



CENTRO PARA  
LOS DEFENSORES  
Y LA JUSTICIA

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# SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

AUGUST 2024

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The Center for Human Rights Defenders and Justice (CDJ) documented **134 attacks and security incidents during August 2024** in Venezuela.

In the post-electoral context, the risks have increased for those on the front line of responding to the social, political and human rights crisis in the country.

The deepening of the Policy of Criminalization, Repression and Social Control affects the actions of promotion, defense and demand of human rights, growing the aggression and intimidation against those who carry them out.

Legal measures and actions by state entities continue to be implemented to close down the civic and democratic space in the country, rising the obstacles to the exercise of the rights to association, expression, assembly and defense of rights.

### ATTACKS AUGUST 2024



134 attacks and security incidents documented during the period show an increase in attacks against people and organizations defending human rights compared to previous months, with August being the second month with the highest number of attacks so far this year.

There is concern about the increase in acts of intimidation, harassment, threats and arbitrary detentions against human rights defenders.

These events are also accompanied by systematic stigmatization campaigns, where people and organizations are disqualified and labeled as enemies, terrorists, destabilizing, among others.

In addition, legal instruments that are contrary to human rights standards and that aim to intimidate and neutralize civil society and restrict civic and democratic space continue to be approved.

The 134 incidents recorded during the month of August were characterized by:

#### ATTACK CHARACTERIZATION:



**HARASSMENT AND  
INTIMIDATION  
56**



**STIGMATIZATION  
47**

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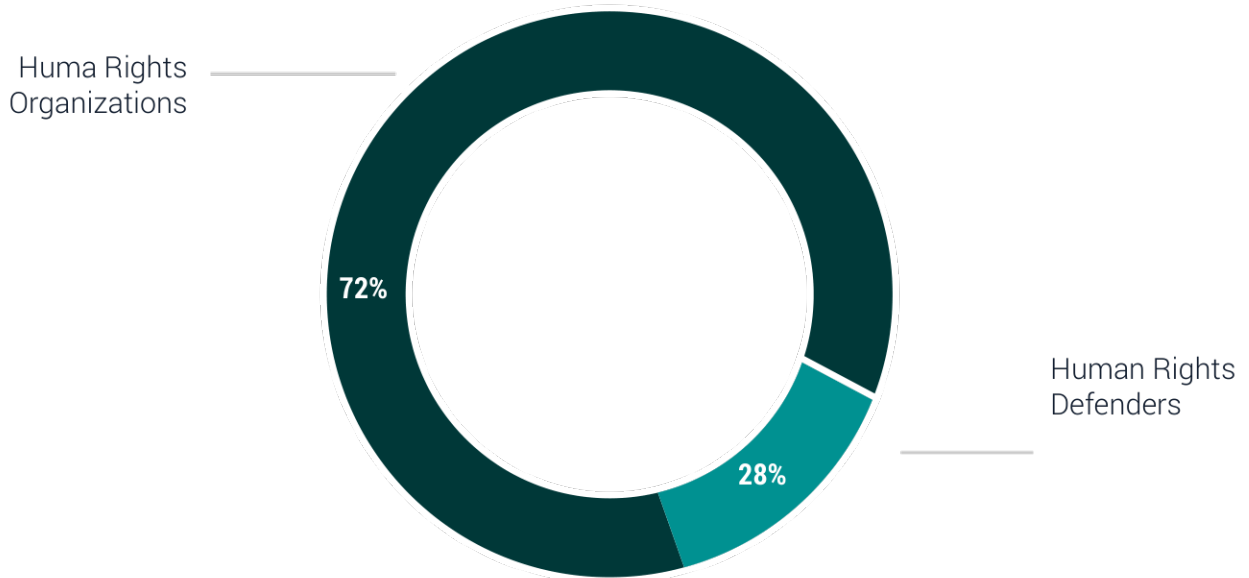


These facts show that the State's repressive and control measures continue to seriously affect the right to defend, promote and demand rights, affecting the operation and security of individuals and human rights organizations, who cannot carry out their work without fear of being subject to reprisals.

It is essential to move forward in the implementation of effective mechanisms for the full and free exercise of fundamental freedoms and to guarantee a favorable and safe environment for this, as well as the protection of those who work for the protection of human rights.

### VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total attacks documented during the month of July 2024, 45 were directed against human rights organizations, equivalent to 80% of the total. While 11 were identified against human rights defenders, representing the remaining 20%.



Some of the cases include the systematic stigmatization campaigns and threats against the organizations *Venezuelan Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos*

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– *PROVEA*; new accusations, threats and intimidation against the *Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)*, *Amnistía Internacional*, Amnesty International and Control Ciudadano.

There is also concern about the widespread disqualification, threats and intimidation against the work of human rights organizations in the country, within the framework of the approval of the *Law on Supervision, Regularization, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations*.

Five human rights defenders were arbitrarily detained, and at least four of them were subjected to judicial proceedings in courts with special jurisdiction against terrorism.

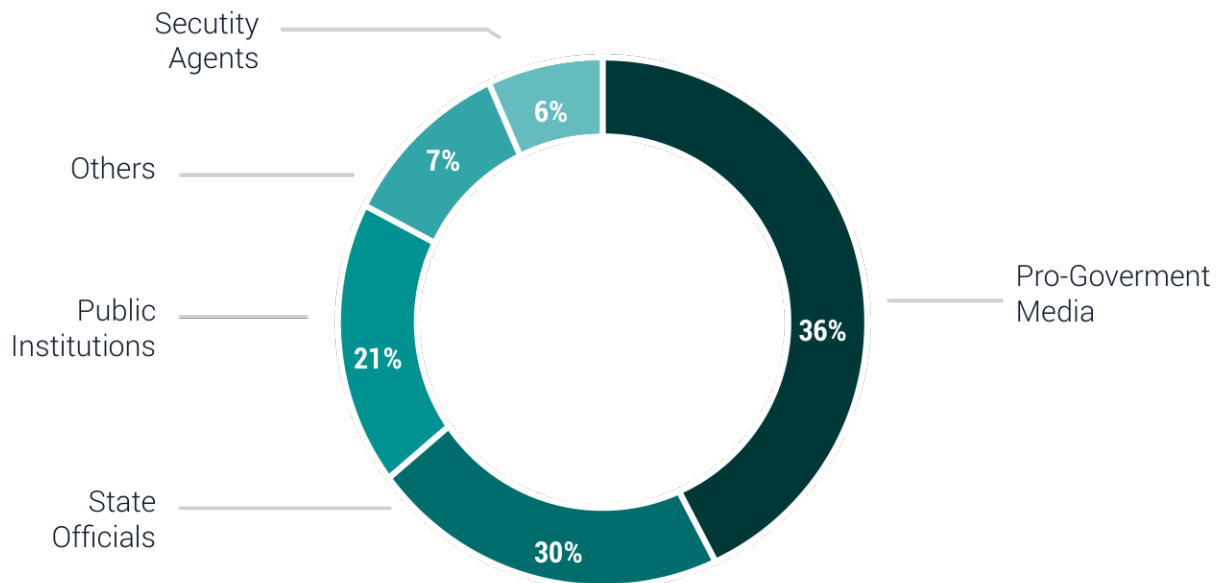
Finally, we remind you that the trial of the defenders of the FundaRedes organization Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García must continue; the judicial harassment against them must cease.

Human rights defenders who are deprived of their liberty must be released.

### PERPETRATORS

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

A total of 48 attacks were perpetrated through traditional and digital media outlets and social media accounts (36%); 40 attacks (30%) were carried out by public officials, who used their social media profiles or statements in government media outlets to stigmatize and intimidate; 29 of the attacks were the responsibility of public institutions (21%); another 9 of the violations (7%) were committed by other actors related to the government or associated with the structures of the Popular System of Protection for Peace (Sp3); and finally, 8 of the attacks were carried out by state security agencies (6%).



## 01

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

Criminalization against people and organizations defending human rights is deepening. In the post-electoral context, attacks against the defense, demand and promotion of rights have increased. The use of the logic of the *Internal Enemy* continues to manifest itself through patterns of attacks aimed at neutralizing, through fear, the work of those who protect rights in the country.

Attacks against physical and moral integrity increased, with intimidation and harassment being the main pattern of attack recorded during the period. These attacks are accompanied by stigmatization, based on questions and accusations about the independence and veracity of the work of human rights organizations, as well as accusing them of being “fascist,” “terrorist,” “destabilizing,” among others<sup>1</sup>.

Intimidation and threats continue regarding the application of the *Law on Supervision, Regulation, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations*, seeking to link the work of human rights organizations with alleged links and activities with destabilizing purposes promoted by foreign governments. These attacks deepened after its approval in the second discussion in the National Assembly on Thursday, August 15<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, the CDJ is concerned about the increase in acts of intimidation and harassment in the month of August. The State is using different measures to control, criminalize and neutralize the defense of human rights in a climate of fear that tends to lead to organizations withdrawing from their actions for fear of reprisals.

In addition, as part of the post-electoral repression, at least 15 human rights defenders had their passports revoked, in some cases even affecting members of their immediate family.

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#HABLEMOSDDHH

<sup>1</sup> See for example: X. Publication by Jorge Arreaza. 08/06/2024. Available at: <https://x.com/jaarreaza/status/1820835587844124806>; Youtube. Statements by Nicolas Maduro. Minutes: 1:07:23 - 1:07:54. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYB7PnjR-f0E>; Con El Mazo Dando. 08/11/2024. The Carter Center in the hands of USAID and the CIA. <https://www.conelmazodando.com/ve/el-centro-carter-en-manos-de-la-usaid-y-la-cia/>; The economic interests that govern the Carter center. Diario Misión Verdad. 08/13/2024. Available at: <https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/los-intereses-economicos-que-gobiernan-el-centro-carter/>; Statements by Mario Silva during the broadcast of La Hojilla. Min. 18:30-18:50. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSIT-VeH92Nk>; Correo del Orinoco. Cabello: Law regulating NGOs will control financing. <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/cabello-ley-regula-las-ong-controlara-financiamiento/>; With the Hammer Giving. Cabello on the Law against Fascism: It will be approved by all those who truly want peace. <https://www.conelmazodando.com/ve/cabello-sobre-la-ley-contra-el-fascismo-sera-aprobada-por-todos-los-que-verdaderamente-quieren-paz/>; Nicolás Maduro | Meeting with the Communes. Minutes 1:07:37 - 1:08:10 Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/live/P\\_6D6fT1tW0](https://www.youtube.com/live/P_6D6fT1tW0); Tweet by Pablo Fernandez. 08/28/2024. Available at: <https://x.com/pabloefb/status/1828842979983012348?t=vEzvlSLPXHVQvp2U7hHsQQ&s=19>; X. Publication by Pablo Fernández. 08/28/2024. Available at: <https://x.com/pabloefb/status/1828807477430780256?t=gnHsPPWcvWurU7seJ71bVw&s=08>

<sup>2</sup> Youtube. National Assembly. 08/15/2024. Minutes 13:42 - 14:11. Available: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0cSb7Et\\_mA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0cSb7Et_mA) and Youtube. TeleSur. 08/15/2024. National Assembly approves NGO financing law in second discussion <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEM4eBvJUek>

The forms of surveillance and monitoring by state and non-state actors of human rights defenders and organizations are increasing, with the creation of the National Cybersecurity Council “, on a permanent basis, as an advisory and consultation body dependent on the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the prevention of criminal uses of information and communication technologies”<sup>3</sup>. This type of mechanism has a deterrent and inhibiting effect on organizations and civil society, who, as they could be victims of surveillance, are afraid to continue carrying out their activities.

During the month of August, the judiciary carried out actions that further deepen the criminalization of the defense of human rights. Human rights defenders were arbitrarily detained, in four cases they were subjected to criminal proceedings under the special jurisdiction against terrorism, they remain deprived of their liberty and their right to due process has been violated.

The defense, demand and promotion of human rights continues to be under attack, thus hindering the rights to association, assembly and defense in Venezuela. Criminalization, repression and social control as a state policy, in a context of widespread impunity, demonstrate that the closure of civic and democratic space in Venezuela hinders the actions of civil society, including the human rights movement.

The State must take the necessary corrective measures to reverse this policy and its effects; defending, demanding and promoting human rights is not a crime, it is a right and a legitimate activity necessary for the reconstruction of a democratic society and the recovery of the rule of law.

## 02 INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CRIMINALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE IN VENEZUELA

In the face of the advances of the Criminalization Policy against the defense and demand for human rights in Venezuela, international organizations and international bodies for the protection of human rights continue to speak out against the attacks committed and demand that the State fulfill its duty to promote and protect the work of human rights defenders.

On August 12, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela demanded “*an end to repression and full investigations following the presidential election.*” The experts indicated that “*the Government of Venezuela must immediately stop the increasing repression that has been shaking the country since the presidential election on July 28, and thoroughly investigate the avalanche of serious human rights violations that are occurring.*” The statement includes concerns about the detention of human rights defenders in the context of post-electoral repression<sup>4</sup>.

On 13 August, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights spoke out against “*continued arbitrary arrests and disproportionate use of force fueling a climate of fear*”, warning that “*it is*

particularly worrying that so many people are being arrested, charged or accused of inciting hatred or under anti-terrorism legislation. The criminal law must never be used to unduly restrict the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association” and expressed concern over the possible adoption of the Bill on the Supervision, Regularization, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations, as well as the Bill against Fascism, Neo-Fascism and Similar Expressions, stating: “I urge the authorities not to adopt these or any other laws that undermine civic and democratic space in the country – in the interest of social cohesion and the future of the country”. He also warned that “some people’s passports have been cancelled, which appears to be an act of retaliation for their legitimate work in the country”<sup>45</sup>.

On August 13, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression (RELE) urgently called on the National Assembly “to refrain from approving the Law on Supervision, Regularization, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Related Organizations”. They stated that “the discussion of this law is resuming today in a context of increasing repression following the elections of July 28”<sup>46</sup>.

On August 15, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression (RELE) condemned the “practices of state terrorism in Venezuela”. In a statement, they described human rights violations in the post-electoral context, including attacks on human rights defenders, and referred to the case of defender Yendri Velázquez. Among the calls made to the State, they requested: “To cease the criminalization, harassment, and persecution of human rights defenders; (...) To immediately cease repressive actions directed against human rights defenders, dissidents, political opponents, electoral witnesses, journalists, and the media; (...) To suspend all strategies of digital persecution and those that use technologies to intimidate or silence the population, in particular, human rights defenders, dissidents, political opponents, electoral witnesses, journalists, and the media”<sup>47</sup>.

On August 28, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) condemned the arbitrary detention of 24-year-old Kennedy Tejada, a member of the organization Foro Penal, “who has been deprived of his liberty since August 2 in Montalbán, Carabobo. Tejada was detained and held incommunicado at a military command of the Bolivarian National Guard while he was investigating the whereabouts of people detained during post-election protests”<sup>48</sup>.

On August 29, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) condemned the persecution of human rights defenders in Venezuela in a press release. It stated that “since the presidential election, human rights defenders have been victims of repressive patterns by the State. This is done to obstruct the work of defense, which by exercising it generates immediate suspicion of the regime and activates the repressive state machinery”. Among its concerns are the approval of the Law on Supervision, Regularization, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations and other violations that occurred in the post-electoral context. Finally, the Commission reiterated “the importance of the work of defending human rights for the consolidation of democracies and the rule of law. For this reason, it calls for an end to acts of harassment and detentions and to ensure that these people can carry out their defense activities, free from any type of intimidation”<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>44</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/08/venezuela-fact-finding-mission-calls-end-repression-thorough-investigations>

<sup>45</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/es/press-releases/2024/08/venezuela-ongoing-arbitrary-detentions-disproportionate-use-force-fuelling>

<sup>46</sup><https://x.com/CIDH/status/1823399445716770893>

<sup>47</sup><https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2024/184.asp>

<sup>48</sup><https://x.com/CIDH/status/1828577121129705604>

<sup>49</sup>[https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2024/198.asp&utm\\_content=country-ven&utm\\_term=class-mon](https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2024/198.asp&utm_content=country-ven&utm_term=class-mon)



Regarding international organizations:

On August 3, Amnesty International spoke out against the arrest of human rights defender Yendri Velázquez and demanded his immediate and unconditional release<sup>10</sup>. The organization also spoke out on the case of human rights defender Kennedy Tejada, humanitarian worker Edni López, and human rights defender Edward Ocaríz<sup>11</sup>. The organization also issued a message in response to *“the alarming attacks aimed at suffocating civic space in Venezuela”*, emphasizing the Law on Oversight, Regularization, Action, and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations and the Law against Fascism and how they instill terror and seek to silence<sup>12</sup>. On August 15, after the law was approved, it denounced that *“The anti-NGO law punishes organizations that assist victims and defend human rights. It threatens freedom of association and participation, putting the crucial work of civil society at risk”*<sup>13</sup>.

August 15th Civil Rights Defenders expressed *“deep concern about the approval of the law on the supervision of NGOs and social organizations in the country. We send our condolences to those in civil society who fight for democracy and freedom”*<sup>14</sup>.

On August 16, Civicus denounced the approval of the Law on Supervision, Regulation, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations and the powers it grants to affect organizations, at the same time calling on the international community to reject this law<sup>15</sup>.

On August 17, the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) expressed concern about the repression in Venezuela and referred to the situation of human rights defenders, stating that *“the passports of human rights defenders, journalists, academics and other people perceived as political opponents are being annulled in an arbitrary, selective and discretionary manner. This is a violation of several internationally recognized fundamental rights (...)”* *“These measures are accompanied by an official discourse that criminalizes the defense of human rights and social protest, equating them with crimes such as terrorism and criminal association”* (...) *“Also, on August 15, the National Assembly approved a law that allows the government to restrict, control and eliminate NGO”*<sup>16</sup>.

Other international organizations have expressed their solidarity with the human rights movement in Venezuela following the approval of the Law on Supervision, Regulation, Action and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations and have expressed their concern about the impact it could have on freedom of association.

<sup>10</sup>Amnesty International Americas #Venezuela: We condemn the arbitrary detention of Yendri Velásquez, human rights defender and director of the organization @ovlgbtiq. He was detained at the Caracas airport when he was going to travel to participate in the #UN Committee against Discrimination. We demand his immediate and unconditional release. <https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/1819853624970772574>

<sup>11</sup><https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/1819801340261937260> ; <https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/1820492784882876846> ; <https://x.com/amnistia/status/1820856873882399030> ; <https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/1821290694981607512>

<sup>12</sup><https://x.com/amnestia/status/1823548362336985541>

<sup>13</sup><https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/1824246891644694553>

<sup>14</sup><https://x.com/CRDLatin/status/1824194774171017369>

<sup>15</sup><https://x.com/CIVICUSespanol/status/1824475504608494006>

<sup>16</sup><https://x.com/cejil/status/1824816063990624688>

# 03 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the complexities surrounding the Venezuelan socio-political environment, we reiterate that the work of defending, demanding and promoting human rights is essential for the protection of human dignity and ensuring the existence of peace and the restoration of the rule of law.

Criminalization, persecution and the implementation of actions contrary to the civic and democratic space must cease. Human rights defenders and organizations are essential actors in ensuring respect for democratic values and fundamental freedoms, and their actions must therefore be promoted and protected.

We call for efforts to build enabling and safe environments so that those who promote, demand and defend rights can carry out their activities freely and without fear of reprisals. As long as the legal and factual actions that reduce civic and democratic space do not cease, there will continue to be risks for civil society in the country.

From the CDJ we urge the effective promotion, protection and respect, without any kind of retaliation, of the actions of those who defend, demand and promote human rights in Venezuela.

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