

VENEZUELA

NGOs IN VENEZUELA AT RISK

On January 24, 2023, the Venezuelan National Assembly took its first step to approve a bill seeking to control, restrict, and potentially criminalize and close NGOs operating in Venezuela. If this bill passes, all Venezuelan NGOs will have to comply with abusive measures or face criminal prosecution. Measures include disclosing information on their funding, staff, and governance, and would violate the rights to association, privacy, and others, putting NGOs and their beneficiaries at grave risk of criminalization and reprisals.

This bill is yet another attempt to control NGOs, humanitarian organizations, and other members of Venezuelan civil society, and a shameful effort to limit their human rights work, including assisting victims of human rights violations, recipients of humanitarian relief, and people in need in Venezuela. NGOs and other civil society organizations carry out a vital mission in any country, but even more so in Venezuela, where over 7.1 million people have fled mass human rights violations and millions need humanitarian assistance on a daily basis.

Write to the National Assembly asking them to:

- immediately put a stop to this bill and cease all efforts to attack, control, prosecute, or censor civil society organizations working to protect the rights of all Venezuelans, particularly those in most need.

Write to:

Jorge Rodriguez
Esqs. Monjas a San Francisco,
Hemiciclo. Palacio Federal Legislativo,
Carmelitas, Av Sur 2,
Caracas, Distrito Capital,
Venezuela
Twitter: @jorgepsuv
CC: @volker_turk
Salutation: Dear Jorge Rodríguez

And copy:

His Excellency Orlando José VIERA BLANCO (M)
Ambassador
Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
32 Range Road
Ottawa, ON K1N 8J4
Tel: (613) 235-5151/ (613) 447-4576 (24h) Fax: (613) 235-3205
Email: consular@misionvenezuela.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Previous attempts to control and attack civil society in Venezuela include 2021's Administrative Regulation No. 001-2021 and 2022's so-called "International Cooperation Law". Amnesty International publicly condemned both initiatives, issuing urgent action 46/21 in reaction to the former, and an open letter addressed to Nicolas Maduro signed by over 500 civil society organisations in response to the latter. Administrative Regulation No. 001 was amended when the Venezuelan government published new regulations that rescinded the most concerning elements of the previous norm, including the requirement to disclose NGO's beneficiaries, the one-month deadline to register the stipulated information, and the possibility of criminal prosecution in case of non-compliance. The "International Cooperation Law" was ultimately never discussed and voted on in the National Assembly.

The current bill, titled "Law for the audit, regularization, action and financing of non-governmental and related organizations" is another effort to restrict and control civil society in Venezuela. The law would impose strict controls that include handing over lists of members and personnel and their assets, lists of donors, registration of financial movements. Non-compliance with registration requirements could lead to the closure of civil society organizations and possible criminal prosecutions. On January 24, 2023, the bill was put up for discussion and first vote to the National Assembly. The vote passed and the bill will continue its run through legislative procedure unless authorities put a stop to its treatment.

Human rights defenders are at a constant risk of harassment, attacks and event detention. Human rights defender, prisoner of conscience and Director of local NGO Fundaredes, Javier Tarazona, remains in detention and prosecuted for defending human rights. We call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Nicolás Maduro's government has continually harassed, prosecuted and censored activists and civil society organizations working to protect the rights of Venezuelans amidst a complex humanitarian emergency and a deep human rights crisis that is making Venezuelans flee in unprecedented numbers in search of safety and protection. By December 2022, over 7.1 million had fled the country.

Since 2020, three reports from the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have thoroughly documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment committed in the country since 2014; as well as the ways in which the justice system serves as a tool for the government's policy of repression, and concluded that these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity.