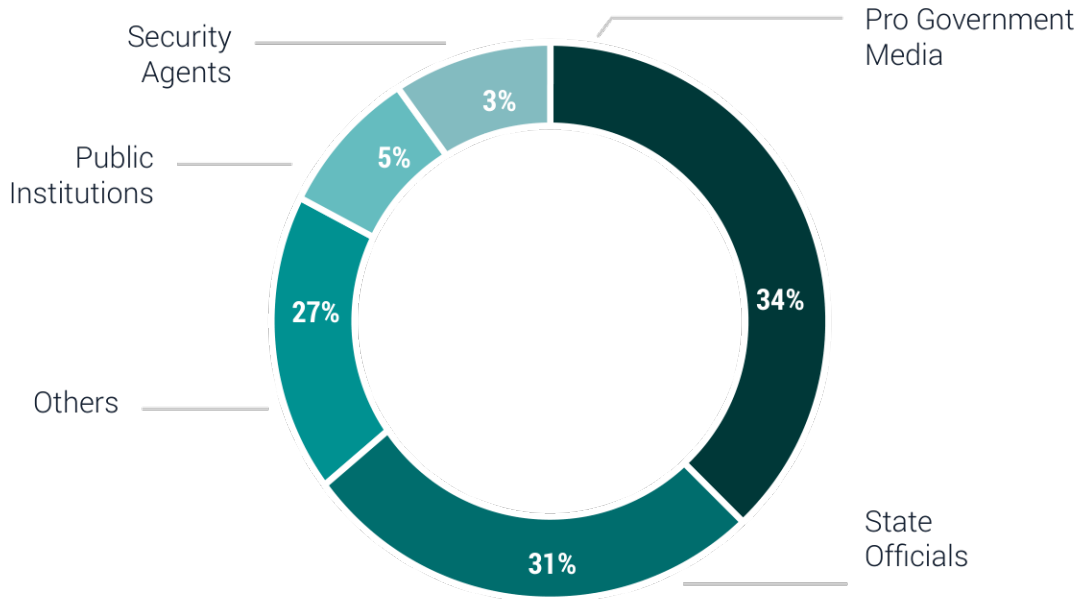
At the end of the period, the arbitrary judicial proceedings against the members of the FundaRedes organization were still ongoing. In this regard, we highlight the use of judicial harassment against the defender and director of FundaRedes, Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García; The first has been a victim of damage to his personal integrity. Likewise, we have documented the increase in the persecution and criminalization of the union leadership, and its activities to demand rights: and of the Defender Rocío San Miguel Sosa, who was a victim of short-term forced disappearance and has remained deprived of liberty since the 8th February of this year with various violations of due process.

### **PERPETRATORS**

The main people responsible for the attacks and security incidents documented during the semester were distributed as follows:

A total of 201 attacks (34%) were carried out by traditional and digital state media and their social media accounts; another 187 of the attacks were carried out by public officials, who used their profiles on social networks, or statements in government media to stigmatize and intimidate (31%); other actors related to the government or associated with the structures of the Popular Peace Protection System (Sp3) perpetrated 158 attacks (27%); 28 were the responsibility of Public Institutions (5%); and 18 of the events were carried out by State security agencies (3%).

## SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA



Among those identified responsible include members of the National Executive, ministers, deputies of the National Assembly (AN), among others. Likewise, institutions that are part of the Justice System, entities associated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and State security agencies are presented 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, La Iguana. TV, and other programs on Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), which were spaces used to discredit and attack organizations.

We highlight actions by civilians affiliated with the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), among others, to carry out actions of stigmatization, intimidation and harassment as part of criminalization.

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

During the first half of 2024, the Center for Defenders and Justice documented the increase in repressive and criminalization actions by the State. Threats, acts of intimidation and the use of the state apparatus to persecute those who defend, demand and promote human rights in the country. The Venezuelan State continued its efforts to neutralize and punish the exercise of civic freedoms to assert and demand human rights.



The attack pattern used focuses on the application of the logic of the internal enemy, under which people who demand rights and question the actions of the authorities are identified as terrorists, destabilizers, enemies, among others, and from different instances of public power. Actions are taken to neutralize him or limit and control his actions.

In this sense, the use of official discourse to generate stigmatizing speeches, unfounded accusations and pejorative accusations is the protagonist of the first half of the year, framed in the Venezuelan electoral context, under which actors considered dissidents, critical voices and those who demand rights from the State have been the subject of smear and stigmatization campaigns.

The defenders and organizations have been accused of interventionist actions and of carrying out political proselytizing activities in order to generate unrest in the country. This speech has been echoed by senior State officials through social networks and media belonging to the National Public Media System; Likewise, news platforms and portals related to the government have contributed to this opinion matrix through articles, comments and the dissemination of messages disseminated in various spaces.

Intimidation and harassment, impacts on life, integrity and personal freedom were some of the events recorded: as well as the impact on spaces of organizations and residences of defenders have also been part of the security incidents recorded. Surveillance and monitoring continue to be implemented as intelligence mechanisms in order to frighten those who defend rights. In the same sense, the CDJ registered direct threats to the human rights movement and other civil society actors, following the regulatory advances of the NGO oversight bills and the law against Fascism, both characterized by their ambiguous wording that allows for discretionary application, and for being highly punitive and restrictive. The stigmatization campaigns with accusations based on the thesis of the internal enemy, with qualifications of "terrorism", "treason to the country", "destabilizing agents", among others, were constant and led to an increase in threats and acts of intimidation and harassment. by a diversity of actors who live in public institutions or in parallel structures that have been created by the State. An increase in the use of criminal law and special legislation associated with organized crime and terrorism to prosecute was observed; Instead of repealing restrictive regulatory instruments, new legal and sub-legal regulations are promoted to control and repress. All of these actions allow criminalization to continue to be applied against organizations and people. An example of this is the arrest of Human Rights Defender Rocío San Miguel, along with members of her family and close friends, accused and subjected to criminal proceedings for crimes contemplated in the aforementioned legislation.

The justice apparatus continues to be used as the executing arm of criminalization, not only with the continuity of the arbitrary process against defenders Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García, who have been subjected to judicial and defense proceedings for more than two years. Javier Tarazona deprived of his freedom for more than two years. Added to this is the arrest and criminal prosecution of defender Rocío San Miguel, who was accused of allegedly committing acts of terrorism, treason, conspiracy and association to commit a crime. As of the date of this report, the defender continues to be deprived of her liberty.

Given the documented facts, the CDJ reiterates its concern about the high level of risk for those who are on the front line of action and working in the field. The repressive measures are applied in a more sophisticated and selective way, also contemplating an exemplary component for the rest of civil society with the aim of neutralizing people and organizations and inhibiting them from acting due to the fear of being the target of possible attacks. retaliation. This pattern has been documented and denounced by the organization, within the framework of the application of the logic of the internal enemy and the increase in attacks committed that function as a kind of "exemplary punishment."

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

The International Community maintains its calls to the Venezuelan State to respect civic space, including the cessation of criminalization and persecution of organizations and individuals defending human rights, presenting a series of recommendations and exhortations to the State, however, this There is still no progress in the creation of mechanisms or public policies aimed at promoting and protecting the work of people and organizations defending human rights .

Among the main actions and pronouncements registered between January and June 2024 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)<sup>6</sup> in response to the new progress in approving 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 fronts". 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 innocence<sup>7</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. 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”*<sup>8</sup>.

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”*<sup>9</sup>.

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 demanded<sup>10</sup>.

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.”*<sup>11</sup>

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 capacity of civil society actors to operate freely and independently in the country.”*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1757157849153589756>

<sup>8</sup> <https://waps.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/02/venezuela-fact-finding-mission-expresses-profound-concern-over-detention>

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/UNHumanRights/status/1757307231614202368>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2024-0179\\_ES.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2024-0179_ES.html)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/es/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/deputy-high-commissioner-updates-human-rights-council-venezuela>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/es/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/statement-marta-valinas-chair-independent-international-fact>

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 rights<sup>13</sup>.

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 Branch and the absence of the rule of law have been documented . 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>14</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>15</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>16</sup>

On April 30, the IACHR published the extension of the Precautionary Measures of the Venezuelan Human Rights Education-Action Program (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>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1i/k1jtwz8c6> and <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19r5gjq82>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2023/capitulos/IA2023\\_Cap\\_4B\\_Venezuela\\_SPA.PDF](https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2023/capitulos/IA2023_Cap_4B_Venezuela_SPA.PDF) Paragraph 28

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* Paragraph 36

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* Page 75

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2024/083.asp>

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>18</sup>.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, on May 16, issued a press release publishing that the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE) of the IACHR has expressed its concern about the increase in repression against journalists and members of civil society in Venezuela, as well as the deterioration of civic space in the country. RELE urges the State to respect and guarantee freedoms of expression and the press, which are fundamental for the reestablishment of a democratic culture that respects human rights in Venezuela. *“There have been cases of judicial harassment, arbitrary detentions, restrictions on access to information, closure of media outlets and stigmatizing accusations by senior government officials against those who investigate and actively participate in matters of public and political interest. According to public information, between January and April 2024, approximately 128 attacks have been recorded against journalists, activists, human rights defenders, media outlets, and civil society organizations. “In addition, there have been at least 18 arrests of people for exercising their freedom of expression.”*<sup>19</sup>

*On the other hand, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a country report on June 28 on the human rights situation in Venezuela. This report includes a detailed evaluation of the implementation of the previous recommendations and will be presented during the 56th session of the Council. The report presented covers the period between May 1, 2023 and April 30, 2024, and addresses different issues of concern, including impacts on civic space and the rule of law. Specific cases are presented, including those of defenders Javier Tarazona and Rocío San Miguel*<sup>20</sup>.

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 the organizations of the 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”*<sup>21</sup>.

On January 17, the international organizations Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), Human Rights Watch, the Washington Office for Latin America (WOLA), the 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, warning that *“If enacted, this law would seriously hinder freedom of association and the free and independent of civil society organizations by requiring*

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/04/alarmed-rise-enforced-disappearances-ahead-venezuelas-presidential-poll-un>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/expresion/prensa/comunicados/2024/106.asp>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/es/documents/country-reports/ahrc5663-situation-human-rights-bolivarian-republic-venezuela-report>

<sup>21</sup> <https://twitter.com/cejil/status/1745935746987405667>

them to seek government authorization for their operations and disclose any foreign funding. The vague and 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.”*<sup>22</sup>

On January 18, the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation organization expressed its concern about legislative advances that could affect the right to association of organizations in Venezuela<sup>23</sup>.

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. He ends the letter by strongly calling for an immediate end to this bill in the National Assembly, and to ensure that all efforts to attack, control, prosecute or censor civil society organizations that They work hard to protect the rights of all people in Venezuela, especially those who need it most<sup>24</sup>.

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 population. Venezuelan woman who 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.

<sup>22</sup> <https://dplf.org/en/news/international-organizations-express-concern-over-legislation-aiming-criminalize-and-obstruct>

<sup>23</sup> <https://twitter.com/parescolombia/status/1748089453107642641/photo/1>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/7602/2024/es/>

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 members<sup>25</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>26</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>27</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>28</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 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”*<sup>29</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>30</sup>.

On March 5, the Civicus Alliance organization, 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 standards<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://twitter.com/amnestia/status/1756689884192895433>

<sup>26</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>27</sup> [https://twitter.com/fidh\\_es/status/1757149420708135179](https://twitter.com/fidh_es/status/1757149420708135179)

<sup>28</sup> <https://twitter.com/cejil/status/1757147930014720206>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/venezuela-desaparicion-forzada-y-detencion-arbitraria>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/incomunicado-detention-woman-human-rights-defender-roc%C3%ADo-san-miguel>

<sup>31</sup> <https://monitor.civicus.org/watchlist-march-2024/es/>

## SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

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 NGOs<sup>32</sup>.

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"*. They refer to some specific cases, among them that of the defender Rocío San Miguel<sup>33</sup>.

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>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1i/k1jtwz8c6> and <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19r5gjq82>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/7949/2024/es/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/es/location/americas/south-america/venezuela/report-venezuela/>



# 05 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The increase in repression and violence exercised against people and organizations and the increase in restrictions on civic and democratic space in the pre-electoral framework demonstrate the authoritarian nature of the State and the lack of interest in assuming international recommendations and solving the crisis. sociopolitics and human rights that The Criminalization and Social Control Policy continues to seriously affect the free and full operation of organizations and people defending human rights, particularly the rights to association, demonstration, expression and defense of rights.

The increase in repression and violence against people and organizations and the increase in restrictions on civic and democratic space in the electoral context raise the alarm regarding the authoritarian nature of the State and the lack of compliance with international recommendations and the need to resolve the socio-political and human rights crisis facing the country and in particular to guarantee a strengthened civic and democratic space.

The State must immediately cease criminalization and ensure that no aggression, attacks or reprisals occur for the exercise of activities within the framework of the defense, promotion and demand of human rights.

The operation and legality of organizations must be respected, to this end restrictive legislation must be repealed and no progress must be made in approving new instruments against the activities of civil society and the exercise of rights.

We urge that the Civic Space and the exercise of fundamental freedoms of those who document, denounce and disseminate violations of human rights be guaranteed.

From the CDJ we insist that the work of defending, demanding and promoting rights is essential for respecting human dignity and maintaining democracy and the rule of law. By criminalizing and attacking those who carry out such actions, the State violates its international obligations and entails its international responsibility.

In the current context, the State must take all corrective measures to guarantee a full, free and safe civic and democratic space. As long as legal limitations on the activities of civil society remain in force, as well as the criminalization of the same, and in particular of human rights organizations, it will continue to be a risk to defend, promote and demand rights in the country.

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