

Standing in solidarity with Venezuelan human rights defenders

The recent, ongoing and unwarranted detention of five members of the Venezuelan NGO 'Azul Positivo' is one more event in a series of threats, harassment, attacks, restrictions, reprisals and criminal proceedings against Venezuelan civil society organizations and human rights defenders, which has been intensifying since November 2020. In recent months and weeks, state agents have forcibly entered the offices of civil society organizations; public threats have been made against defenders who have been engaging with human rights mechanisms, NGO bank accounts have been frozen and arrest warrants issued for aid workers.

Venezuelan civil society operate in a context of serious legal and administrative obstacles with domestic laws used to target human rights defenders, such as the 'Law Against Hate', or having the effect of limiting the operations of NGOs and restricting their access to funding, essentially blocking the work of many organizations vital for Venezuelans in need.

In a public statement, a number of UN independent human rights experts and regional experts have described threats and measures taken against Venezuelan civil society since November 2020 as amounting to 'systematic persecution and stigmatization.'

It is essential that humanitarian and human rights organizations responding to the grave humanitarian and human rights crises in the country, pushing for accountability for violations and abuses and the return of guarantees provided by democratic institutions and processes are able to do their work without fear or hindrance.

Human rights defenders are critical, constructive and essential to democracies and the functioning of the rule of law. Attempts to silence and cow them are counterproductive and shameful.

We urge the Venezuelan authorities to ensure that harassment and threats against Venezuelan defenders stop and for all international legal guarantees to be respected. We call on all states and UN bodies and agencies to actively support civil society organizations, defenders and activists and to speak up loudly and consistently for the right to defend human rights in Venezuela and globally.

We are inspired by the daily commitment and courage of Venezuelan human rights defenders and humanitarian workers and stand in solidarity with our Venezuelan partners and friends.

Amnesty International

Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)

CIVICUS

Civil Rights Defenders

Conectas Diretos Humanos

Freedom House

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Human Rights Watch

International Commission of Jurists

International Service for Human Rights

People in Need

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)