



**CENTRO PARA  
LOS DEFENSORES  
Y LA JUSTICIA**



---

**SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA**

OCTOBER 2020

## CONTENT

# 01

### DEFENDING AND DEMANDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA A HIGH-RISK WORK

PAG. 3

# 02

### CRIMINALIZATION OF COOPERATION

PAG. 8

# 03

### INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS CRIMINALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA

PAG. 10

# 04

### CONCLUSIONS Y RECOMMENDATIONS

PAG. 14

The Center for Human Rights Defenders and Justice (CDJ for its acronym in Spanish) registered 46 new attacks and security incidents during the month of October 2020 in Venezuela. The systematic policy of criminalization of defense and demand for human rights, which aims to qualify defenders as internal enemies of the State that must be neutralized continues to aggravate.

We highlight the continuity of the attacks, especially the stigmatization associated with the criminalization of cooperation with international mechanisms for the protection of human rights and the attempts to delegitimize the work of documentation and reporting carried out by the organizations. Demonstrating a clear breach by the State of its obligations to respect, protect, and guarantee the right to defend rights.

In light of this situation, we highlight the restrictions and continuity of obstacles for organizations, within the framework of the state of alarm, in force since March 13, 2020, highlighting that instead of generating measures to guarantee the effective protection of the population, it has accentuated authoritarianism and measures of social control.

**ATTACKS  
OCTOBER  
2020**



**46 ATTACKS**

## **01 DEFENDING AND DEMANDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA A HIGH-RISK WORK**

As has been denounced previously, to defend and demand human rights in Venezuela has been constituted as risky work. The existence of restrictive laws and the application of factual measures facilitate criminalization based on the logic of the internal

**PAG**

**3**

#HABLEMOSDDHH

<sup>1</sup>Gaceta Oficial n.º 6.519 extraordinario del 13 de marzo de 2020.

Within this framework, measures that restrict, hinder, and affect the development of the activities of those who defend human rights continue to be imposed.

The reduction of the civic and democratic space, added to the social control measures and the deepening of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency, aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, generate an adverse and hostile environment in which those who defend human rights must carry out their activities exposed to serious risks that can compromise the operation of organizations, as well as their lives and integrity.

Additionally, the lack of a public policy and mechanisms that promote the defense of human rights as a right recognized by international law, contributes to the absence of conditions to defend rights in the country without fear of reprisals and is conducive and safe environments. It also contributes to impunity in the face of abuses committed against defenders and shows the lack of conditions to carry out legitimate work.

Despite adversities and risks, individuals and organizations continue to file complaints and make demands for the implementation of corrections and measures that guarantee the right of Venezuelans to live with dignity and that contribute to the realization of the rights to the truth, justice, and reparation.

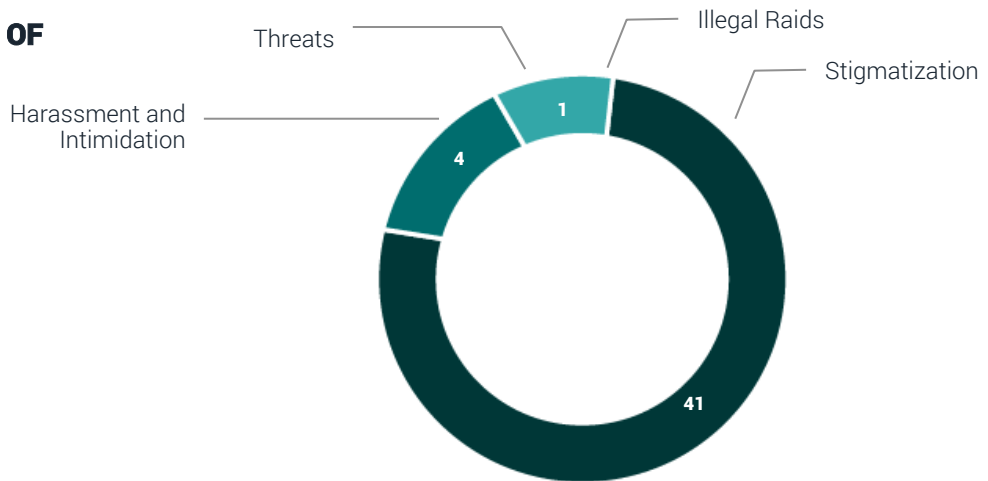
The State's response continues to be the criminalization of the defense of human rights, arbitrarily restricting and obstructing the actions are undertaken to ensure respect for human rights in the country. There has been an attempt to intimidate and silence the human rights movement through legal mechanisms and acts of violence, highlighting among the main forms of attack, stigmatization acts, intimidation and harassment, digital attacks, illegal raids, threats, ill-treatment, and torture, arbitrary detentions, and opening of judicial processes.



**46 new attacks and security incidents** documented in October show the consolidation of the policy of criminalization and harassment against those who demand and defend rights.

The 46 events recorded in the period under study were characterized by:

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ATTACKS

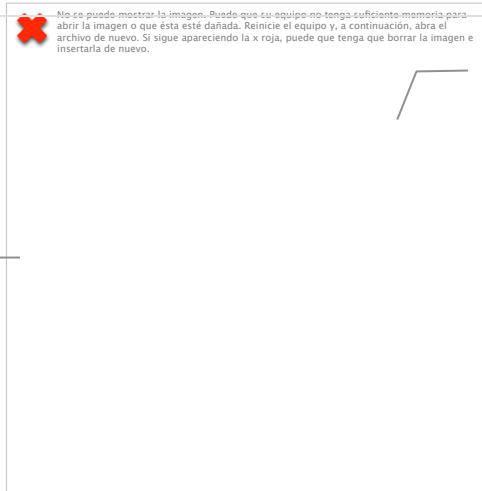


Of the total number of attacks documented in October, 31 were directed at human rights organizations. Highlighting organizations such as the Venezuelan Program of Education for Action on Human Rights (Provea for its Spanish acronym), Transparency Venezuela, Penal Forum and in general the organizations that have cooperated with international mechanisms such as the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission about Venezuela in the preparation of a report on serious violations of human rights and crimes against humanity committed in the country.

While 15 of the events were individualized against human rights defenders. Of the total documented in this period, we highlight that 9 of the events were directed against women human rights defenders.

**VICTIMS**

Defenders

Human Rights  
Organizations

The main mechanism used by the State to criminalize and intimidate those who defend and demand human rights continues to be the State Policy of stigmatization.

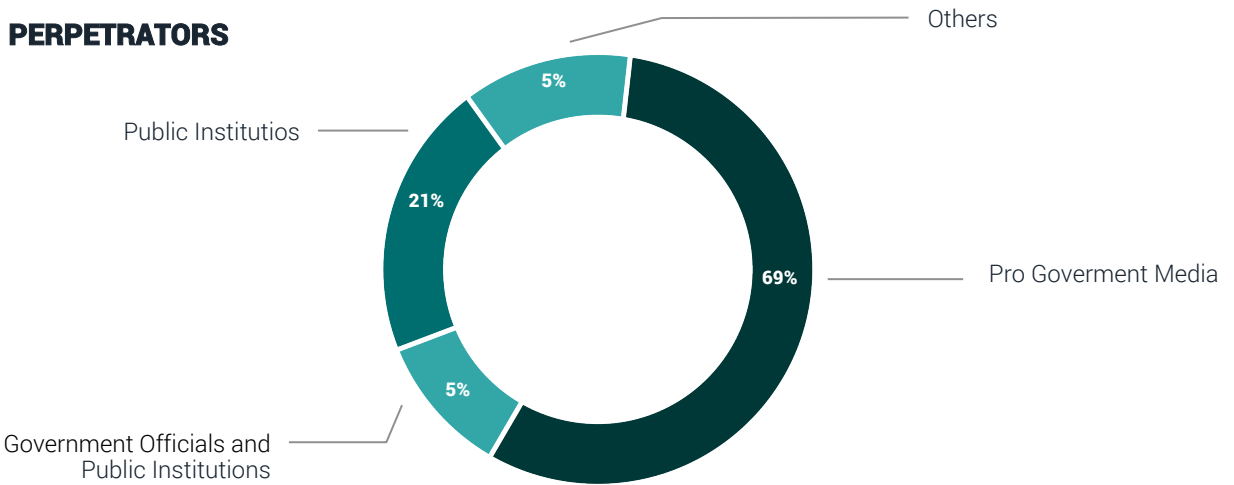
The objective of these actions is to discredit the work of documentation and reporting, based on hate speech, protected by the National Security Doctrine, with the intention of undermining the work of documentation and reporting, trying to reduce the impact of these before the international community. High officials of the State make use of offensive speeches, make insults and unfounded accusations that discriminate and position defenders as enemies of the State that must be neutralized, as part of the Criminalization Policy.

During the documented period, the disqualification of the organizations or their representatives and the accusations of promoting interventionism or the destabilization of the country, of being associated with the political opposition, among others, remained. We reiterate that this type of stigmatizing practices encourage the materialization of aggressions and specific risks that can seriously compromise the life, integrity, and personal freedom of those who defend human rights, both due to the direct responsibility of state officials or related third parties who see violence as the best option to silence those who consider adversaries, especially after the calls of the authorities to protect the nation under the protection of the *Furia Bolivariana*.

In this scenario, we reiterate the concern expressed by the CDJ about the improvement of the measures and plans established to be executed within the framework of the Protection System for Peace (SP3 for its acronym in Spanish) and the performance of the structures that compose it in accordance with the call to act accordingly. the Bolivarian Fury, the application of "social intelligence" and the protection of the nation from the "enemies of the Nation".

### Perpetrators

Those most responsible for the attacks and incidents documented in October were:



# 02 CRIMINALIZATION AND COOPERATION

During the month of October, the attacks continued as part of the presentation of the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela and the pronouncements of the international community regarding the violation of human rights in the country.

Not only was it documented the way in which organizations and individuals are subjected to intimidation, retaliation, or stigmatization when accused of “presenting false information”, of being “politicized”, of being “operators or arms of US foreign policy”, “Opportunists”, to promote destabilizing actions, among others. But also, the persistence of the criminalization of the receipt of international cooperation to carry out activities and operations of organizations, which has turned out to be, since at least 2006, one of the main forms of attack against the defense of rights.

In this regard, we recall that the Declaration on the right and duty of individuals, groups, and institutions to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, known as the Declaration of Human Rights Defenders establishes that they have the *right to request, receive and use resources in order to protect human rights (including receiving funds from abroad)*. Thus, the State, as part of its obligations must refrain from criminalizing organizations for the reasons presented.

We emphasize that the Venezuelan State continues to fail to comply with its international obligations, and also intends to evade international scrutiny in some instances by disqualifying them and attacking those who attend them in order to denounce the violations and crimes that are committed in the country.

Likewise, we see with great concern how within the framework of the criminalization of cooperation, the Ministry of Popular Power for Internal Relations, Justice and Peace and the Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Relations promulgated a joint resolution, on October 19 of 2020, and published on the official gazette on October 27 of 2020, by means of which a set of special norms were dictated for the “recognition and operation of non-governmental associative organizations not domiciled in Venezuela”<sup>1</sup>.



Faced with an increasingly restrictive environment, in which attacks on organizations that carry out humanitarian actions have increased, we raise alarms about the use that may be made of the aforementioned normative instrument, given the history of limitations, arbitrary interference, and obstacles to organizations that document, report and assist victims of human rights violations in the country.

## 03 **INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS CRIMINALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VENEZUELA**

Faced with the systematic policy of criminalization and stigmatization, international organizations for the protection of human rights and international organizations whose mandate specializes in the protection issues, continue in contact with the organizations and persons who are victims of these acts, their work of monitoring the situation of human rights defenders continues and given the seriousness of these, the pronouncements are maintained condemning the affectations of the right to defend rights in the country and calling for an end to criminalization and not to obstruct or affect their work.

Due to the criminalization situation, on October 9, 2020, the international organization specialized in protection Front Line Defenders issued two urgent actions in which it pronounced on attacks and acts of harassment suffered by the defender Raquel Sánchez (Táchira) and the defenders Charles Newbury and Pedro Hernández (Yaracuy), at the end of September.

<sup>9</sup>ID: Fact-finding Mission on Venezuela (Cont'd) - 17th Meeting, 45th Regular Session Human Rights Council 23.09.20. Disponible en: <http://webtv.un.org/search/id-fact-finding-mission-on-venezuela-16th-meeting-45th-regular-session-human-rights-council/6193752875001/?term=&lan=english&cat=Human%20Rights%20Council&sort=date&page=8>

ID: Fact-finding Mission on Venezuela (Cont'd) - 19th Meeting, 45th Regular Session Human Rights Council. 24.09.20. Disponible en: <http://webtv.un.org/search/id-fact-finding-mission-on-venezuela-contd-19th-meeting-45th-regular-session-human-rights-council-/6194214407001/?term=&lan=english&cat=Human%20Rights%20Council&sort=date&page=7>

<sup>10</sup>Oral update on the situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 45th session of the Human Rights Council. Geneva, September 25, 2020. In: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26295&LangID=S>

In this regard, the organization warned about the case of Ms. Sánchez *to be concerned about the security and integrity of the defender* (...). Likewise, it reiterated its position expressed on September 22, (...) *on the continuous oppression of the human rights movement in Venezuela and the context of persecution, stigmatization, and systematic criminalization against human rights defenders, in particular lawyers and lawyers*<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding the case of Messrs. Newbury and Hernández, the organization expressed *profound concern for the physical and psychological integrity of the defenders Charles Newbury and Pedro Hernández, who are at imminent risk due to the possibility of arbitrary detention.* (...) And it reiterated (...) *its deep concern over the abuse of power by Venezuelan public officials, who use their authority to intimidate and limit the work of human rights defenders*<sup>3</sup>.

PAG

10

#HABLEMOSDDHH

<sup>2</sup>Front Line Defenders. October 9, 2020. Attacks and harassment against the lawyer and human rights defender Raquel Sánchez. Available at: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/attacks-and-harassment-lawyer-and-woman-human-rights-defender-raquel-sanchez>

<sup>3</sup>Front Line Defenders. October 9, 2020. Harassment against human rights defenders Charles Newbury and Pedro Hernández. Available at: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/harassment-human-rights-defenders-charles-newbury-and-pedro-hermandez>

# 04 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Security Doctrine that places defenders within the logic of the "internal enemy" has been institutionalized, which has resulted in the consolidation of the Criminalization Policy for the defense of human rights and the stigmatization of those who exercise it. Day by day legal and factual measures are implemented that restrict the right to defend rights, actions that add to the precariousness of basic services, and social conditions that affect the work of defenders and the full operation of organizations.

The institutions of the Venezuelan State such as the Attorney General's Office (FGR, for its Spanish acronym) or the Office of the Ombudsman, which should speak out in favor of promoting the work of defenders, remain silent in the face of attacks against defenders and in some cases bear responsibility, by action or omission of criminalization. Likewise, the State continues to not implement effective measures to protect, respect, and guarantee the human rights of the population in the framework of a Complex Humanitarian Emergency aggravated by the health emergency caused by the Covid-19 virus. Contrary to international standards, actions, and omissions of the State continue to affect all human rights and hamper the work of those who defend them.

In an increasingly adverse context for the defense of human rights, the CDJ continues to accompany, document, and denounce the attacks against humanitarian actors, health defenders, union leaders, social leaders, and organizations that document, denounce, and disseminate rights violations of human rights and crimes committed in Venezuela.

We reiterate our call to the different mechanisms created to protect human rights defenders both within the United Nations and the Inter-American System to urge the representation of the Venezuelan State to cease the Policy of criminalization and stigmatization, as well as to abstain to retaliate against defenders.

Faced with the lack of protection and vulnerabilities faced by people and organizations that defend human rights, we will continue to work on the construction of conducive and safe environments that allow the right to defend human rights to be exercised without undue obstacles and without fear of being a victim of assaults. Trying to create spaces that guarantee freedom of association, demonstration, transparency, and freedom of opinion and expression.

From the CDJ we reaffirm our commitment to investigate and punish those responsible for committing attacks against human rights defenders in the country and to effectively apply the Declaration on the right and duty of individuals, groups, and women. institutions to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms; known as the Declaration of Defenders, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1998.

---

**CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS  
AND JUSTICE**

PAG

12

#HABLEMOSDDHH

TW @DEFENSORESDDHH\_  
IG @centrodefensores  
centrodefensores@gmail.com

