

POLITICAL PERSECUTION IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC 2020-VENEZUELA



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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The monitoring presented below constitutes a summary of the research work that the **Center for Justice and Peace** (Cepaz) has prepared on the occasion of the exacerbation of the patterns of persecution by the Nicolás Maduro regime during the pandemic.

The investigation has a documentary approach, so the record of the cases presented is derived from the compilation of publications shared by national and international digital information sources, to which any organization or individual can have access if they so require.

The monitoring has been carried out from **march 16, 2020 to june 9, 2020**.

The use of the sources of information has complied with the process of tonnage of the sources, the revision, the comparison and the interpretative approach.

The information presented is sufficient to yield results that are considered true in terms of numbers and percentages.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The multidimensional crisis that exists in Venezuela and the complex humanitarian crisis has been emphasized in times of a pandemic. The de facto government has used the health emergency to continue with the declaration of a state of emergency, which already has been unconstitutional for more than 4 years, and which, now being necessary to safeguard the lives of Venezuelans, **has been used to violate rights and apply greater restrictions** that, far from addressing the emergency, further deepens the pre-existing crisis.

In this sense, the regime has continuously threatened the autonomy and independence of individuals and organizations, through the systematic and continued application of patterns of persecution against opposition leaders, human rights defenders, communicators, the health guild, the Venezuelan returnees, and in general the entire population through a state control policy as a mechanism of perpetuation in power.

In this report we present the situation of **persecution and violation** of the human rights of Venezuelans since the beginning of the declaration of state of emergency by the regime. And how these practices are exacerbated, exceeding the level of violence and arbitrariness, which violates the free exercise of civil, political, economic and social rights, particularly the right to due process, political participation, association, respect for physical integrity, freedom of opinion and demonstration, among others.

POLITICAL PERSECUTION

Since 2014 the Justice and Peace Center (Cepaz) has been consistent in documenting and denouncing the political persecution in Venezuela¹. In this period, we have presented the main patterns of persecution that are systematically and continuously exercised by the de facto government, demonstrating that the harassment against the Venezuelan opposition is pre-existing and it worsens while the crisis also worsens.

Proof of the above is the **media violence that takes place through the use of the media for harassment and threats, and the consent of the regime to create irregular groups to carry out violent acts against the opposition**. This is the case of Nicolás Maduro's response after the United States launched the anti-drug operation in which several regime officials are accused.

Thus, public television was once again used to persecute the opposition. Maduro's main ally, Diosdado Cabello, through his programme called "Con El Mazo Dando", unveiled the "*Furia Bolivariana splan*", and threatened the opposition to go against them through a "*Furia Bolivariana alert*".² From Sunday, March 29 and until the beginning of June, at least **42** people linked to the political work of the opposition, have been intimidated through drawings on the walls of their residences with threats and insults.

In this regard, the presidential commissioner for human rights and attention to victims, Humberto Prado stated that "*we are witnessing a situation as in the time of the Nazis that marked the houses and labelled them for a certain situation*".³

On the other hand, **the illegitimate deprivations of liberty and the violation of the human right to access to justice and due process** is another of the patterns

■ ATTACK ON HOMES "Furia Bolivariana"

- 1 Eduardo Delgado
- 2 Karim Vera
- 3 Jesús Báez
- 4 Iván Roa
- 5 Armando Armas
- 6 Luis Lippa
- 7 Larissa González
- 8 María Gabriela Suárez
- 9 Bolivia Suárez
- 10 Luis Alberto Silva
- 11 Libio Rondón
- 12 Horacio Guzmán
- 13 Hector Cordero
- 14 Beatriz Martínez
- 15 Maga Martínez
- 16 Carlos Michelangeli
- 17 Andrés Velásquez
- 18 José Antonio Mendoza
- 19 Orlando Fernández
- 20 Alfredo Ramos
- 21 Miguel Chacón
- 22 Adriana Carrillo
- 23 Mensur Sliman
- 24 José Petralía
- 25 Mizluma Bolívar
- 26 Emilio Mirabal
- 27 Alfredo Díaz
- 28 Gabriel Alarcón
- 29 Templo Santa Catalina
- 30 Sede de Vente Venezuela
- 31 Carlos Andrés González
- 32 Joaquín Aguilar
- 33 Eliezer Sirit
- 34 Olivia Lozano
- 35 Ángel Álvarez Gil
- 36 Pablo Morillo
- 37 Ángel Aristimuño
- 38 Raúl Yusef
- 39 Carlos Borjas
- 40 Eleazar Betancourt
- 41 Juan Freitas
- 42 Félix Alberto Alayón

¹ See reports: "[Persecución política en Venezuela. Sistematización de patrones de persecución en contra de la disidencia política venezolana](#)"; "[Persecución Política en Venezuela \(Identificación diferenciada de patrones de persecución en actores disidentes y seguimiento de casos\)](#)" and "[Nuevos patrones y agudización de la persecución política. Seguimiento y actualización de caos de persecución](#)".

² EL NACIONAL. Cabello advierte aplicar la «furia bolivariana» en contra de los que piden invasión de EE UU. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/cabello-advierte-aplicar-la-furia-bolivariana-en-contra-de-los-que-piden-invasion-de-ee-uu/>

³ DIARIO LAS AMERICAS. Gobierno de Guaidó denuncia ante organismos internacionales persecución del régimen. Available in: <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/gobierno-guaido-denuncia-organismos-internacionales-persecucion-del-regimen-n4195970>

that the de facto government has used in a systematic and continuous way to silence the opposition; therefore, since the beginning of the quarantine (march 16, 2020) there have been at least **99 new cases of political prisoners** until May 2020⁴, of which from CEPAZ we have recorded that at least **10 arbitrary arrests have been directly against people related to the opposition leadership**.

In this regard, at least five people from the working environment of the president in charge Juan Guaidó have been detained in a week without court orders. These arrests have been made using State security agents such as the Special Actions Forces (FAES) or the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), who are to fulfill security functions in the maintenance of public order. In no circumstance, can they represent an accessory of the government in the systematic persecution against the opposition.

To mention some of the cases, on march 29th, **Víctor Silo** and **Rómulo García** were arrested and accused of having weapons and marijuana in their vehicle. On march 30th, **Andrea Bianchi**, Rafael Rico's girlfriend, was arrested, who despite having been released on the same day, reported that she was assaulted and threatened with rape. Finally, on april 2nd, **Demóstenes Quijada** and **Maury Carrero**, were arrested and accused of terrorism, association for crimes, concealment of weapons

and explosives, and concealment of small amounts of drugs.⁵

In this regard, it is important to highlight that the deprivation of liberty has been without court orders, and in some cases under the excuse of a check-up operation for suspected cases of coronavirus in the area.

On the latter, on march 29th, Guaidó alerted that an apparent health team had tried to enter his residence due to an alleged spread of coronavirus.

Furthermore, the violation of private property continues to be a pattern of political persecution in Venezuela through the search of houses without court orders, with the purpose of intimidating and harassing political leaders. From CEPAZ we have counted at least **4 cases of search of homes** during the quarantine.

On the other hand, the workers of the legitimate National Assembly continue to be victims of intimidation by the de facto government through **dismissal of charges and dismissals**. Not only the deputies have been facing these difficulties, also one of the two workers' unions of the National Assembly, *Sinfucan*, denounced that on march 28th, Luis Parra dismissed more than 650 officials, workers and employees of the institution in the midst of the confinement.⁶

■ ARBITRARY ARRESTS

- 1 Víctor Silo
- 2 Rómulo García
- 3 Andrea Bianchi
- 4 Demóstenes Quijada
- 5 Maury Carrero
- 6 Julio César Molinos
- 7 Vicente Borjas
- 8 Antonio Geara
- 9 Tony Geara
- 10 Heddy Antonio Cristancho

■ HOME SEARCH

- 1 José Hernández
- 2 Fernando López
- 3 Blas Antonio Santander
- 4 Tony Geara

⁴ CRÓNICA UNO. Foro Penal: Hay 362 presos políticos, 16 desapariciones forzosas y 99 detenidos durante la cuarentena. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/foro-penal-hay-362-presos-politicos-16-desapariciones-forzosas-y-99-detenidos-durante-la-cuarentena/>

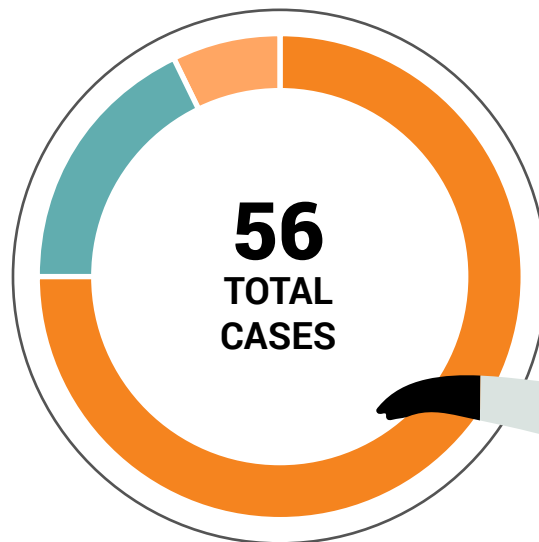
⁵ RUN RUN. Sin procedimientos ni pruebas siguen quebrando el entorno de Guaidó. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/403594/sin-procedimientos-ni-pruebas-siguen-quebrando-el-entorno-de-guaido/>

⁶ RUN RUN. Sindicato de la AN ratifica que Luis Parra despidió a 650 trabajadores. Available in: <https://runrun.es/noticias/403076/sindicato-de-la-an-ratifica-que-luis-parra-despidio-a-650-trabajadores/>

We demand respect in the exercise of civil and political rights as well as human rights of all Venezuelans, in a health crisis that requires the participation and consensus of democratic leaders and specialists.

SUMMARY

	CASES
● Attacks on homes "Furia Bolivariana"	42 75%
● Arbitrary arrests	10 18%
● Home search	4 7%
TOTAL CASES	56



VENEZUELA CENSORED DURING COVID-19

*Freedom of expression, in all its forms and manifestations, is a fundamental and inalienable right, inherent to all people. It is also an indispensable requirement for the very existence of a democratic society*⁷. Freedom of expression is a human right enshrined in Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights, and includes the freedom to seek, receive, and disseminate information by visual, written, or spoken means.

However, and despite what it has been mentioned, as of march 16th, 2020, the date on which the state of alarm was declared due to the spread of COVID-19, in Venezuela the application of the persecution and censorship. And with it, the violation of the human rights of Venezuelans, including communicators who have responsibly transmitted and disseminated necessary information in these times of emergency.

The transmission of information is threatened and restricted in Venezuela, as well as the citizen who disseminates it or who tries to have access to it. There are power failures, lack of internet access and media censorship which directly affect the right to be informed.

Thus, in times of global health emergencies, while a responsible state should advocate for pandemic control to save lives, the de facto regime continues to bet on systematic practices of persecution to exercise control and remain in power.

In this sense, in the exercise of their human, constitutional, civil and political rights, communicators, in their fundamental role in the context of the pandemic, have the right to see, document and demand optimal conditions to face the emergency. Health and life are fundamental rights, and as such they require priority, and this *“does not only depend on easy access to health care. It also depends on access to accurate information on the nature of the threats and the means to protect yourself, your family and your community,”*⁸so the role of journalism in this context is crucial to keep the population informed.

⁷ OEA. Antecedentes e Interpretación de la Declaración de Principios. Available in: <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/showarticle.asp?artID=132&IID=2>

⁸ OEA. COVID-19: Los gobiernos deben promover y proteger el acceso y la libre circulación de la información durante la pandemia - Expertos internacionales. Available in: <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/showarticle.asp?artID=1170&IID=2>

At least **26 arrests of social communicators** have been carried out in Venezuela since the declaration of national alert. The arrests took place arbitrarily and without a judicial order, violating not only the right to freedom of expression, but also the right of due process and access to justice. Among them we can mention: journalist **Darvinson Rojas**, who was detained for 12 days and the radio commentator at 1300 AM⁹, **Arnaldo Sumoza**, who was arrested while recording a protest for lack of water, and then released with precautionary measures.¹⁰ There have also been cases where they are detained for around an hour, interrogated and harassed, such as the case of the *Caraota Digital* reporter, **Rosalí Hernández**, the 2001 journalist, **Kerlin Mosquera**, the director of the newspaper *La Verdad de Vargas*, **Beatriz Rodríguez** and *Rumbera 94.7 FM* journalist **Alexander Zerlín**.

As part of the pattern of censorship and persecution of communicators, not only are there arbitrary arrests, but also **actions contrary to freedom of the press and information**. Examples of this are the blocking of digital media, the impediment of the movement of journalists, the confiscation of equipment and the deletion of the information contained therein. There have also been closings of radio stations and patterns of intimidation,

threats and harassment of journalists in general.

At least 9 cases were presented of deletion of material, it is important to note that these cases do not include those who, during arbitrary arrests, confiscated their equipment and erased the information they had obtained. Among them we can mention the case of the correspondent of *Factores de Poder*, **Sofía Torres**, who was forced to erase the information of the interviews that she carried out to people who bought medicines in Propatria, Caracas¹¹. A similar case was the one of **Francisco Figuera**, who was forced to erase the audio-visual material that he had on the situation of gasoline supply at the Guaparo service station, in Valencia, Carabobo state.¹²

Moreover, at least **6 journalists denounce the impediment of security agents to the free movement of people**, despite having the credential to carry out their work. We can mention, the case of the TVV, **Mariana de Barros**, who was prevented from moving to Caracas.¹³ The same case occurred when the GNB prevented the circulation of the transport that contained the printing impressions of **Diario 2001**.¹⁴

Likewise, censorship reaches an alarming level with the **blocking of digital media and the closure of radio**

■ ARBITRARY ARRESTS

- 1 Darvinson Rojas
- 2 Arnaldo Sumoza
- 3 Rosalí Hernández
- 4 Kerlin Mosquera
- 5 Beatriz Rodríguez
- 6 Alexander Zerlín
- 7 Eduardo Galindo
- 8 María Alejandra Meléndez
- 9 Rolando Rodríguez
- 10 Daniel Molina
- 11 Ariadna García
- 12 Tairy Gamboa
- 13 Jesús Castillo
- 14 Jesús Torres
- 15 Yarnaldo Tovar
- 16 Mayerlin Villanueva
- 17 Luis Cobaría
- 18 Elvis Rivas
- 19 Hidalgo Rincón
- 20 Ovidio Mora
- 21 Wilfredo Rodríguez
- 22 José Galindo
- 23 Carol Romero
- 24 Jorge Cortez
- 25 Segovia Bastidas
- 26 Carlos Padilla

■ ERASING OF MATERIAL

- 1 Luis Lopez
- 2 Milton Moreno
- 3 Alexander Viloria
- 4 Romina Uzcategui
- 5 Marcos Villegas
- 6 Katusca González
- 7 Sofía Torres
- 8 Francisco Figuera
- 9 Pedro García

■ IMPEDIMENT TO THE FREE MOVEMENT

- 1 Mariana De Barros.
- 2 José Meza
- 3 Diario 2001
- 4 Mónica Salazar
- 5 José Rengel
- 6 Eliana Palencia

⁹ INFOBAE. El régimen de Nicolás Maduro liberó al periodista Darvinson Rojas tras 12 días detenido. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/04/03/el-regimen-de-nicolas-maduro-libero-al-periodista-darvinson-rojas-tras-12-dias-detenido/>

¹⁰ EL NACIONAL. Dictan libertad con régimen de presentación a periodista Arnaldo Sumoza. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/dictan-libertad-con-regimen-de-presentacion-a-periodista-arnaldo-sumoza/>

¹¹ EFECTO COCUYO. obstaculizan labor de periodistas en Caracas durante primer día de cuarentena. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/obstaculizan-labor-de-periodistas-en-caracas-durante-primer-dia-de-cuarentena/>

¹² IPYS VENEZUELA. Available in: <https://twitter.com/ipysvenezuela/status/1250105209164087304>

¹³ IPYS VENEZUELA. Available in: <https://twitter.com/ipysvenezuela/status/1243197517027672064>

¹⁴ NOTICIERO DIGITAL. GNB impide circulación de transportes que llevaban versión impresa del diario 2001: CNP. Available in: <https://www.noticierodigital.com/2020/03/gnb-impide-circulacion-de-transportes-que-llevaban-version-impresa-del-diario-2001-cnp/>

stations, which we must warn is a systematic practice by the de facto government. In times of pandemic, when more information is needed, they continue to censor arbitrarily.

Thus, we count at least **13 cases of media blockages and closures**. Among them we can mention the case of **Directv**, which although its exit was not through a measure of the regime, the political conditions brought as a consequence the loss of one of the most important cable companies and with more users in Venezuela¹⁵. We can also mention the blocking of the website of the National Communication Center of the Presidency <https://presidenciave.com/>¹⁶, and the closure of stations such as **Radio Chévere 95.5 Fm**, **Oceánica 98.5 FM y Río 90.5 FM** in Tucupita, and the **Kariñosa 106.1 FM**, station, located in the state of Anzoátegui.¹⁷

On the other hand, the worsening of the humanitarian crisis, the scarcity and precarious functioning of public services, are part of the generalized censorship that is evident today in Venezuela. In this sense, it is estimated that 89.4% of the population has electrical service failures¹⁸, while the precarious

connectivity of the main internet company, Cantv, leaves 51% of the population with constant internet connection failures.¹⁹ These critical figures deeply limit both the work of communicators and access to information by the population. Thus, censorship in Venezuela is intensified in times of pandemic.

In this regard, we point out some cases, such as that of the **Prensa de Lara** which ceased to circulate since march 23rd due to lack of fuel to distribute the newspaper²⁰, and the university radio station **Luz Radio 102.9 FM**, which went off the air on march 18th due to lack of fuel for the operation of the power plant.²¹

Additionally, **social networks and media** controlled by the regime are being used to threaten and intimidate communicators. On april 1st, journalist **Charito Rojas** was mentioned in Diosdado Cabello's program "Con El Mazo Dando" and was subsequently threatened on her social networks by regime supporters²². The same case is that of journalist **Alberto Ravell**, who was threatened on april 3rd by the host of "Zurda Konducta", Pedro Cavajalino.²³

For their part, the oppressive

■ BLOCKADE AND CLOSURES

- 1 Coronavirusvenezuela.info
- 2 Presidenciave.com
- 3 Radio chévere 97.5 FM
- 4 Oceánica 98.5 FM
- 5 kariñosa 106.1 FM
- 6 Río 90.5 FM
- 7 Albertonews.com
- 8 Pvenezuela.com
- 9 Teleconsulta. presidenciave.org
- 10 Diarioultimahora
- 11 digital.com.ve
- 12 Directv
- 13 Ararauna.com.ve

■ COULD NOT CONTINUE TO OPERATE

- 1 Luz Radio 102.9
- 2 Diario la Calle
- 3 La prensa Lara
- 4 Periódico Monagas
- 5 Rumberísima 91.9 FM
- 6 Pentagrama 107.3 FM
- 7 ULA 107.7

¹⁵ BBC MUNDO. DirecTV en Venezuela: AT&T cierra sus operaciones en el país sudamericano por no poder hacer compatibles las sanciones de EE.UU. y las leyes locales. Available in: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52723896>

¹⁶ EFECTO COCUYO. Cantv bloquea web informativa sobre el COVID-19, denuncia Venezuela Sin Filtro. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/coronavirus/cantv-bloquea-web-informativa-sobre-el-covid-19-denuncia-venezuela-sin-filtro/>

¹⁷ DIARIO DE LARA LA PRENSA. Sacan del aire a cuatro emisoras. Available in: <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/15046/2020/04/sacan-del-aire-a-cuatro-emisoras>

¹⁸ VENEZUELA UNIDA. Encuesta sobre el impacto de Covid-19 en Venezuela, servicios se encuentran en situación de colapso. Available in: <https://venezuelaunida.com/encuesta-sobre-el-impacto-de-covid-19-en-venezuela-servicios-se-encuentran-en-situacion-de-colapso/>

¹⁹ OBSERVATORIO VENEZOLANO DE SERVICIOS PÚBLICOS. Available in: [OVSP: 51% de los ciudadanos reporta fallas del servicio de internet en el hogar todos los días](https://www.ovsp.org.ve/ovsp-51-de-los-ciudadanos-reporta-fallas-del-servicio-de-internet-en-el-hogar-todos-los-dias)

²⁰ ESPACIO PÚBLICO. La Prensa de Lara dejará de circular por falta de gasolina. Available in: <http://espaciopublico.org/la-prensa-de-lara-dejara-de-circular-por-falta-de-gasolina/>

²¹ RADIO FE Y ALEGRÍA. Denuncian que LUZ Radio queda fuera del aire por falta de combustible en Zulia. Available in: <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/denuncian-que-luz-radio-queda-fuera-del-aire-por-falta-de-combustible-en-zulia/>

²² NTN24. Charito Rojas: "Asfixia a libertad de expresión comenzó cuando Chávez asumió la presidencia". Available in: <https://www.ntn24.com/programas/la-tarde/quien-reciba-un-dolar-del-regimen-chavista-es-su-rehen-de-por-vida-schamis-123159>

²³ Carvajalino amenaza con destruir la casa de Alberto Ravell y las oficinas de La Patilla y el Chigüire Bipolar. Available in: <https://albertonews.com/nacionales/alerta-carvajalino-amenaza-con-destrozar-la-casa-de-alberto-ravell-y-las-oficinas-de-la-patilla-y-el-chiguire-bipolar/>

practices of the regime have even reached the point of **violation of property rights**. At least 4 cases have become public knowledge regarding raids on properties, the confiscation and affectation of the property of journalists and family members who are even in exile and therefore do not have a residence in these homes.

This is the case of the journalist **Carla Angola**. On March 31st, officials from the General Directorate of Military Counter-Intelligence (Dgcim) raided her parents' house in Caracas and damaged the residential complex.²⁴ The same happened to journalist **Sergio Novelli**, who denounced that on April 16th Dgcim officials raided his house in Caracas, even though he does not live there and has rented it.²⁵ In the case of **Darvinson Rojas** and **Eduardo Galindo**, in addition to having been detained, their homes were arbitrarily searched.

Finally, there have been multiple threats and harassment against communicators, with at least **17 cases**, including victims of the "*Furia Bolivariana*", such as **Eladio Muchacho Unda**²⁶ or **Alberto Rodríguez**.²⁷ There are also people threatened for recording the gasoline and public services crisis, for example

Adixson Hernández.²⁸ However, the attack does not stop at threats, stigmatization and harassment against journalists, including cases of violence such as that of **Danilo Sarmiento**, who was recording a protest against the water crisis and was attacked by security agents.²⁹

Arbitrary detentions, closure of media outlets, prohibition of arbitrary and illegal circulation, threats, intimidation, lack of optimal light and internet service conditions for obtaining and disseminating information, are part of the patterns of persecution that the regime has applied and that today keeps Venezuela censored by COVID-19.

THREATS BY THE MEDIA

- 1 Charito Rojas
- 2 Marianela Salazar
- 3 Sergio Novelli
- 4 Carla Angola
- 5 Ibeyise Pacheco
- 6 Leopoldo Castillo
- 7 Alberto Ravell
- 8 Nelson Bocaranda
- 9 La Patilla
- 10 El chigüire Bipolar

VIOLATION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS

- 1 Carla Angola
- 2 Servio Novelli
- 3 Darvinson Rojas
- 4 Eduardo Galindo

HARASSMENT AND THREATS

- 1 Gabriel Labrador
- 2 Melquiades Ávila
- 3 Gregoria Díaz
- 4 César Saveedra
- 5 La mañana digital
- 6 Eladio Muchacho Unda
- 7 Alberto Rodríguez
- 8 Luis Gonzales Pérez
- 9 Adam Contreras
- 10 Ana Rodríguez
- 11 Natalia Roca
- 12 Federico Black
- 13 Juan Goddeliett
- 14 Andrés Rodríguez
- 15 Adixson Hernandez
- 16 Danilo Sarmiento
- 17 Vladimir Villegas

²⁴ EL UNIVERSAL. Allanan residencia de Carla Angola ubicada en La Pastora. Available in: <https://www.eluniversal.com/politica/66199/allanan-residencia-de-carla-angola-ubicada-en-la-pastora>

²⁵ EL NACIONAL. Sergio Novelli denunció que la Dgcim allanó su casa en Venezuela. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/sergio-novelli-denuncio-que-la-dgcim-allano-su-casa/>

²⁶ RUNRUN.ES. "Furia Bolivariana" atenta contra vivienda de director de Diario de Los Andes. Available in: <https://runrun.es/noticias/402673/furia-bolivariana-atenta-contra-vivienda-de-director-de-diario-de-los-andes/>

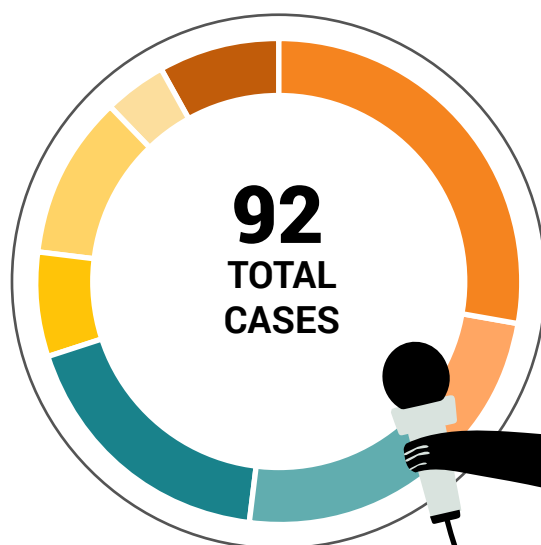
²⁷ ALBERTONEWS. SNTIP condena mensaje intimidatorio "Furia Bolivariana" en la residencia del periodista Alberto Ravell. Available in: <https://albertonews.com/nacionales/sntp-condena-mensaje-intimidatorio-furia-bolivariana-en-la-residencia-del-periodista-albertonews/>

²⁸ EL PITAZO. Guárico | Productores agropecuarios protestan para exigir combustible. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/los-llanos/guarico-productores-agrope-cuarios-protestan-para-exigir-combustible/>

²⁹ EL NACIONAL. Funcionarios de la GNB agredieron al periodista Danilo Sarmiento durante una protesta en Falcón. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/funcionarios-de-la-gnb-agredieron-al-periodista-danilo-sarmiento-durante-una-protesta-en-falcon/>

SUMMARY

	CASES
● Arbitrary detentions	26 28%
● Confiscation of material and / or breakage of ID	9 10%
● Media blockades and closures	13 14%
● Harassment and threats	17 18%
● Impediment of free movement	6 7%
● Threats by TV or social networks	10 11%
● Violation of property rights	4 4%
● Impossibility to continue operating	7 8%
TOTAL CASES	92





PERSECUTED FOR DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

The policy of systematic persecution by the de facto government, against human rights defenders, is contrary to the principles and international obligations of the State, and mainly violates the right to defend rights, as well as the right to assembly and association. In addition to all those that are violated in the context of the actions of the regime against those who, exercising fundamental tasks, make visible the multidimensional crisis that exists in Venezuela.

In this sense, **defending human rights is a right**, which translates into the right of every person, individually or collectively, to *“promote and strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”*.³⁰ This implies the right to be protected, to access and communicate with international bodies, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to protest, to develop and discuss new ideas on human rights, the right to access to remedies and the right of association and assembly.³¹

The latter, the **right to association and assembly**, is provided for, among some international instruments, in Article 16 of the American Convention on Human Rights, as well as in Article 22 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It translates into *“the right of every person to freely form or join an organization or group to act, express, promote, exercise, and defend in a collective manner ends of common interest, and the capacity to carry them out through the means and actions that its members consider appropriate”*.³²

In this regard, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, affirmed, in the context of the pandemic, the need for inclusive participation. In this regard, *“civil society should be seen as an essential partner of governments in responding to the current crisis, in terms of helping to frame inclusive policies, disseminate information,*

³⁰ ASAMBLEA GENERAL ONU. A/RES/53/144. Declaración sobre el derecho y el deber de los individuos, los grupos y las instituciones de promover y proteger los derechos humanos y las libertades fundamentales universalmente reconocidos. Available in: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration_sp.pdf

³¹ ONU. Relatora especial sobre la situación de los defensores de los derechos humanos. Available in: <https://acnudh.org/load/2019/07/020-Defender-los-Derechos-Humanos-es-un-Derecho.pdf>

³² CIVILIS. Libertad de asociación. Available in: <https://www.civilisac.org/nociones/libertad-de-asociacion-2>

build shared and cooperative approaches, and provide social support to vulnerable communities".³³

In the same context, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) considers that *"when attempts are made to silence and inhibit the work of human rights defenders, thousands of people are denied the opportunity to obtain justice for violations of their human rights"*.³⁴

In spite of the above, since 2002 the regime has violated the free exercise of the right to association, and in that sense from civil society [we have demanded the end of the systematic policy of criminalization of human rights defenders in Venezuela](#). However, at present, there have been more and more patterns linked to direct State intervention in the sphere of Venezuelan civil society. The de facto government has continuously threatened the autonomy, independence, and free exercise of association by individuals and organizations through controls and threats, at a time when their participation is essential to address the health emergency. They play a role of vigilance and protection in the face of the restrictions inherent to a state of alarm.

In this sense, the regime has opted for a **policy of repression and control** based on the need to protect the State from foreign interests

or those contrary to the general interest, thereby criminalizing the work of human rights defenders. In this regard, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders has expressed his concern about the widespread violations of human rights and the climate of fear in which defenders work. Their circumstances are increasingly difficult, since they are subjected to smear campaigns, threats, harassment, arbitrary detention and even torture, despite the fact that they are carrying out their legitimate work.³⁵

As an example of this, at least **17 human rights defenders have been victims of persecution** since the beginning of the pandemic.

We can mention cases in which the de facto government uses the media to threaten human rights defenders and discredit their work. In particular, through the program conducted by Diosdado Cabello, "Con El Mazo Dando", through which **Rocío San Miguel's** work was disqualified after she questioned the State's handing over of weapons to the militia. Likewise, is the case of **Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos (Provea)**, after denouncing the prioritization of power at the expense of the suffering of Venezuelans. It also threatened to evaluate the laws related to the financing of NGOs and

THREATS

- 1 ONG PROVEA
- 2 Rocío San Miguel
- 3 Amenazas de financiamiento a la S.C

³² CIVILIS. Libertad de asociación. Available in: <https://www.civilisac.org/nociones/libertad-de-asociacion-2>

³³ OFICINA DEL ALTO COMISIONADO DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS. Las respuestas de los Estados a la amenaza Covid 19 no deberían detener las libertades de reunión y asociación" - Experto de la ONU sobre los derechos a las libertades de reunión pacífica y de asociación, Sr. Clément Voule. Available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25788&LangID=E>

³⁴ COMISIONADO INTERAMERICA DE DERECHOS HUMANOS. Informe sobre la situación de las defensoras y defensores de los derechos humanos en las Américas. Available in: <https://www.cidh.oas.org/countryrep/Defensores/defensorescap1-4.htm>

³⁵ WORLD REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS. Available in: <https://www.protecting-defenders.org/sites/protecting-defenders.org/files/UNSR%20HRDs-%20World%20report%202018.pdf>

private individuals. He said *“we will apply the maximum sanctions possible to those who receive funding from the United States to conspire against the country”*³⁶. This threat was later ratified by the same media, when Diosdado Cabello, in program 294 of *“Con El Mazo Dando”*, stated: *“We will soon approve this law and these opposition NGOs will have to account for the resources they have received from abroad to finance conspiracies”*.³⁷

However, threats against civil society and human rights defenders do not stop at the television media and social networks. They are carried out in an excessive manner, through, for example, limitations on the exercise of the defense of rights, arbitrary arrests or the permissiveness of action by irregular groups that violate private property and threaten the work of human rights defenders.

Thus, we can see at least **5 defenders who have been victims of arbitrary arrests**, such as the coordinator of the Vinotinto Movement, **Henderson Maldonado** who was deprived of his liberty on march 30th and later released, for supporting a protest of kidney patients in Lara State.³⁸ Likewise, the director of the Centre for Action and Defence of Human Rights (Cadef), **Gabriel Aranguren**, who was detained for several hours on the april 23rd in Cojedes state, when he was managing the handing over of

mask covers by the organization he represents.³⁹

On the other hand, the attack on homes through the *“Furia Bolivariana”* plan threatened at least **3 human rights defenders** through graffiti on their residences by irregular groups.

The campaigns of discredit and stigmatization by the media, threats, harassment, and arbitrary arrests are part of a pattern of persecution against organizations and individuals committed to human rights. The government seeks to demobilize anyone who, even while performing fundamental work recognized in the international covenants and conventions signed by Venezuela, documents, denounces, and disseminates the critical situation, which in times of pandemic, is worsening.

In addition, we must bring up the way in which the exercise of the defense of human rights is limited. Organizations and human rights defenders do not have the necessary safeguards to carry out their work in defense of human rights and humanitarian assistance despite the complex humanitarian emergency that exists in Venezuela. Adding all this to the pandemic, leaves the population in alarming conditions of vulnerability.

■ ARBITRARY ARRESTS

- 1 Henderson Maldonado
- 2 Gabriel Aranguren
- 3 Iván Virgüez
- 4 Luis Serrano
- 5 Milagros Rodríguez

■ ATTACK ON HOMES

- 1 Javier Tarazona
- 2 Adriana Carillo
- 3 Ángel Patty

³⁶ CON EL MAZO DANDO. Programa 289, transmitido el 19.02.2020. Minuto 60. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi612o0_rF4

³⁷ <https://www.conelmazodando.com.ve/cabello-pronto-aprobaremos-una-ley-para-controlar-el-financiamiento-extranjero-a-ong>

³⁸ TAL CUAL. ONG Movimiento Vinotinto exige levantar medidas cautelares para Henderson Maldonado. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/movimiento-vinotinto-exige-libertad-plena-para-henderson-maldonado/>

³⁹ FRONT LINE DEFENDERS. Detención arbitraria del director ejecutivo de cadef. Available in: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/arbitrary-detention-executive-director-cadef>

We alert on the persecution of human rights defenders and the restrictions that arbitrarily limit the right of association and assembly, as well as the right to defend rights. We also demand the recognition of the defense of human rights as an essential task that must be guaranteed, particularly in this period of health emergency.

SUMMARY

	CASES
● Threats	3 30%
● Arbitrary detentions	5 40%
● Attack on homes	3 30%
TOTAL CASES	11



IV

THE THREATENED HEALTH GUILD

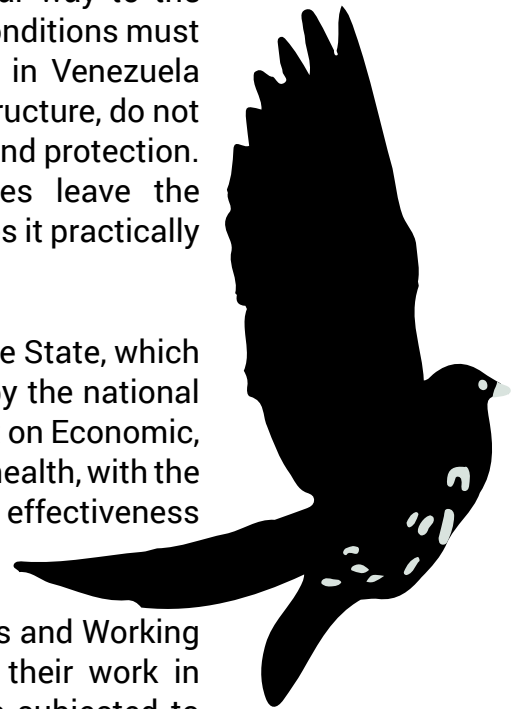
The complex humanitarian crisis that exists in Venezuela is exacerbated in times of pandemic, however, we must refer in a particular way to the health system that was already collapsed, and that in these conditions must face a global health emergency. Thus, health professionals in Venezuela must work in alarming conditions, hospitals lack basic infrastructure, do not have the equipment and instruments for prevention, hygiene and protection. Furthermore, the precarious electricity and water services leave the Venezuelan health system at a level of deterioration that makes it practically inoperative.

Health is a fundamental social right, it is an obligation of the State, which must guarantee it as part of the right to life, as established by the national Constitution. Similarly, Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes the right of everyone to health, with the State having to take the necessary measures to ensure the full effectiveness of the right.

The Article 53 of the Organic Law on Prevention, Conditions and Working Environment establishes the right of workers to carry out their work in an adequate and conducive environment, so they cannot be subjected to dangerous or unhealthy working conditions.

The State must guarantee access to health services, especially in the event of a health emergency such as that caused by the spread of COVID-19. To this end, it must provide facilities, specialized personnel and medical equipment, including the instruments needed to diagnose the virus and provide timely treatment to all those affected.

However, despite the State's international obligations in this area, the de facto regime has led the health system into serious conditions of precariousness. Thus, serious gaps remain in the supplies needed to combat the pandemic. There is a 78 per cent shortage or failure in the supply of soap and disinfectant gel, 61 per cent in mask, 48 per cent in gloves⁴⁰. This leaves Venezuelans in a different state of vulnerability from the rest of the world.



⁴⁰ CENTRO DE COMUNICACIÓN NACIONAL. Available in: https://twitter.com/Presidencia_VE/status/1257640644941668352/photo/1

In this context, health workers, key workers in the fight against COVID 19, have denounced the deficient Venezuelan health system to face the health emergency, have demanded the regime to guarantee the appropriate conditions for the care of the personnel and the sick, have worked in favor of the right to health of all Venezuelans, and have been in many cases a source of information before the censorship imposed by the regime. However, the state of alarm continues to be used to attack health personnel and also to disregard the State's obligations, with health being the human right that requires exceptional primary care in the face of the threat of COVID-19.

In this sense, the regime of Nicolás Maduro, again bets on the systematic practices of persecution to exercise control and stay in power, despite the fact that the health union has the right to make visible, document and demand optimal conditions to face the emergency, as well as the right to exercise their profession freely, with the facilities, resources and instruments to ensure their professional practice.

Among the patterns of persecution at least **13 health professionals were arbitrarily detained**, such as the case of nurse **Rubén Duarte**, who was arbitrarily detained and later released, for reporting not having the

security team to attend to patients who might have coronavirus in the Central Hospital of San Cristóbal.⁴¹

The same happened to union leader **Julio Molino**, who was accused of incitement to panic and hatred for denouncing the conditions at the Dr. Manuel Núñez Tovar University Hospital in Monagas state, and is still under house arrest.⁴² Also, members of the GNB arrested two residents of the Dr. Calles Sierra Hospital, obstetrics resident **María Lugo** and the anesthesiology resident, **Adriana Vargas**, for possessing materials to solve emergencies of their shift.⁴³

On the other hand, censored communication in Venezuela becomes a systematic pattern of persecution that also affects doctors, who, when they warn of particular situations in the context of the pandemic, become victims of the regime. This is the case of bioanalyst **Andrea Sayago**, who was arrested and later released in Trujillo, for informing some colleagues via WhatsApp about the detection of positive cases of COVID-19 in Trujillo.⁴⁴ The same happened to doctor **Freddy Pachano**, who reported a suspected case of coronavirus at the University Hospital of Maracaibo, and then the governor of Zulia state ordered the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (Dgcim) to pursue the doctor.⁴⁵

■ ARBITRARY DETENTIONS

- 1 Rubén Duarte
- 2 Andreína Urdaneta
- 3 Carmen Hernández
- 4 Luis Araya
- 5 Andrea Sayago
- 6 Jorge Yespica
- 7 Julio Molinos
- 8 Carlos Carmona
- 9 María Lugo
- 10 Adriana Vargas
- 11 Ángel Silva
- 12 Jesús Rodríguez
- 13 Luis González
- 14 Edgar Castillo

⁴¹ NOTICIERO DIGITAL. Liberaron al enfermero Rubén Duarte. Available in: <https://www.noticierodigital.com/2020/03/liberaron-al-enfermero-ruben-duarte/>

⁴² CRÓNICA UNO. Detienen a dirigente de Voluntad Popular en Monagas por denunciar las malas condiciones del hospital Núñez Tovar. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/detienen-a-dirigente-de-voluntad-popular-en-monagas-por-denunciar-las-malas-condiciones-del-hospital-nunez-tovar/>

⁴³ MÉDICOS UNIDOS. Available in: <https://twitter.com/MedicosUnidosVe/status/1253469145775079425>

⁴⁴ EL PITAZO. En arresto domiciliario quedó la bioanalista detenida en Trujillo. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/los-andes/en-arresto-domiciliario-queda-la-bioanalista-detenida-en-trujillo/>

⁴⁵ LA NACIÓN. Médicos bajo fuego en Venezuela por alertar sobre casos sospechosos del virus. Available in: <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/el-mundo/medicos-bajo-fuego-en-venezuela-por-alertar-sobre-casos-sospechosos-del-virus-nid2341942>

In this respect, censorship is also evident in the blocking of the health guild's web portals. Thus, at least **five websites are blocked** by the regime.

In addition, intimidation and threats to the health sector also stood out during the pandemic. In this regard, at least **six cases** can be highlighted, including that of the **Academia de Ciencias Físicas, Matemáticas y Naturales**, which after publishing an article on Venezuela's inability to deal with COVID-19 and the possible disagreement between official infection figures and reality, were threatened by Diosdado Cabello. He even claimed that this could lead to a visit by security agencies for generating a false alarm⁴⁶.

On the other hand, we can mention threats in which the relatives are involved, as it is the case of the health worker **Maglys Mendoza**. She denounced the conditions of the Hospital Manuel Nuñez Tovar of Maturín. Because of this, the National Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Command (Conas) detained Mendoza's granddaughter as a form of threat, and she was later released.⁴⁷

Moreover, we must also highlight how the lack of fuel directly affects the work of health personnel, who have denounced the fact that the military and law enforcement agencies do not give priority to refueling their vehicles to transport them to hospitals. This

same situation affects ambulances, which are a vital tool in the fight against the pandemic. Thus, 84% of doctors in Venezuela have not been able to refuel their vehicles and those who do have spent between 8 and 20 hours in line.⁴⁸

In short, Venezuela's health system has critical characteristics, since the State has omitted its international obligations to guarantee the right to health and maximize the available resources, use them effectively, and even rely on the assistance of international cooperation. But as it has been shown, the problem in Venezuela is not only one of a complex humanitarian crisis resulting from the degradation of the health system, among other causes. There is also a permanent aggression against health professionals who demand dignified conditions that the State must provide as part of its obligations. However, the regime, far from addressing the health crisis affecting Venezuelans in a differentiated manner, continues to insist on persecution as a mechanism for control and perpetuation in power.

WEBSITE BLOCKING

- 1 APOYOSALUDVE.COM
- 2 HEROESDESALUDVE.INFO
- 3 PORLASALUDVE.COM
- 4 SALUDVZLA.COM
- 5 APOYOHEROESSALUDVE.COM

THREATEN

- 1 Academia de Ciencias Físicas, matemáticas y Naturales
- 2 Carlos Carmona
- 3 Maglys Mendoza
- 4 Hannia Salazar
- 5 Personal del Hospital Universitario Dr. Razzetti de Barcelona.
- 6 Freddy Pachano

⁴⁶ CNN. Diosdado Cabello lanza advertencia contra academia que publicó proyecciones del coronavirus. Available in: <https://cnnspanol.cnn.com/2020/05/14/alerta-venezuela-cabello-lanza-advertencia-contra-academia-que-publico-proyecciones-del-coronavirus/>

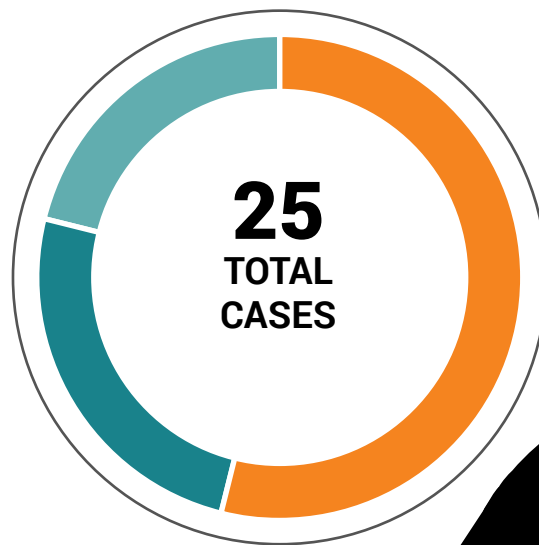
⁴⁷ EFECTO COCUYO. Detienen a dirigente de salud y persiguen a otros dos en Monagas, denuncia VP. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/detienen-a-dirigente-de-salud-y-persiguen-a-otros-dos-en-monagas-denuncia-vp/>

⁴⁸ LA PRENSA. Médicos continúan sin poder surtir combustible. Available in: <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/14898/2020/04/medicos-continuan-sin-poder-surtir-combustible>

We warn of the serious health crisis that exists in Venezuela, and the systematic violation of the human rights of health professionals. Those who, being fundamental workers in the fight against the pandemic, have been persecuted and forced to work in unacceptable conditions.

SUMMARY

	CASES
● Arbitrary detentions	14 54%
● Threats	6 25%
● Web page blocking	5 21%
TOTAL CASES	25



V

PERSECUTION IN ANOTHER SOCIETY

VENEZUELAN RETURNEES ARE PERSECUTED AND STIGMATIZED

Venezuela has been in a multidimensional crisis and a complex humanitarian crisis for several years, which has left the lives, security and freedom of Venezuelans under threat. As a result, at least 5 million people have been forced to move to other countries to meet their most basic needs, making it the largest exodus from the region in contemporary history.

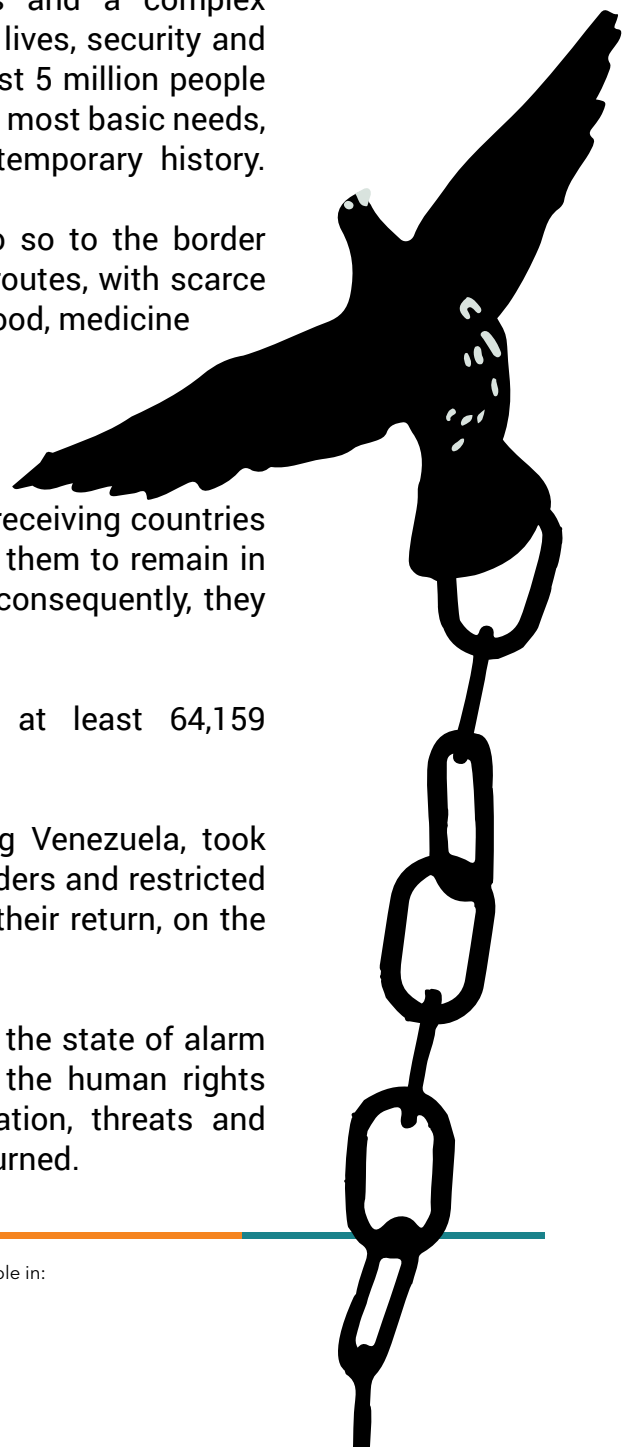
Many of the Venezuelans who leave the country do so to the border countries, in inhumane conditions, even using irregular routes, with scarce resources and with the immediate need to obtain work, food, medicine and lodging.

This group of migrants and refugees is particularly vulnerable, and has been affected differently by the COVID-19. The social isolation measures of each of the receiving countries have left them in conditions that make it impossible for them to remain in that country. They have lost their means of living, and consequently, they have had to return to Venezuela.

According to Colombian immigration authorities, at least 64,159 Venezuelans had returned to the country by mid-May.⁴⁹

On the other hand, many of the countries, including Venezuela, took extreme measures to prevent COVID-19, closed their borders and restricted air operations, so that Venezuelans abroad depend, for their return, on the repatriation flights offered by the de facto regime.

Despite this situation, the regime again makes use of the state of alarm and exception resulting from the pandemic to violate the human rights of returnees, in this particular case, under stigmatization, threats and systematic violations of the human rights of persons returned.



⁴⁹ VOA NOTICIAS. Más de 60 mil venezolanos han regresado a su país desde Colombia. Available in: <https://www.voanoticias.com/venezuela/colombia-venezolanos-retorno-pandemia>

In this regard, we must refer to the human right to movement and residence, established in Article 22.5 of the [American Convention](#), which implies that *no one may be expelled from the territory of the State of which he/she is a national, nor be deprived of the right to enter it.*

Similarly, the Inter-American Principles on the human rights of all migrants, refugees, stateless persons, and victims of trafficking of people refer to the right to leave a country freely, the right to remain in one's country of origin or residence, and guarantees for a safe return.

The above implies that, although the right to free movement may be restricted in order to protect public health, in the process of return to the country of origin, the State has the obligation to offer all the facilities so that this occurs in conditions of security and dignity, without any discrimination, guaranteeing life, freedom and integrity during the whole process of return and after it.

However, despite the rights of all Venezuelans to a safe return, the de facto regime has opted for widespread violence and persecution against Venezuelan returnees.

This is the case of the isolation measures that the regime imposed on Venezuelan refugees, who upon their return to the country are held in inhumane conditions. They sleep on

the pavement without mattresses, have little access to services such as water and food, and are beaten and humiliated if they complain⁵⁰.

In this sense, the measures taken by the de facto government far from attending to the needs of the population and preventing the spread of the virus, end up being ineffective for the protection of both the returnees and the population. The isolation in overcrowded conditions and the need of the returnees to leave to satisfy their basic needs, ends up being counterproductive.

Moreover, despite the need to take strong measures to safeguard public health, this cannot in any way be used to intensify the persecution against Venezuelans. On the contrary, it must ensure that the isolation of returnees is carried out in refuge centres prepared for that purpose, in humane and non-discriminatory conditions.

Additionally, they stigmatize and discriminate against the returned migrant population, taking advantage of the extreme vulnerability in which, they find themselves, to make political propaganda⁵¹. The de facto regime has at times used language that is inclusive, protective of the State and of economic and social possibilities for Venezuelan returnees. However, this discourse does not coincide with subsequent speeches and with the real conditions denounced by the

⁵⁰ INFOBAE. Reclusión sin comida, sin colchones y con golpes al que critica: así trata el régimen de Nicolás Maduro a los venezolanos que regresan. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/04/09/reclusion-sin-comida-sin-colchones-y-con-golpes-al-que-critica-asi-trata-el-regimen-de-nicolas-ma-duro-a-los-venezolanos-que-regresan/>

⁵¹ YOUTUBE. Desde el puente Simón Bolívar: El protocolo que aplican a venezolanos al ingresar por Táchira. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsMuMz_Y4Z0&feature=youtu.be

people who return to the country.

Likewise, the figures of infections that the de facto government issues, have been increased under the justification of the increase of Venezuelan returnees who import the virus.

However, there is evidence of inconsistencies in the management of information on daily infected since the beginning of the pandemic, which allows us to highlight, first, the inefficient way in which the returned population has been protected, since the conditions in which they are located do not meet the necessary health obligations to prevent the virus. Secondly, the discriminatory use of infected figures to stigmatize Venezuelan returnees and to use them to continue strengthening the pattern of control based on rights violations.

In this regard, we can mention the statement made by Lisandro Cabello, Secretary of Government of the State of Zulia, to the Venezuelans returning to the country, which he called “*biological weapons*”, alluding to a strategy of the Colombian government to infect Venezuela.⁵²

This shows how the thesis of the internal enemy continues to be implemented in order to commit systematic human rights violations against any person considered

a potential enemy. This includes Venezuelan returnees who, being mostly displaced by the multidimensional crisis and the complex humanitarian crisis, are considered dissidents and therefore also enemies.

Furthermore, we can mention, for example, the way in which Tarek William Saab, the regime’s attorney general, attributed as “*karma*” the return of Venezuelan refugees, claiming that they had reneged on their country, were outraged abroad and are now returning through *the return to the homeland plan*.⁵³ It is important to note that the stigmatization of Venezuelan refugees is a systematic pattern by the regime, which for years has labeled them, among others, as *slaves and beggars or fascists and coup leaders in disguise*. Now, this pattern is intensifying in times of pandemic.

In this regard, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has categorically rejected the stigmatizing and discriminatory statements made by high-ranking officials of the regime. They have accused the returnees of being “*opportunists*”, “*stateless*”, “*traitors*”, among others.⁵⁴ He also emphasized that this type of speeches aggravates the situation of the returnees, which in itself is delicate, and create an adverse climate for the observance of human rights in Venezuela.⁵⁵

⁵² RCN Radio. Venezolanos que cruzan por trochas son potenciales armas biológicas: Gobierno de Zulia. Available in: <https://www.rcnradio.com/internacional/venezolanos-que-cruzan-por-trochas-son-potenciales-armas-biologicas-gobierno-de-zulia>

⁵³ TWITTER. Tarek William Saab. 13 de abril de 2020. Available in: https://twitter.com/TarekWilliamSaab/status/1249824326838255619?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1249824326838255619&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.diariolasamericas.com%2Famerica-latina%2Ffiscal-maduro-achaca-al-karma-el-retorno-venezolanos-n4197102

⁵⁴ TWITTER. CIDH 17 de abril de 2020. Available in: https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1251157470044512259?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1251157470044512259&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Ffectococuyo.com%2Fcocuyo-chequea%2Ftrato-retornados-alojamientos-temporales%2F

⁵⁵ OEA. CIDH llama a los Estados a garantizar derechos de personas venezolanas que retornan a Venezuela ante la pandemia del COVID-19. Available in: <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2020/112.asp>

We must start from dignity as a fundamental principle of human rights, which implies that every person, just because he or she is a person, must be valued and respected. This is expressed in Article 1 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#): *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and, endowed with reason and conscience, they should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

Inhumane, humiliating and discriminatory treatment is completely contrary to this fundamental pillar.

The de facto regime, again using persecution as a means to perpetuate itself in power and exercise total control, systematically violates the human rights of Venezuelans and infringes upon their dignity and freedom.

SOCIAL CONTROL AS A MECHANISM OF PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION

The de facto government has demonstrated an evolving state policy based on the application of control mechanisms with the ultimate aim of perpetuating itself in power. The consolidation of the military forces, militias and armed civilian population groups, demonstrate the creation of capacities, of State security agents and irregular groups, to exercise functions of persecution and social control.

On the other hand, the declaration of the state of alarm has been used as an excuse to execute arbitrary actions that allow the exercise of control. This can be evidenced through two mechanisms:

Firstly, through persecution, stigmatization and threats. Thus, particular emphasis has been placed on political persecution and censorship, the stigmatization and persecution of human rights defenders, the health profession, Venezuelan returnees, and the population in general. They are all victimized by the application of exemplary punishments that attempt against human dignity.

Secondly, as a control mechanism, the state has made the population dependant. Over the course of the pandemic, problems such as shortages of food and medicine, poor supply of basic services and poverty rates have been exacerbated. The state of vulnerability in which the



Venezuelan population finds itself makes it dependent on the regime's social plans, which are also applied in a discriminatory manner. For its part, protest, as a social manifestation of demand for rights, has been repressed through disproportionate mechanisms.

In conclusion, both mechanisms are part of the patterns of persecution and constitute systematic and continuous violations of the human rights of Venezuelans. The constant persecution against the population, together with the consolidation of the executing forces, accounts for the planned and deliberate control mechanism as an instrument for perpetuating power.

Repression is not protection, it is social control

During the pandemic, the population's demand for the restitution of basic services and the guarantee of their rights has not ceased. In March, at least 580 protests⁵⁶ were registered and in April 716⁵⁷, protests were registered. All of them related to demands for the restitution of basic services such as electricity, water, gas and light, and the rights to food, health and political participation.

The recurrent protest, by Venezuelans in the midst of the health crisis, show the double crisis that

exists in the country. The pandemic does not prevail over the urgency of Venezuelans to cover their most basic needs. This is also evident in the impossibility of complying with the quarantine, since the Venezuelans are forced to go out in search of food, source of income, among others, as a means of survival.

However, there have been social protests in the streets and multiple lootings of several shops and supermarkets in different cities of the country⁵⁸. Moreover, a protest in a prison in the state of Portuguesa showed the lack of medicine and food inside the prison⁵⁹, as well as the overcrowded conditions that leave the prisoners at risk from COVID-19.

In this regard, in the light of the various manifestations of grievances and demands, the regime uses the state of alarm to resort to and justify repressive measures with the excessive and unnecessary use of force to dissolve them, even using the irregular armed groups for this purpose.

Proof of this is that at least two people lost their lives during the protests because of the regime's repression. One in a food protest in the state of Bolivar, and another in a protest demanding electricity in Merida⁶⁰. In addition, the regime ended the protest at the Portuguesa state prison with a massacre, where

⁵⁶ Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social OVCS. Marzo 2020. Available in: <http://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/oc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/INFORMEOVCS-MAR2020-1.pdf>

⁵⁷ Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social OVCS. Abril 2020. Available in: <http://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/oc/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/INFORMEOVCS-ABR2020.pdf>

⁵⁸ EL MUNDO. Primer muerto en Venezuela durante los saqueos y protestas por el hambre. Available in: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2020/04/24/5e-a212ccfdfff4888b45b0.html>

⁵⁹ FRANCE 24. Venezuela: un enfrentamiento dentro de una cárcel deja más de 40 muertos. Available in: <https://www.france24.com/es/20200502-venezuela-enfrentamiento-carcel-guanare-muertos>

⁶⁰ EL IMPULSO. OVCS: La represión es la única respuesta de Maduro a las protestas #26May. Available in: <https://www.elimpulso.com/2020/05/26/ovcs-la-represion-es-la-unica-respuesta-de-maduro-a-las-protestas-26may/>

more than 40 inmates were killed and many others were injured.⁶¹ In this regard, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, expressed his disagreement with the events and pointed out that this is one of the regime's forms of torture.⁶²⁽⁷⁾

The mechanisms of arbitrary repression, far from protecting the population, undermine their rights and are an instrument of intimidation to control the population.

Poverty creates dependency and social control

The de facto government has used poverty and the need of the Venezuelan people as a mechanism to control the population and perpetuate itself in power.

According to the United Nations, one out of every three people in Venezuela has difficulty putting food on the table and consuming the minimum nutritional requirements. In addition, **9.3 million people**, approximately one third of the population, suffer from what is technically called moderate or severe "food insecurity".⁶³

However, food shortages are not the only problem of Venezuelans; interruptions in basic services worsen their quality of life.

In Venezuela, 86% of the population has no gasoline supply and 13% reports supply failures, 52% of the population has no gas supply, 26% has supply failures, 91% of the population has constant interruptions in electricity service, 71% of the population reports water supply failures, and at least 23% reports no supply for more than 7 days.⁶⁴

The alarming figures of shortages, poverty and cutbacks in services are evidence of the complex humanitarian crisis that exists in Venezuela. This crisis is used by the regime as a mechanism to make the population dependent on the plans to have access to food, money, goods and services. All of them directly linked to the support of the official political party, and are therefore discriminatory.

Poverty, gasoline shortages and cuts in public services leave a population vulnerable and dependent. A perfect context for exercising control.

Social programs do not seek social welfare

Social programs have been used in Venezuela as a mechanism of social control. The creation of the Sistema Patria, the Comité de Abastecimiento Producción (CLAP) and the Redes de Articulación y Acción Sociopolítica (RAAS), show clear discrimination of a political nature.

⁶¹ ABC INTERNACIONAL. Al menos 46 muertos durante un motín en una cárcel de Venezuela. Available in: https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-menos-46-muertos-durante-motin-carcel-venezuela-202005020700_noticia.html

⁶² TWITTER. Luis Almagro. Available in: https://twitter.com/Almagro_OEA2015/status/1256619998111567872

⁶³ NOTICIAS ONU. Una de cada tres personas en Venezuela no tiene suficiente comida. Available in: <https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/02/1470101>

⁶⁴ TWITTER. Centro de comunicación social. Available in: https://twitter.com/Presidencia_VE/media

The social programs called “homeland bonds”, condition the most vulnerable groups to the state dependence, and subordinates them to obtain economic benefits, food and health. They must support the official political party, not only in the registration of the homeland system, but even in the electoral space and political events. The people who receive these benefits are subject to constant surveillance by the members of the Local Supply Committees (CLAP) and the Socio-Political Articulation and Action Network (RAAS).

An example of this is that regardless of the support that the regime has today, between 72% and 74% of the population has the “carnet a la patria⁶⁵”. This means that the population, without showing any intention of supporting the regime, is obliged to be part of this discriminatory policy in order to be included in the benefits.

Now, in the context of the pandemic, the regime has granted social benefits only to those who are registered in the Patria System, excluding the population that today is not part of that registry and has been affected by the pandemic. Among the social benefits granted in this context, we can point out: the special “stay at home” bonus, 100% “amor mayor”, “mother’s day bonus”, “worker’s day bonus”, “health and life bonus”, “holy week bonus⁶⁶”. None of these benefits are worth four dollars,

and therefore they are not enough to satisfy the basic needs.

Therefore, these measures do not improve the quality of life of the population and are not aimed at social welfare but at social control. Despite the fact that these economic bonds are insufficient and food does not provide the necessary nutrients, people continue to bet on being part of these benefits as the only way to cover a minimum percentage of their basic needs.

The de facto government destroys the Venezuelan people’s capacity for self-determination, and creates social programs as a control mechanism.

⁶⁵ TAL CUAL DIGITAL. Gobierno apela al Sistema Patria para frenar el covid-19 y arreciar control social. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/gobierno-apela-al-sistema-patria-para-frenar-el-covid-19-y-arreciar-control-social/>

⁶⁶ PATRIA BLOG. Artículos de protección social. Available in: <https://blog.patria.org.ve/categoria/proteccion-social/>

VI

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE REPORT

MOST AFFECTED SECTOR	CASES
● Journalists and communicator	92
● Human Rights Defenders	11
● Healthcare Professionals	25
● Political figures	56

PATTERNS OF PERSECUTION MOST USED BY THE REGIME	CASES
● Attack on homes “Furia Bolivariana”	45
● Arbitrary detentions	55
● Home search	8
● Communication censorship *media closures, blocking of pages, impossibility to continue operating and impediment to the movement of journalists	40
● Harassment and threats	36



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- 1 The multidimensional crisis and complex humanitarian crisis that exists in Venezuela becomes more acute in times of pandemic, so its effects have a differentiated impact on the Venezuelan population. The country is fighting the pandemic in the midst of a shortage of medical equipment, medicines, and a deficient system of public services.
 - 2 The state of alarm has been used by the regime as an excuse for the systematic violation of the human rights of Venezuelans.
 - 3 The investigations show the existence of a regime of political repression in the ascendancy. In times of pandemics, the patterns of persecution by the regime and the criminalization become more acute. The regime criminalises those key workers who fight against the health emergency and subject them to continuous and systematic violation of their human rights.
 - 4 The patterns of persecution systematically applied by the regime are not new, and constitute a state policy to exercise total control and perpetuate itself in power. Among many we can mention: censorship, criminalization, harassment, threats, house raids and arbitrary arrests.
 - 5 We insist on the need for international organisations to ascertain the violations of the human rights of Venezuelans. And that denunciations, follow-up and adequate accompaniment to be carried out in order to guarantee the protection of the rights of the population and the restitution of democracy.

