



CENTRO PARA
LOS DEFENSORES
Y LA JUSTICIA

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

**FIRST SEMESTER OF
2026**

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The Center for Human Rights Defenders and Justice (CDJ) documented **146 attacks and security incidents during the first half of 2026** in Venezuela.

Criminalization, repression, and control persist against those who promote, defend, and demand human rights in a context of political crisis and the persistence of a State policy of fear and persecution, which aims to neutralize civil society.

Within the framework of the institutional changes taking place in the country, it remains necessary to recover civic and democratic space and to stop institutional violence, in order to mitigate the risks and attacks against people and organizations that defend human rights.

ATTACKS FIRST HALF OF 2026



146 ATTACKS

Between January and June 2026, the Venezuelan state continued to take action against human rights individuals and organizations in the country. The implementation of patterns designed to obstruct, limit, and affect the activities of those who document, defend, demand, and promote human rights persists.

The 146 attacks and incidents documented during the period compromise and affect the rights of human rights defenders, and represent a 55% decrease compared to the same period in 2025, in which 321 situations were recorded.

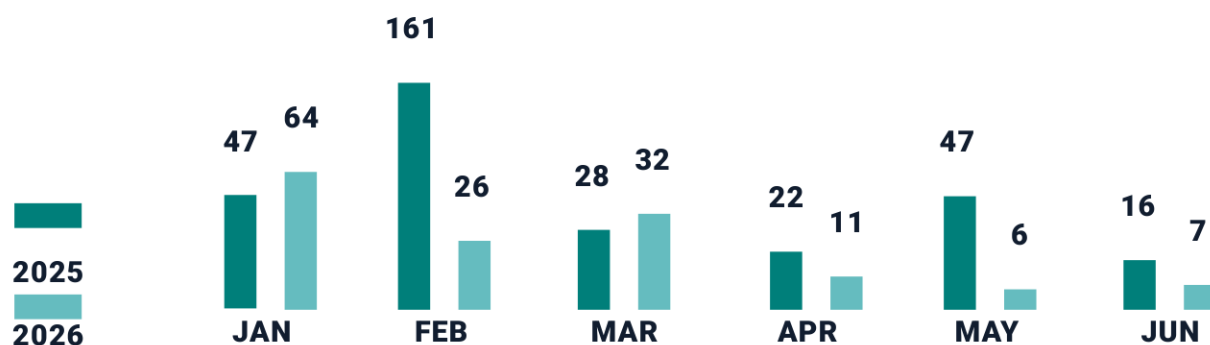
This decrease does not constitute an improvement in the working conditions of human rights organizations and defenders, who continue to face restrictive laws, threats from officials, and an environment that does not enable or guarantee the free and full exercise of their activities.

Despite the decrease in the number of attacks, given the constant limitations and lack of progress in the full recovery of civic space, the fear of civil society to suffer reprisals for its actions remains.

Acts of intimidation and threats surrounding the auditing law continue to occur, and risks persist from the imposition of excessive and discretionary controls aimed at maintaining control and neutralizing civil society organizations under the logic of fear.

The persistence of the internal enemy logic and impunity for human rights violations continues to make the levels of risk high for human rights defenders and human rights organizations in the country.

DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACKS PER MONTH



The 146 documented attacks and security incidents reflect the following main patterns of aggression and intimidation:

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ATTACKS



Despite the changes in the Venezuelan context following the events of January 3rd, and the actions undertaken to reform the country's institutions, 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 government continues to employ patterns that constitute a repressive state policy of persecution against those on the front lines, defending, demanding, and promoting human rights.

Between January and June, attacks against human rights defenders and organizations in the country were documented, mainly related to international cooperation, as well as impacts on the validity and application of the Oversight Law.

Several irregularities have been reported regarding the use of the Law on the Oversight and Regulation of Civil Society Organizations and Related Entities as a control mechanism. New obstacles and acts of intimidation have been recorded, violating the right to defend, promote, and demand human rights. These issues stem from regulations and administrative decisions

derived from the law, which are aimed at controlling the actions of civil society actors.

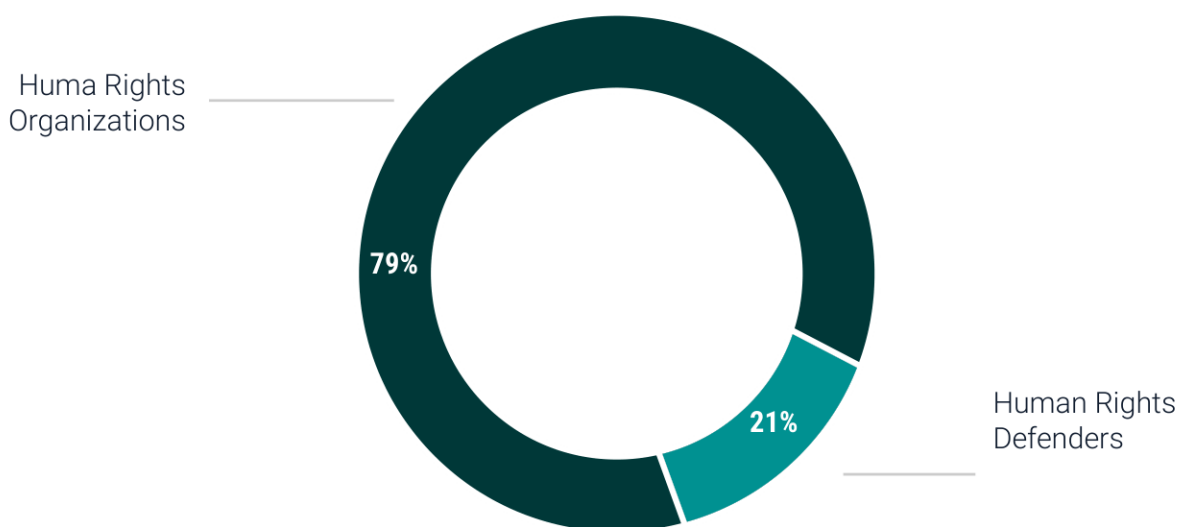
From different spaces and institutions of the State, the work of the organizations was criminalized and discredited by repeatedly labeling them as “liars”, “commercializing justice”, being fronts to “fight with foreign funds”, they were publicly accused of alleged “extortion” and of using their work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

The 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.

It is essential to continue documenting the patterns, denouncing and insisting in various instances 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.

VICTIMS OF THE ATTACKS

Of the total attacks documented during the first half of 2026, 116 targeted human rights organizations, representing 79% of the total. An additional 30 attacks targeted individual human rights defenders, accounting for the remaining 21%.



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 Venezuelan Program for Education-Action in Human Rights – PROVEA, Foro Penal, and Transparencia Venezuela. They also note the systematic stigmatization and

discrediting of the work of non-governmental organizations.

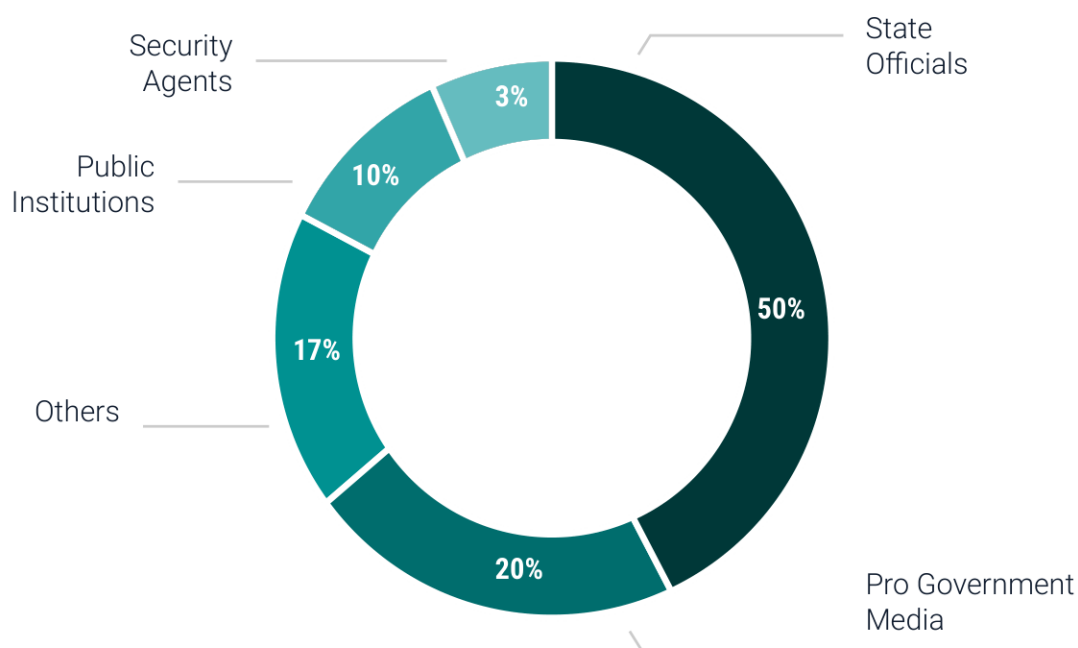
Judicial harassment continues against human rights defenders, who, despite having been released from prison and following the enactment of the Amnesty Law, remain subject to criminal proceedings and have been denied the benefits of the law.

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 semester were distributed as follows:

A total of 73 of the attacks were carried out by public officials, who used their social media profiles or statements in the media to stigmatize and intimidate (50%); 30 of the attacks (20%) were carried out by traditional and digital media of the State and their social media accounts; actors affiliated with the government perpetrated 25 attacks (17%); 14 (10%) of the events were the responsibility of public institutions; and finally 4 (3%) of the events were the responsibility of State security agencies .



Those identified as responsible include members of the National Executive, ministers, members of the National Assembly, and others. Similarly, institutions within the Justice System, entities associated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and state security agencies are also identified 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.

01

THREATS TO CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC SPACE PERSIST IN VENEZUELA

The environment for defending, demanding, and promoting rights remains adverse and hostile. The failure to repeal restrictive legal and de facto measures that undermine civic and democratic space perpetuates the risks for human rights defenders and organizations.

The first semester 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 Technology¹. 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 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 lack of progress in repealing laws that restrict civic space is concerning, since without the annulment of legal instruments aimed at restricting and controlling civil society, it will be impossible to guarantee a safe and favorable 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 and Non-Profit Social Organizations, the Constitutional Law against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance, among others. Likewise, the use of anti-terrorism and organized crime legislation to criminalize the defense of rights must cease.

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**

During the first half of 2026, the Center for Defenders and Justice documented attacks against human rights defenders and organizations in the country, mainly related to international cooperation, as well as impacts related to the enforcement of the Oversight Law.

Stigmatization remained the primary pattern and basis of the attacks. Disqualifying rhetoric and accusations continued, fostering criminalization based on the assumption that human rights defenders and organizations are “enemies,” “traitors,” “destabilizing agents,” and other such labels. The content of these accusations is alarming because they are violent and accompanied by threats. This situation has been exacerbated by the increase in cases of human rights defenders detained and prosecuted in special courts of the Anti-Terrorism Jurisdiction, accused of committing terrorism-related offenses and other crimes related to organized crime.

During this period, stigmatizing rhetoric was repeated. The message and narrative against human rights defenders and organizations was based on unfounded accusations that they allegedly engaged in “illicit activities aimed at destabilizing the country,” conspired, were thieves, or were corrupt, and were repeatedly threatened with investigations. Some defenders continue to face criminal proceedings or threats of investigation, and were also denied amnesty.

The restrictive legal framework remains in place—administrative, civil, and criminal—which runs counter to the State’s obligations to promote and protect human rights. These are the primary tools the State uses to control and obstruct the documentation, denunciation, advocacy, cooperation, and humanitarian actions undertaken by non-governmental organizations to address the socio-political and human rights crisis in the country and to assist and support victims of abuses and crimes committed by the State in their pursuit of truth, justice, and reparations. Criminal law, particularly the law criminalizing defamation, as well as laws against terrorism and organized crime, is used for persecution.

Organizations that have attempted to register have been prevented from doing so due to their human rights mandate or have been asked to meet extraordinary or impossible requirements, not only for registration purposes but also for banking entities complying with SUDEBAN regulations. Furthermore, new threats related to its application were reported during this period as a form of persecution and intimidation.

The Venezuelan State continued its efforts to neutralize and punish the exercise of civic freedoms to assert and demand human rights.

Furthermore, acts of intimidation and harassment, as well as threats against individuals and organizations, were documented by public officials, particularly those with responsibilities in citizen security and intelligence, as well as by non-state actors.

At the close of the period, the arbitrary legal proceedings against members of the FundaRedes organization—Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona, and Omar de Dios García—and Carlos Correa continue. Despite having been released from prison, they remain under alternative measures to incarceration, and in the case of the FundaRedes members, amnesty was denied.

Additionally, there are concerns about potential new forms of persecution and control surrounding the humanitarian response to the June 24 earthquakes. Formal organizations and other informal associations that emerged in response to the situation have received threats or pressure related to government control of aid. This sets a dangerous precedent for a response that will need to be sustained over time.

As long as the State continues to portray those who defend, demand, and promote rights as enemies, and continues to perpetrate attacks against them in a limited civic and democratic space and in a hostile environment, the risks will continue to increase.

It is essential to continue documenting the patterns, denouncing and insisting in various instances 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.

We reiterate that the work of human rights defenders and organizations is essential for the pursuit of justice and reparations for victims; attempts to silence and neutralize them must cease. The State must recognize the legitimacy of human rights defenders as actors within organized civil society and advance measures that guarantee and protect their work so they can carry it out safely and without fear of reprisals.

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.

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 Miguel².

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”*³.

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”*⁴, 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 reform⁵.

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 Bogotá⁶.

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 speech⁷.

Various States spoke out at the Human Rights Council session in March regarding the closure of Civic Space and the criminalization of human rights defenders⁸.

In April, 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 consolidation of a de facto regime and the systematic violations of human rights”*.

²IACHR. 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

³<https://x.com/DefensoresDDHH>

⁴<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pipwpf7l>

⁵Idem

⁶<https://x.com/MaryLawlorhrds/status/2032441769883750724>

⁷<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k197qghaqw>

⁸<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pipwpf7l>

The analysis highlights the situation of human rights defenders and the IACHR's ongoing concern, as acts of persecution against them continued to be documented. It indicates that during 2025, *"the Commission observed the deepening of obstacles to defending human rights in Venezuela due to the increased restrictions on civic space and the intensification of practices of repression, intimidation, and harassment. In this regard, the Commission received alarming information about temporary disappearances, the misuse of criminal law, the cancellation of passports, and other repressive practices aimed at silencing dissenting voices. This is compounded by the application of laws that appear to disproportionately target the activities of human rights organizations"*⁹.

In his analysis, he highlights the different patterns used and calls for guaranteeing and protecting the work of human rights defenders and organizations.

On April 9, the IACHR and its Rapporteurship on Freedom of Expression issued a statement expressing concern over *"reports of attacks against protesters and journalists during protests called by unions"*; and urged the authorities *"to respect and guarantee the #RightToProtest, as well as to provide guarantees to journalists covering them"*, human rights defenders who were covering the events were affected¹⁰.

On June 26, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Turk, and his office presented a new update on the human rights situation to the Human Rights Council. Among the concerns expressed by his office was the situation of human rights defenders and the importance of their protection.

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 all¹¹.

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"*¹².

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"*¹³.

⁹IACHR Annual Report https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2025/Capitulos/IA2025_4B_VEN_ES.PDF

¹⁰Post on X. 09.04.26. Available at: https://x.com/RELE_CIDH/status/2042349653304254747

¹¹https://x.com/OBS_defenders/status/2009578588845326580, <https://x.com/cejil/status/2014419997792063556>, <https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/2015587013831844319>

¹²<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%20celebramos%20la%20excarcelaci%C3%B3n%20del%20defensor%20Javier,director%20de%20Fundaredes%2C%20detenido%20desde%202021%20y>

¹³ <https://x.com/AmnistiaOnline/status/2036573308859060367>

On April 9, the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) issued a statement condemning the repression suffered by human rights defenders covering a protest. They stated, “*CEJIL condemns the repression that occurred on April 9 in Caracas during a peaceful protest for labor and social rights, in which workers, human rights defenders, and journalists participated*”¹⁴.

On May 18 and 19, Amnesty International held a Human Rights Conference, creating spaces for discussion and proposals to guarantee the protection of human rights in Venezuela. Among the topics discussed was the importance of ensuring the work of civil society. During the event, more than 20 experts, academics, human rights defenders, and rights holders gathered to identify effective proposals for advancing freedoms, upholding the rule of law, and guaranteeing the non-repetition of violations of international law. Amnesty International’s Senior Director, Erika Guevara Rosas, addressed the defenders who continue to demand rights in Venezuela, highlighting, among other things, that “*Venezuelan civil society has been vital in the creation of international mechanisms that monitor the human rights situation in Venezuela, from the Fact-Finding Mission to the investigations carried out by the ICC*”¹⁵.

04 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

It is essential that the processes of change and reinstitutionalization taking place in the country incorporate a human rights perspective. Therefore, it is crucial that human rights defenders participate and offer a rights-based perspective and standards to ensure the effectiveness of the reforms with a focus on protecting human dignity.

Concrete measures are needed to promote a conducive and safe environment for the exercise and defense of human rights, in which possibilities for interaction and action by human rights defenders are enabled, in order to contribute to redemocratization under the approach of international human rights law, and thus guarantee truth, justice, memory, reparation and prevent the repetition of violations.

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.

¹⁴Post on X. 10.04.26. Available at: <https://x.com/cejil/status/2042701933476020420>

¹⁵Amnesty International. <https://x.com/amnistia/status/2057892908359893265>

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

- The criminalization must end. Official speeches, social media campaigns, and television programs that discredit the work of human rights defenders must be stopped immediately.
- Repeal of restrictive laws: include in legislative and institutional reforms the elimination of legal instruments that impose excessive and discretionary controls on civil society organizations.
- Guaranteeing a safe environment for the defense of human rights. Progress must be made in designing concrete public policies that ensure a civic space free from intimidation, threats, and institutional harassment.
- To the International Community: Continue active monitoring and documentation, maintain constant vigilance over the human rights situation in the country, and demand that the State comply with its international obligations to protect human rights defenders and promoters. Furthermore, operational, technical, and financial support must be strengthened to mitigate their vulnerability to attacks.

CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA

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