



CENTRO PARA  
LOS DEFENSORES  
Y LA JUSTICIA

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# SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

FIRST QUARTER  
2026

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# 01

## 122 VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA DURING THE FIRST TRIMESTER OF 2026

During the first quarter of 2026, the Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (CDJ) documented 122 attacks and security incidents against human rights defenders and organizations in Venezuela.

These events demonstrate the continuity of a systematic policy of criminalization, repression, and social control, aimed at restricting and punishing the exercise of the right to defend, promote, and demand human rights. Far from being isolated incidents, the recorded attacks reflect a sustained pattern of persecution that seeks to inhibit civic action and weaken the Civic and Democratic Space.

### ATTACKS FIRST QUARTER OF 2026



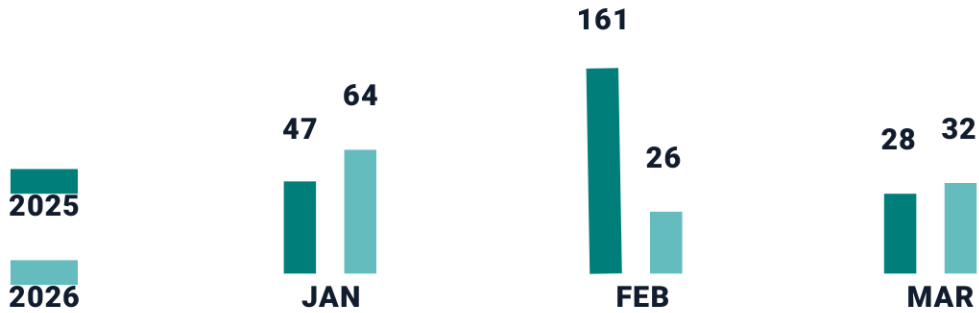
# 122 ATTACKS

Between January and March 2026, no improvements were recorded in the conditions of civic and democratic space in Venezuela. On the contrary, restrictive regulations remained in force, continuing to limit the actions of individuals and civil society organizations, as well as practices aimed at criminalizing the work of defending and demanding human rights.

122 incidents affecting the exercise of the right to defend human rights were documented, representing a 48% decrease compared to the same period in 2025, when 236 cases were recorded.

The decrease in the number of attacks is not due to a cessation of repressive practices. It is a direct consequence of the tightening of restrictions on civic space, the persistent stigmatization of human rights defenders and organizations as enemies of the state, and the consolidation of a policy of terror aimed at social control. This situation has forced those who defend, promote, and demand human rights to modify their methods, adopting self-protection measures, greater caution, and, in many cases, practices of self-censorship and inhibition, in order to prevent reprisals and reduce the risk of becoming victims of the policy of criminalization.

**DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACKS PER MONTH**



Despite the changes in the Venezuelan context following the events of January 3, the intimidation and attacks against human rights defenders and organizations have not ceased. They continue to carry out their activities in a restrictive environment characterized by criminalization and social control. The State continues to employ patterns that constitute a repressive and persecutory policy against those on the front lines, defending, demanding, and promoting human rights.

The environment for exercising and defending rights continues to present risks and challenges, as acts of intimidation and violence against human rights defenders and organizations continue to materialize, in a scenario in which the thesis of the internal enemy that must be neutralized is institutionalized and protected by a regulatory framework that restricts rights.

From different spaces and institutions of the State, the work of the organizations was criminalized and discredited by repeatedly labeling them as “liars”, “commercializing justice”, being fronts to “fight with foreign funds”, they were publicly accused of alleged “extortion” and of using their work as a form of “political conspiracy to destabilize”.

The 122 documented attacks and security incidents reflect the following main patterns of aggression and intimidation:

**CARACTERIZACIÓN DE LOS ATAQUES**



## SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

During the trimester, the CDJ primarily documented stigmatizing speeches and campaigns, systematically labeling non-governmental organizations as destabilizing agents and attempting to link their activities with alleged illegal actions and events related to destabilization, as a way to intimidate and harass.

These types of attacks aim to neutralize human rights organizations and defenders by labeling them, according to the government narrative, as enemies of the state and exposing them to potential investigations and criminal penalties. This stigmatization also serves as a catalyst for other forms of aggression, such as threats, harassment, and intimidation, among other violations of personal integrity and freedom.

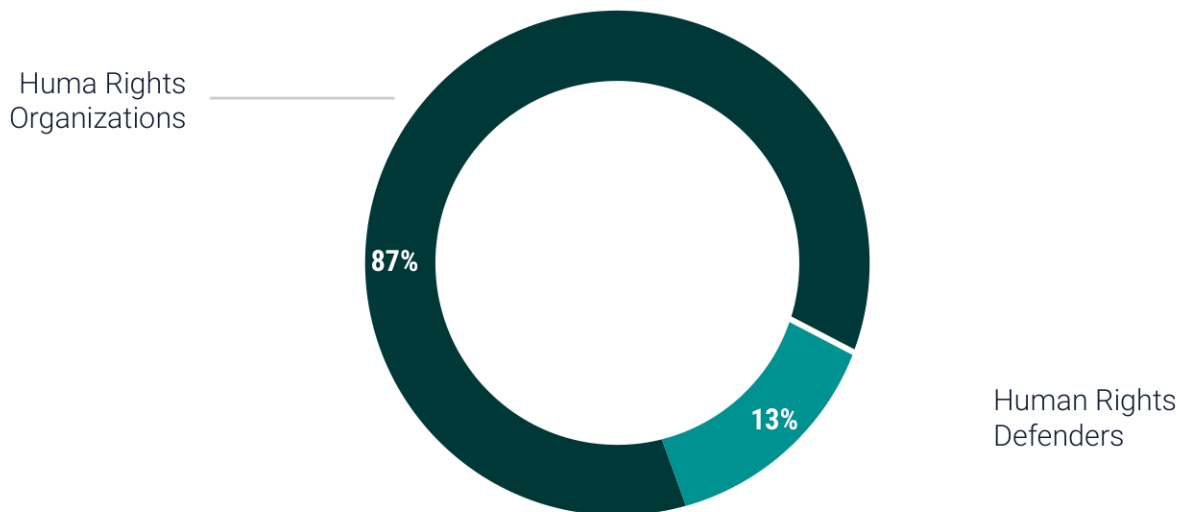
The State continues to use official channels to exercise institutional violence in order to intimidate and harass civil society and as a way to criminalize the legitimate exercise of the right to defend human rights.

Likewise, government officials made threats regarding international cooperation, calling for the application of the Oversight Law to civil society organizations, alleging that *“many of them are nothing more than fronts to launder money from imperialism and finance the small groups that want to set the country on fire”*.

The practice of defending human rights continues to be severely hampered by state practices aimed at delegitimizing it. Various branches of government promote the arbitrary linking of human rights defenders and human rights organizations to criminal activities, accusing them of destabilization and threatening the peace of the country. Restrictive laws and criminal law continue to be used to prosecute, persecute, control, and criminalize human rights defenders.

### VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total attacks documented during the first quarter of 2026, 106 targeted human rights organizations, representing 87% of the total. The remaining 13%, 16, targeted individual human rights defenders.



The human rights movement as a whole was affected by systematic campaigns of stigmatization and harassment, being subjected to threats and calls to be monitored under accusations of allegedly using international cooperation as a foreign front to interfere in national affairs.

They highlight the accusations, stigmatization, and acts of intimidation and harassment against the organizations *Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos* – PROVEA, *Foro Penal*, and *Transparencia Venezuela*. They also note the systematic stigmatization and discrediting of the work of non-governmental organizations.

Judicial harassment continues against human rights defenders, who, despite having been released from prison and following the enactment of the Amnesty Law, remain subject to criminal proceedings and have been denied the benefits of the law.

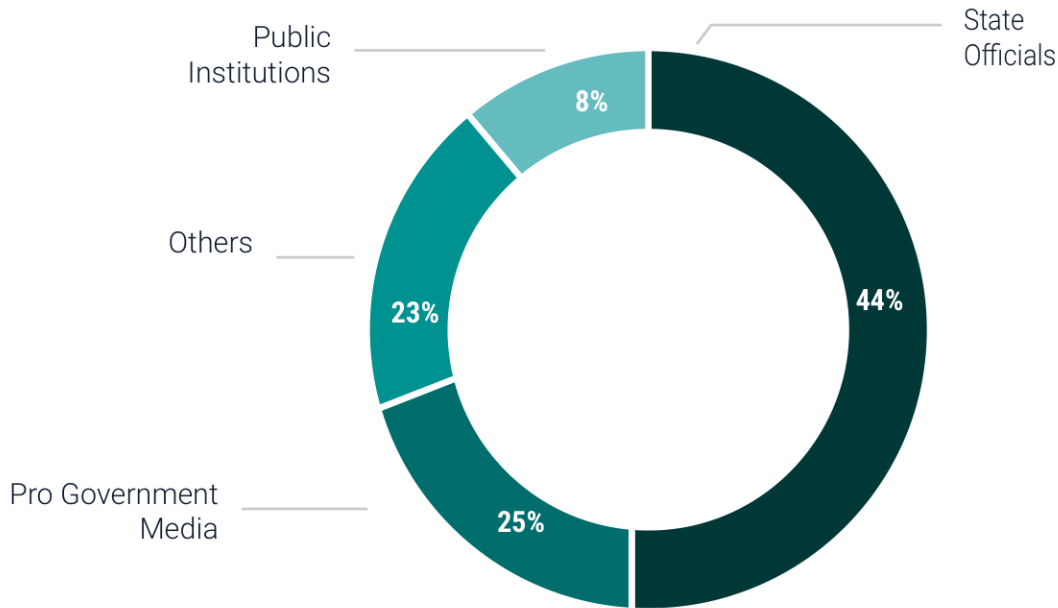
Also of concern is the continued existence of regulations that restrict civic space, since without repealing the legal instruments aimed at restricting and controlling civil society, it will be impossible to guarantee a favorable and safe environment for its activities. This is particularly true regarding the threats surrounding the application of the Law on the Oversight, Regulation, Operation, and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Non-Profit Social Organizations.

### **PERPETRATORS**

The main perpetrators of the attacks and security incidents documented during the first quarter of 2025 were distributed as follows:

A total of 59 of the attacks were carried out by public officials, who used their social media profiles or statements in the media to stigmatize and intimidate (44%); 30 of the attacks (25%) were carried out by traditional and digital media of the State and their social media accounts; actors affiliated with the government perpetrated 22 attacks (23%); and finally 11 (8%) of the events were the responsibility of public institutions.

## SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA



Those primarily responsible for the attacks against human rights defenders and advocates include members of the National Executive, ministers, members of the National Assembly, and others. Similarly, institutions within the justice system are also implicated as perpetrators.

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 to violence.

Other actors are responsible for actions of stigmatization, intimidation, and harassment as part of criminalization.

### Threats to civic and democratic space persist in Venezuela

The environment for defending, demanding, and promoting rights remains adverse and hostile. The implementation of restrictive legal and factual measures that undermine the existing civic and democratic space maintains the risks for human rights defenders and organizations.

The first quarter was characterized by new threats resulting from the validity of regulations that limit the right to freedom of association and by the constant intimidation of the defense and demand for human rights.

During January 2026, the Executive announced the creation of the National Office for Cyber Defense and Security, an entity that will coordinate scientific and technological institutions to “protect cyberspace” and that will be attached to the Ministry of Science and Technology<sup>1</sup>. This action adds to various mechanisms created within the framework of a repressive system that remains in place and where digital surveillance is used to intimidate and control civil society.

We warn that the regulatory framework in Venezuela focuses many of its regulations on the

<sup>1</sup> See Delcy Rodríguez announces the creation of the National Office for Cyber Defense and Security <https://www.observatorio-deconflictos.org.ve/oc/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/La-presidenta-encargada-de-Venezuela-Delcy-Rodriguez-anuncio-la-creacion-de-una-Oficina-Nacion.mp>

need to protect the nation and its sovereignty against “interventionist, destabilizing and terrorist aggressions,” based on the thesis of the internal enemy, increasing the level of risk for human rights organizations when carrying out their activities, also causing an inhibitory effect due to the fear of being subject to criminalization or judicialization under these rules in a discretionary or arbitrary manner.

The persistence of restrictive laws, coupled with the lack of measures to dismantle the repressive apparatus that affects civic space, continues to jeopardize the operational capacity of these organizations, limiting their ability to function within the legal framework and their independence. Furthermore, this context increases the likelihood of further attacks and security incidents against them.

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

At the close of the first trimester of 2026, defending, promoting and demanding human rights involves risks; the State maintains its repressive apparatus and continues to commit attacks against human rights individuals and organizations.

State discourse continues to revolve around discrediting, disqualifying, questioning, and making accusations against the human rights movement in order to try to link its activities with actions of political proselytizing, destabilization, and foreign interference.

Stigmatization has been the dominant pattern of attacks since the beginning of the year, consisting of statements by state officials accusing organizations of fabricating facts and allegations to justify the events of January 3rd<sup>2</sup>, as well as discrediting the complaints made regarding the release processes. Furthermore, the state continued to question the legitimacy of the complaints filed by the human rights movement with international bodies, insisting that they are “weapons” used to manipulate human rights for political ends<sup>3</sup>.

Acts of intimidation and harassment were also among the patterns documented during the first quarter of the year. These included intimidating messages and threats of investigations, evidence of monitoring of the organizations, as well as calls and the presence of unknown individuals at the organizations’ headquarters. These actions to intimidate persist, along with the fear of reprisals for reporting and demanding accountability.

We celebrate the release on January 8 of human rights defender Rocío San Miguel, president of the organization Control Ciudadano, who had been arbitrarily deprived of her liberty for over two years<sup>4</sup>; the

<sup>2</sup>Center for Defenders and Justice. Situation of human rights defenders in Venezuela. January 2026 and February 2026. Available at: <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/?p=765>  
<https://centrodefensores.org.ve/?p=777>

<sup>3</sup>See: <https://provea.org/actualidad/derechos-civiles-y-politicos/gobierno-de-delcy-rodriguez-mantiene-ataques-contra-defensores-en-consejo-de-derechos-humanos-de-la-onu/>, <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pipw7f1>; <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k197qghaqw>

<sup>4</sup>El País. Available at: <https://elpais.com/america/2026-01-10/la-familia-de-rocio-san-miguel-resalta-los-dialogos-y-la-diplomacia-que-han-propiciado-su-liberacion.html>

release of human rights defender Kennedy Tejada, a member of Foro Penal<sup>5</sup>, on January 25; the release of Eduardo Torres, a lawyer with Provea, on January 30<sup>6</sup>; and the release of Javier Tarazona, Director of FundaRedes, on February 1, after more than four years of arbitrary detention<sup>7</sup>. We reiterate that no human rights defender should be criminalized or prosecuted for carrying out their legitimate work.

The transition to democracy necessarily involves opening up civic space and respecting the rule of law, making it essential that fundamental freedoms can be exercised without fear of reprisal. To date, there is no evidence of effective actions aimed at reversing the policy of criminalization or correcting its effects; on the contrary, the State continues to impose an antagonistic discourse against those who defend, promote, and demand human rights.

From the CDJ we reiterate the importance of having a safe and conducive environment for the defense of human rights, understanding this activity as essential for the search for justice and truth within the framework of a reinstitutionalization process.

## 03 THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY REMAINS VIGILANT AND CONDEMNS THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA.

The criminalization of human rights defenders and the closure of civic and democratic space in Venezuela remain a focus of concern for the international community.

Human rights protection bodies, diplomatic actors and international organizations 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.

Among the main actions and pronouncements recorded between January and March 2026 are:

On January 13, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued a statement expressing concern about the events that occurred in Venezuela after January 3. The Commission and its Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression (RELE) urged the government to “*guarantee full conditions for the exercise of journalism, without censorship, threats, reprisals, or undue restrictions, and to protect human rights defenders*”; and they commented on the release of human rights defender Rocío San Miguel<sup>8</sup>.

On February 3, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) rejected “*the statements made by the Minister of the Interior against organizations that defend people detained for political reasons*”, indicating that “*the defense of human rights is indispensable for a democratic transition*”<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>Criminal Forum. #Jan25 With great joy we can confirm the release of our volunteer lawyer from @ForoPenal KENNEDY TEJEDA JIMÉNEZ, who was arbitrarily detained since August 2, 2024. <https://x.com/HimiobSantome/status/2015456926788673924>

<sup>6</sup>Provea. Freedom! Our colleague Eduardo Torres is greeted by his wife and children after being released from prison Friday night. We are overjoyed by this news and it encourages us to continue demanding, along with dozens of families, the full and immediate freedom of all political prisoners in the country. [https://x.com/\\_Provea/status/2017418990184743149](https://x.com/_Provea/status/2017418990184743149)

<sup>7</sup>CNN Available at: <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2026/02/01/venezuela/excarcelan-activista-javier-tarazona-helicoide-orix>

<sup>8</sup>IACHR. January 13, 2026. Press Release [https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/jsForm/?File=%2Fes%2Fcidh%2Fprensa%2Fcomunicados%2F2026%2F007.asp&utm\\_content=country-ven&utm\\_term=class-mon](https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/jsForm/?File=%2Fes%2Fcidh%2Fprensa%2Fcomunicados%2F2026%2F007.asp&utm_content=country-ven&utm_term=class-mon)

<sup>9</sup> [https://x.com/DefensoresDDHH\\_](https://x.com/DefensoresDDHH_)

On March 12, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, in its oral update, denounced that *“civil society organizations, independent media, academics, students, and politically active individuals are subjected to attacks, harassment, and intimidation. The prospects for full guarantees for holding free and democratic elections remain remote”*<sup>10</sup>, and indicated that *“they regret that the legal instruments that for years have served as the basis for political persecution remain in force, such as the Law Against Hatred and the Law on Financing NGOs,”* urging their repeal and substantial reform<sup>11</sup>.

On March 13, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons published letters to the governments of Venezuela and Colombia regarding the attack on Venezuelan human rights defender Yendri Velásquez on October 13, 2025 in Bogotá<sup>12</sup>.

On March 16, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed the release of human rights defenders and urged respect for the right to defend human rights. He also warned about the continued closure of the Civic Center and the continued enforcement of the oversight law and the law against hate speech<sup>13</sup>.

Various States spoke out at the Human Rights Council session in March regarding the closure of Civic Space and the criminalization of human rights defenders<sup>14</sup>.

For their part, international organizations such as Amnesty International, the Center for Justice and International Law CEJIL, spoke out against the release of human rights defenders, demanding full freedom for all<sup>15</sup>.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, comprised of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), issued a statement regarding the release of several human rights defenders arbitrarily detained in Venezuela. It stated that *“ these individuals should never have been deprived of their liberty for carrying out their legitimate work of defending human rights. Their release does not yet constitute full freedom; therefore, we urge the immediate and unconditional guarantee of their full release, along with the dismissal of all pending criminal charges and the expungement of their police and judicial records”*<sup>16</sup>.

Amnesty International spoke out against the continuation of legal proceedings against prisoner of conscience Javier Tarazona and the FundaREDES team , calling it *“unacceptable”* and denouncing that *“it is not an isolated case and responds to a pattern faced by civil society organizations that includes stigmatizing discourses and intimidation through laws that punish solidarity”*<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pipw71>

<sup>11</sup>dem

<sup>12</sup><https://x.com/MaryLawlorhds/status/2032441769883750724>

<sup>13</sup> <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k197qghaqw>

<sup>14</sup><https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pipw71>

<sup>15</sup>[https://x.com/OBS\\_defenders/status/2009578588845326580](https://x.com/OBS_defenders/status/2009578588845326580) , <https://x.com/cejil/status/2014419997792063556> , <https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/2015587013831844319>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.omct.org/es/recursos/declaraciones/venezuela-por-la-liberaci%C3%B3n-inmediata-e-incondicional-de-todas-las-personas-defensoras-de-derechos-humanos-en-detenci%C3%B3n-arbitraria#:~:text=Asimismo%2C%20celebramos%20la%20excarcelaci%C3%B3n%20del%20defensor%20Javier,director%20de%20Fundaredes%2C%20detenido%20desde%202021%20y>

<sup>17</sup><https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/2036573308859060367>

# 04

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The State continues to fail to guarantee a favorable and safe environment for the exercise and defense of human rights.

In the context of recent events, including the ongoing international monitoring and oversight process following the events of January 3, there have been no improvements in guarantees for the exercise and defense of human rights. On the contrary, repressive practices, criminalization, and restrictions on civic space persist, demonstrating the state's lack of will to create safe conditions for the work of human rights defenders and organizations.

The use of restrictive legal frameworks and criminal law as tools of persecution, along with tactics of intimidation and stigmatization, must cease immediately. Actions aimed at delegitimizing the work of human rights organizations are particularly worrying, in a context where the lack of institutional guarantees deepens the vulnerability of civic space.

In this scenario, it is urgent to move towards the reconstruction of minimum conditions of legality, independence and security, which allow the full exercise of the right to defend human rights, in accordance with international standards.

To guarantee a free and safe environment where human rights defenders are protected, we request:

- Repeal restrictive regulations and cease the application of laws that, under the pretext of oversight or control, limit the right to freedom of association and criminalize international cooperation.
- End the stigmatization of human rights defenders and their organizations. Authorities must refrain from making statements that promote hatred, delegitimization, or criminalization. The defense of human rights is a legitimate activity protected by international law, the guarantee of which is the responsibility of the State.
- Adopt and implement effective institutional protection measures that ensure real conditions for human rights defenders and organizations to carry out their work without fear of reprisals, harassment, or violence.

- Maintain monitoring and denunciation actions by the international community, demanding compliance with the human rights treaties signed by the country and the comprehensive and effective protection of human rights defenders. Text

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