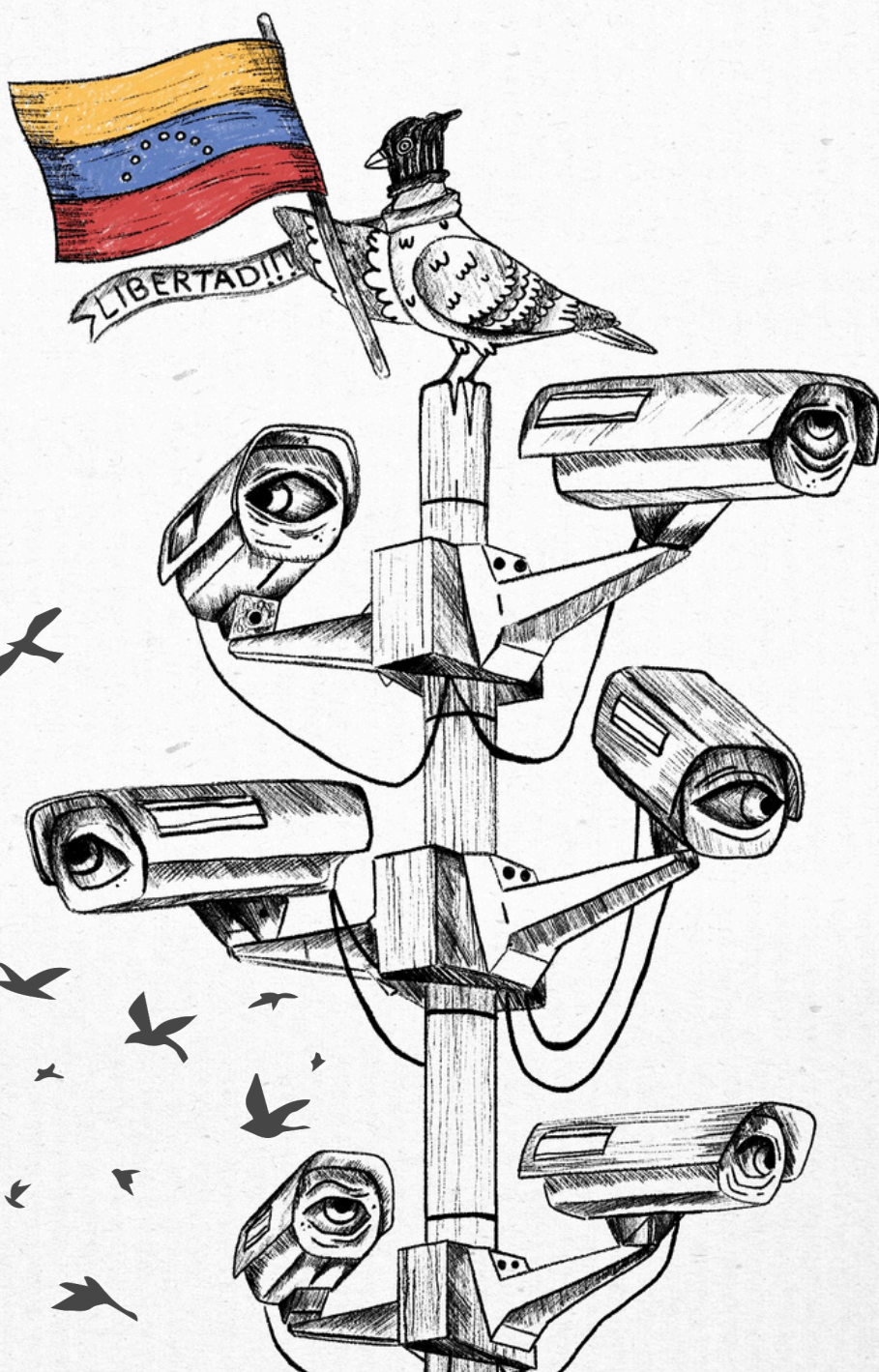


# SEMIANNUAL REPORT OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



2025





# Executive Summary

During the first semester of the year 2025, a systematic policy of repression against freedom of expression in Venezuela continued, evidencing the continuity of an authoritarian model that seeks to control the public narrative, silence criticism and restrict access to independent information. The regional and legislative elections of May 25 served as a catalyst for a new wave of arrests, information blockades and attacks on journalists and citizens. The post-electoral context has been particularly delicate, with an intensification of censorship mechanisms and criminalization of dissidence.

The Semiannual Report on Freedom of Expression 2025 aims to document violations of the State's duty to respect freedom of expression, analyze the public policies used to guarantee -or restrict- this right and evaluate compliance with the obligation to promote freedom of expression and access to information in Venezuela.

A total of 231 cases resulted in 302 violations of the right to freedom of expression, according to Un Mundo Sin Mordaza's documentation. These violations include arbitrary detentions, threats, physical and verbal aggressions, digital blockades and confiscation of traditional media equipment. The figures show a sustained strategy of state repression, applied through an institutional and para-statal network that operates throughout the national territory.

Arbitrary detentions continue to be the main mechanism of repression.

During this semester, 148 arrests were recorded, many of them in the framework of unfounded accusations of terrorism or conspiracy, particularly during the May electoral period. Among those detained were political activists, journalists, community leaders, ordinary citizens and even economists. Short-term enforced disappearances were also documented, used to sow fear and disrupt protests or critical expression. As for aggressions, threats and harassment, 24 incidents were recorded in 18 cases, most of them committed by state security forces or actors linked to the government. These incidents include physical aggressions, digital harassment, illegal searches and direct intimidation against press workers and citizens. These actions reinforce an environment of self-censorship, isolation and generalized fear that affects both the practice of journalism and public debate in networks and community spaces.

In the technological sphere, digital censorship deepened. Thirty-two TCP/IP blockades and one UDP protocol blockade were identified, in addition to the DNS and HTTP blockades previously documented. These actions limit access to independent media and information pages, affecting the collective right to be informed. In addition, new geographic restrictions and the silencing of accounts in social networks

dedicated to economic monitoring, such as those that published the price of the parallel dollar. Traditional media did not escape this repressive wave. Four cases of confiscation or arbitrary closure were documented, affecting community radio stations in Portuguesa, Táchira and Bolívar. These actions, promoted by the regulator or local authorities, contribute to a process of information emptying in the interior of the country, where radio is often the only media accessible to the population. This report was prepared based on a documentary methodology, using primary sources, reports from allied organizations, press records and verified complaints. We also analyzed the applicable international legal standards, especially from the Inter-American System and the Universal System of Human Rights, in order to evaluate the Venezuelan State's compliance with its obligations. Un Mundo Sin Mordaza is deeply grateful for the work of the organizations that have made this report possible through their rigorous monitoring and documentation, among them Espacio Público, the National Union of Press Workers (SNTP), VE Sin Filtro, Realidad Helicoide and the National College of Journalists (CNP). Their work is essential to make these violations visible, demand accountability and sustain the demand for justice and freedom for the Venezuelan people.



# List of abbreviations

**ACHR**

American Convention on Human Rights

**ANC**

National Constituent Assembly

**ANIA**

National Artificial Intelligence Agency

**BCV**

Central Bank of Venezuela

**CANTV**

National Telephone Company of Venezuela

**CCPR**

UN Human Rights Committee

**CICPC**

Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigations Corps

**CONATEL**

National Telecommunications Commission

**CRBV**

Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

**Court IDH**

Inter-American Court of Human Rights

**COPP**

Organic Code of Criminal Procedure

**DGCIM**

General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence

**GNB**

Bolivarian National Guard

**IACHR**

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

# List of abbreviations

<b>IACHR-SR</b>	Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR
<b>IACHR Court</b>	Inter-American Court of Human Rights
<b>IAHRS</b>	Inter-American Human Rights System
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>LCOCPT</b>	Constitutional Law Against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance
<b>LOTEL</b>	Organic Telecommunications Law
<b>PNB</b>	Bolivarian National Police
<b>RELE UN</b>	UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression
<b>RESORTEME</b>	Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media Law
<b>RSF</b>	Reporters Without Borders
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
<b>OVCS</b>	Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict

# List of abbreviations

**OVF**

Venezuelan Finance Observatory

**SAIME**

Administrative Service of Identification, Migration and Foreigners

**SEBIN**

Bolivarian National Intelligence Service

**SENIAT**

National Integrated Service of Customs and Tax Administration

**SIDH**

Inter-AmericaInter-American Human Rights  
Systemn Human Rights System

**TV**

Television

**VPN**

Virtual Private Network

**UDHR**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**UMSM**

Un Mundo Sin Mordaza

**UN**

United Nations

**UNHRC**

United Nations Human Rights Council

**ZODI**

Integral Defense Zone



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# I. Conceptual and Regulatory

## Framework Notions and basic concepts

### a. Freedom of Expression

In order to fully understand the meaning and scope of freedom of expression, it is necessary to consider different aspects. The existence of this right within a democratic state is paramount, since it constitutes an essential element in the formation of individual opinions and in the debate of ideas as a basis for the shaping of the social fabric. This means that when a citizen's freedom of expression is illegally limited, not only is the right of that individual violated, but also the collective right of society to receive information.<sup>1</sup>

***"70. Freedom of expression is a cornerstone upon which the very existence of a democratic society rests. It is indispensable for the formation of public opinion. It is also a conditio sine qua non for the development of political parties, trade unions, scientific and cultural societies and, in general, those who wish to influence the public.***

***It represents, in short, the means that enable the community, when exercising its options, to be sufficiently informed. Consequently, it can be said that a society that is not well informed is not a society that is truly free." (Emphasis added)"***<sup>2</sup>

### i. Inter-American System: Scope and Limitations

Freedom of Expression is explained in Article 13.1 of the American Convention on Human Rights (hereinafter, ACHR). This article establishes that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought and expression", which includes "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice".<sup>3</sup>

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (hereinafter, IACHR Court) has determined that Article 13 of the ACHR has two dimensions: i) the collective dimension, which inseparably encompasses the right to have at one's disposal all possible means to disseminate and know opinions and news,

**1** 1 Inter-American Court. "Compulsory Membership in an Association of Journalists".

**2** Advisory Opinion OC-5/85. 1985. para. 30. 2 Ibid. para. 70.

**3** 3OAS. ACHR. Article 13.1.

giving equal importance to both those who communicate the message and those who receive it, with the objective of getting the message to the greatest number of addressees, and ii) the individual dimension, which implies the right of each person to attempt to communicate his or her views and opinions.

The right to freedom of expression is the right to make one's own points of view known to others, including the right of society as a whole to know opinions and news. Likewise, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (RELE IACHR) has pointed out that this right has a triple function from which its scope can be understood:<sup>4</sup>

**1. To protect the individual right of each person to share information and thoughts of his or her own and of others. 2. To consolidate the functioning and preservation of democratic regimes. 3. To facilitate the exercise of other fundamental rights".**<sup>5</sup>

In effect, this triple function seeks to satisfy the different needs that this right covers as an essential part of a democratic society. The Inter-American system, for its part, establishes through Article 13.2 of the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR) two assumptions of limitation to the right to freedom of expression, which will be analyzed in greater depth in the following sections.<sup>6</sup>

**Article 13.2: The exercise of the right provided for in the foregoing paragraph shall not be subject to prior censorship but shall be subject to subsequent imposition of liability, which shall be expressly established by law to the extent necessary to ensure:**

**a) respect for the rights or reputation of others; or  
b) the protection of national security, public order, or public health or morals."**

For its part, Article 13.5 of the ACHR also expresses the assumptions where Freedom of Expression does not have any scope, being the following: "Any propaganda for war and any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitute incitements to lawless violence or any other similar action against any person or group of persons on any grounds including those of race, color, religion, language, or national origin shall be considered as offenses punishable by law"

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. para. 31. <sup>5</sup> IACHR. Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, "A Hemispheric Agenda for the

<sup>5</sup> Defense of Freedom of Expression", 2010, paras.16-19. Available: <https://bit.ly/3rpGfEr>

<sup>6</sup> OAS. ACHR. Article 13.2



## II. Universal System, scope and limitations

Freedom of Expression is defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter, "UDHR"), which states:

***"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".<sup>8</sup>***

Within international regulation, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (hereinafter "ICCPR") is one of the fundamental normative instruments in this area, and its articles 18, 19, 25 and 27 establish freedom of expression and freedom of opinion, as well as access to information.

Likewise, General Comment 34 of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR) analyzes Article 19 of the ICCPR, requiring in its second paragraph that freedom of expression be guaranteed in the States Parties and developing an analysis of how the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds should be protected.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the Office of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression (hereinafter "UN SR on Freedom of Opinion and Expression"), establishes with respect to Article 19 of the ICCPR that:

***Traducción oficial de la ONU: "(...)Article 19 (2) robustly defines freedom of expression as one that is multidirectional ("seek, receive and impart"), unlimited by viewpoint ("information and ideas of all kinds"), without boundaries ("regardless of frontiers"), and open-ended in form ("or through any other media")(...)"<sup>10</sup>***

Now then, Article 19 of the ICCPR, in paragraph 3, establishes the limits to the right to freedom of expression, these being:

***"3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (orders public), or of public health or morals."<sup>11</sup>***

<sup>7</sup> OEA. CADH. Artículo 13.5. ONU. Resolución 217 (III) A de la Asamblea General "Declaración Universal de Derechos del Hombre" A/RES/217(III).1948.

<sup>8</sup> Disponible en: [https://undocs.org/es/A/RES/217\(III\)](https://undocs.org/es/A/RES/217(III))

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, párr. 11.

<sup>10</sup> CDH ONU. Relator Especial sobre la Promoción y Protección del Derecho a la Libertad de Opinión y de Expresión. "Las pandemias y la libertad de opinión y de expresión." A/HR7C/44/49. Parr. 11. Disponible en: <https://bit.ly/38GGtj9>

In addition to this, Article 20 of the ICCPR explains different cases where Freedom of Expression has no scope, in the following assumptions:

- 1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.**
- 2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.**

## **b. Access to information:**

Access to information is considered a fundamental right relevant by the Member States of the Organization of American States (hereinafter, OAS), as well as by the doctrine and international jurisprudence for the consolidation,<sup>13</sup> functioning and preservation of democracy. It is stipulated in Article 13 of the ACHR in its first numeral, where it expresses the right of every person to "seek" and "receive" "information", that is, to access information under the control of the State, with the exceptions allowed under the strict regime of restrictions established in said instrument.<sup>14</sup>

## **Inter-American system, scope and limitations**

The Inter-American system has set precedents in defining the right of access to information. The IACHR Court in the case of *Claude Reyes et al. v. Chile* became the first international court to recognize access to information as a human right, which implies that it is the duty of any State to develop any action aimed at guaranteeing and promoting this right.<sup>15</sup>

In its report "The Right of Access to Information in the Inter-American Juridical Framework", the IACHR has presented and identified the obligations of the States to guarantee the right of access to information:<sup>16</sup>

**"1) the obligation to respond in a timely, complete and accessible manner to the requests that are made; 2) the obligation to have a remedy that allows the satisfaction of the right of access to information; 3) the obligation to have a suitable and effective judicial recourse for the review of refusals to provide information; 4) the obligation of active transparency; 5) the obligation to produce or capture information; 6) the obligation to generate a culture of transparency;**

**11** UN. General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI) "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights". A/RES/2200A (XXI). December 16, 1966.

**12** Ibidem

**13** OAS General Assembly Resolutions 2057 (XXXIV-O/04), 2121 (XXXV-O/05), 2252 (XXXV-O/06), 2288 (XXXVII-O/07), and 2418 (XXXVIII-O/08).

**14** I/A Court H.R., Case of *Claude Reyes et al. v. Chile*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of September 19, 2006. Series C No. 151, paras. 76 and 78.

**15** I/A Court H.R., Case of *Claude Reyes et al.* "Case of *Claude Reyes et al. v. Chile*. Judgment of September 19, 2006. Series C No. 151. p. 43, para. 77.

***and 7) the obligation to provide information to the public; 6) the obligation to generate a culture of transparency; 7) the obligation to adequately implement the rules on access to information; 8) the obligation to adapt the legal system to the requirements of this right"***

## **ii. Universal System, scope and limitations**

Access to information is defined in this system as the public's right to obtain information of general interest. This is contemplated in Article 19 of the ICCPR, second paragraph, which establishes the right to seek and receive information of any kind, including that which is of public interest. The UN RELE, in its Report submitted in 2013, in accordance with resolution 16/4 of the UN HRC, defines access to information more broadly as that which:<sup>17</sup>

***It encompasses both the general right of the public to have access to information of public interest from a variety of sources and the right of the media to access information, in addition to the right of individuals to request and receive information of public interest and information concerning themselves that may affect their individual rights***

The report highlights several principles that represent transparency in the activities and decisions of public bodies in their legislations, which are: maximum disclosure, i.e., the obligation to publish any document of public interest; promotion of transparency in public administration; clarity in the causes for denial of access to information; fast and effective procedure to access information, open meetings; protection for those who disclose information of public interest.<sup>18</sup>

Access to information cannot be considered an absolute right. It shall be subject to restrictions in specific cases in order to safeguard individual and collective legal interests. Such limitations must be conditioned to the principle of necessity and proportionality, always respecting human dignity as a superior value, and this entails not violating other human rights.

The UN RELE ratifies the principles that every State must comply with when setting limits for the exercise of freedom of expression: it must follow each of the purposes set forth in Article 19(3) of the Covenant, which are: <sup>19</sup>

***“(a) It must be provided by law, which is clear and accessible to everyone (principles of predictability and transparency); and (b) It must pursue one of the purposes set out in***

<sup>16</sup> IACHR. Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. "El derecho de acceso a la información en el marco jurídico interamericano". 2009. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3iyvWtw>

<sup>17</sup> UN HRC. Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression and opinion. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue."

<sup>18</sup> Pg.6, para. 19. September 4, 2013. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2IpEFjZ> 18Ibidem, p. 18, para.76.

***article 19, paragraph 3, of the Covenant, namely (i) to protect the rights or reputations of others, or (ii) to protect national security or of public order, or of public health or morals (principle of legitimacy); and (c) It must be proven as necessary and the least restrictive means required to achieve the purported aim (principles of necessity and proportionality)."***

## **Right of access to State-held information**

The right of access to public information was recognized by the IACHR Court in the case of *Claude Reyes et al. v. Chile*<sup>21</sup> as part of Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights. This right imposes on the State the obligation to guarantee publicity, transparency and maximum disclosure of information under its control that is of public interest. In the event that the State restricts access to certain information, it must justify it in a substantiated manner and allow the applicant to challenge the refusal through an effective judicial remedy.

### **Specific situations related to freedom of expression**

## **A. Political participation**

For the exercise of political participation, information and opinion contribute to nurture the thinking and support the decisions of citizens,

which are expressed through electoral processes and the political-administrative performance of those elected.

Freedom of expression protects various forms of political participation such as electoral campaigning, protest activity, private activity and community activity.<sup>22</sup> According to Article 13 of the ACHR, freedom of expression is fundamental because the expression of ideas in the media represents an indispensable condition for its proper exercise. In addition, freedom of expression from the point of view of political participation enables the exercise of the right of access to information, where citizens can have access to diverse expressions, which they can obtain from different alternative sources and not from the same issuer.

## **B. Situation of public servants**

In the case of public servants, according to the IACHR Court through<sup>23</sup> the Case of *Ricardo Canese v. Paraguay*, the situation is different because there is legitimate and admissible criticism, to which all public servants or aspiring to exercise functions of public interest are subjected due to the issues that extend the activity or opinion of the same, being themselves subjected to greater public scrutiny than the everyday.<sup>24</sup>

**19** Office of the Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of freedom of expression and opinion. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of expression and opinion, Frank La Rue." 2011.

**20** Pg.8, para. 24. Available at: <https://bitly/35WjHSj> 20Office of the Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of freedom of expression and opinion. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and

**21** protection of freedom of expression and opinion, Frank La Rue." 2011. Pg.8, para. 24. Available at:

**22** <https://bitly/35WjHSj> 21IACHR Court. *Claude Reyes et al. v. Chile*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of September 19, 2006



## C. Prohibition of criticism

The prohibition to make critical comments on a process in which an alleged victim is involved, as well as the restriction to express opinions about the institution where he/she has worked or studied, violates the right to freedom of expression. The case of *Palamara Iribarne v. Chile*<sup>25</sup> shows that any limitation on the possibility of expressing disagreement with respect to a proceeding constitutes a control mechanism that illegitimately restricts this fundamental right.

## D. State disinformation as a restrictive practice

In the framework of the international obligations of the Venezuelan State, the Inter-American Court has held that freedom of expression protects both the right of citizens to express their ideas and the collective right of society to receive information without arbitrary restrictions. It has also emphasized that public servants have the responsibility to verify information before disseminating it, in order to avoid misinformation and strengthen public debate. However, in Venezuela, a systematic pattern of disinformation promoted by the State has been identified, which violates these fundamental principles and seriously affects freedom of expression.

State disinformation is characterized by the use of mechanisms that distort or manipulate public information, with the aim of consolidating control over the national narrative, weakening critical voices and imposing an official perception that responds to government interests. This practice affects the collective dimension of freedom of expression and aggravates the already precarious human rights situation in the country.

## Manifestations of state disinformation

### 1. Narrative control by the State

In the area of the media, control over licenses and concessions through bodies such as Conatel has allowed the Venezuelan State to consolidate a monopoly over the information disseminated on traditional platforms, such as radio and television. This has been complemented with prior censorship and the closure of independent media, thus weakening information pluralism. In the case of *Granier et al. (RCTV) v. Venezuela*, the Inter-American Court affirmed that “the lack of informational pluralism generates a negative impact on the right of citizens to receive information and ideas of all kinds, as well as on the public debate essential for a democratic society.”<sup>26</sup>

The information monopoly not only silences the independent media, but also amplifies the propagation of official messages that respond to political interests, leaving the citizenry without real options to contrast information.

<sup>23</sup> Corte IDH. Caso Ricardo Canese Vs. Paraguay. Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas. Sentencia de 31 de agosto de 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem. Párr 98 y 103.

<sup>25</sup> Corte IDH. Caso Palamara Iribarne Vs. Chile. Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas. Sentencia de 22 de noviembre de 2005. Párr. 74.

## 2. Manipulation of facts through official statements

Public statements by high-level government officials have been used as a tool to discredit and harass journalists, independent media and civil society actors.

In some cases, these statements contain false or distorted information, generating confusion among the population and contributing to the delegitimization of critical positions. In the case *Ríos et al. v. Venezuela*, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights determined that “the statements of high-ranking public officials [...] contributed to accentuating situations of hostility.”, The Court also warned that this type of behavior is incompatible with the State’s obligations to respect and guarantee freedom of expression.<sup>27</sup>

These statements have been combined with disinformation campaigns on social media, where government-linked accounts amplify narratives that misinform and discredit opposition figures or journalists.

## 3. Denial of access to public information

The absence of effective mechanisms for access to information in Venezuela translates into a systematic violation of the right of citizens to know information held by the State.

This vacuum has been documented as a strategy to hide data that could expose situations of corruption, human rights violations or administrative failures.

In the case of *Claude Reyes et al. v. Chile*, the Inter-American Court emphasized that “the right of access to information ensures the possibility of obtaining truthful and necessary information to participate in public debate”<sup>28</sup> In Venezuela, this lack of active transparency limits the possibilities of contrasting official narratives, favoring the propagation of manipulated messages that remain without effective public questioning.

## 4. Proliferation of official narratives in critical contexts

During key processes, such as the 2024 presidential elections and the 2025 regional and legislative elections, the systematic use of state disinformation as a tool to control the public narrative was evidenced. This included the use of official media to present biased information about the electoral process, discredit opposition actors and minimize irregularities documented by independent observers. This use of disinformation in electoral contexts constitutes a serious violation of democratic principles by depriving citizens of truthful information needed to make informed decisions.

<sup>26</sup> Corte IDH. Caso Granier y otros (Radio Caracas Televisión) vs. Venezuela. Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas. Sentencia de 22 de junio de 2015. Serie C No. 293. párr. 145.

<sup>27</sup> Corte IDH. Caso Ríos y otros vs. Venezuela. Excepciones Preliminares, Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas. Sentencia de 28 de enero de 2009. Serie C No. 194. párr 139.

State disinformation constitutes a practice that goes beyond the simple omission of transparency and becomes a mechanism of indirect repression. The manipulation of official information, the censorship of critical media and the absence of pluralism of information are strategies that not only violate freedom of expression, but also affect the very essence of a democratic society.

## **II. Specific obligations of States to guarantee Freedom of Expression.**

### **I. Pluralism:**

States are obliged to promote the plurality of ideas and opinions, in addition to the duty to promote the diversity of communication channels and media that help to obtain and disseminate information without any obstacle. In this sense, the Court, in its jurisprudence related to this obligation, has established that:

***"... plurality of the media and news constitutes an effective guarantee of freedom of expression,<sup>28</sup> and the State has a duty to protect and ensure this under Article 1(1) of the Convention, by minimizing restrictions to information and encouraging a balanced participation, and by allowing the media to be open to all without discrimination"***<sup>29</sup>

In this way, the Court goes on to establish that:

***"In this regard, and in relation to the pluralism of the media, the Court recalls that the citizens of a country have the right to access information and ideas representing a diversity of positions, which must be guaranteed at different levels, such as the types of media, the sources and the content."***<sup>30</sup>

With respect to this obligation, States should not have a public or private monopoly in the ownership and control of the media, and should promote the access of different groups to radio and television frequencies and licenses, whatever their technological modality, for which reason it has been determined that it is necessary to establish structural conditions that facilitate competition in the media on an equal footing, allowing the inclusion of diverse groups in the dissemination of information and, on the other hand, ensuring freedom for those who may be "ungrateful to the State or any sector of the population", which is consistent with the "tolerance and spirit of openness" inherent to pluralism.<sup>31</sup>

***Likewise, Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles states the following:<sup>32</sup> "Monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people's right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals".***

Finally, regarding this point, the IACHR reiterated the following:

***“In the 2000 Annual Report, the Special Rapporteur noted that one of the fundamental requirements of the right to freedom of expression is the necessity of broad plurality in information. In today’s society, mass media, such as television, radio, and the press, wield undeniable power in shaping the cultural, political, religious, and other aspects of all inhabitants. If these media are controlled by a small number of individuals, or by just one, a society is effectively being created in which a few people, or only one, exercise control over information, and directly or indirectly, over the opinions received by the rest of the population. This lack of plurality in information is a serious obstacle to the functioning of democracy. Democracy requires the confrontation of ideas, debate, and discussion. When this debate does not exist or is weakened due to limited sources of information, the main pillar of democratic functioning is directly undermined.”***<sup>33</sup>

## II. Prevention:

The State's action should not only refrain from adopting measures after the consummation of the facts with the purpose of sanctioning and repairing,

but the State also has the obligation to create and implement different tools to avoid the materialization of violations of the rights in question. Likewise, the State shall take preventive actions to prevent violence and impunity against journalists and impunity. Among such actions or tools are the following:<sup>34</sup>

***a) Adopt a public discourse that may help prevent any form of violence against journalists, and it is the State’s obligation to condemn any aggression, as well as to recognize the importance of journalistic work, “even when the information disseminated may be critical, inconvenient, or untimely for the interests of the government.”***<sup>35</sup>

The IACHR has pronounced on a duty that governmental authorities have in events where some matter concerning the State is exposed. Such obligation is intrinsically related to the guarantee of due diligence in the public expressions of the mentioned subjects, with the purpose of not executing acts of abuse of law that may incur in consequences contrary to international principles.

<sup>29</sup> Corte IDH. “Caso Granier y otros (RCTV) Vs. Venezuela”. 2015. Consideraciones de la Corte. Estándares generales sobre el derecho a la libertad de expresión

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, párr. 170.

<sup>31</sup> Corte I.D.H., Caso Ríos y otros Vs. Venezuela. Excepciones Preliminares, Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas. Sentencia de 28 de enero de 2009. Serie C No. 194, párr. 105; Corte I.D.H., Caso Perozo y otros Vs. Venezuela. Excepciones Preliminares, Fondo,

<sup>32</sup> Reparaciones y Costas. Sentencia de 28 de enero de 2009. Serie C No. 195, párr. 116.



A clear example of a pronouncement of the Court regarding this duty can be found in the case of Perozo et al. v. Venezuela, in which the Court determined the international responsibility of the State for the aggression and harassment through statements made by public officials against 44 journalists working for Globovisión. Likewise, the IACHR established that:

***“considering the opinion about the media that state authorities and certain sectors of the society have, it is possible to consider that the declarations of highranking public officials created or at least, contributed to emphasize or exaggerate situations of hostility, intolerance or animosity of some sections of the population towards the people linked to such media”***<sup>37</sup>

To this end, it is necessary to:

a. Instruct the security forces on respect for the work of journalists and adopt adequate prevention mechanisms to avoid violence against those who work in the media, where public officials and police forces are trained for "the adoption of conduct guides or guidelines on respect for freedom of expression".

b. Respect the right of journalists to keep their sources of information, notes and personal and professional files confidential. Thus preventing them from becoming victims of acts of violence. "Likewise, the absence of such protection could dissuade sources from collaborating with the press to inform the population on matters of public interest".<sup>38</sup>

Penalize violence against journalists and media workers.<sup>39</sup> d. To produce quality data, compile and maintain accurate statistics on violence against journalists in order to design, implement and violence against journalists in order to design, implement and evaluate effective policies for the prevention, protection and criminal prosecution of violence against journalists.<sup>41</sup>

### III. Protect:

The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression recommends that States should adopt protection measures for any journalist whose right to life or physical integrity is at risk of violation by virtue of the type of activity carried out by reason of his or her profession.<sup>42</sup>

### IV. Procuring justice:

It is the duty of States to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators who commit crimes against journalists. This obligation implies:

<sup>33</sup> CIDH. Justicia e inclusión social: Los desafíos de la democracia en Guatemala. Capítulo VII: La situación de la libertad de expresión en Guatemala, párr. 419. Disponible en: <http://www.cidh.oas.org/countryrep/Guatemala2003sp/capitulo7.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Relatoría especial para la libertad de expresión. "Violencia contra los periodistas". <https://bit.ly/3ruHoud>

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, párr. 8

- Adopting an adequate institutional framework that assigns the responsibility of investigating and judging such crimes to the authorities that are in the best conditions to solve them, with sufficient human, economic, logistical and scientific resources, and that have autonomy and independence to act. Thus, in "contexts in which there is a continuous risk of acts of violence against journalists and where impunity prevails, it has been recommended to States to create specialized investigation units for crimes against freedom of expression"<sup>43</sup>.
- Act with due diligence and exhaust the lines of investigation linked to the victim's journalistic practice, taking into consideration the complexity of the facts, their context and the patterns of the crime<sup>44</sup>.
- Conduct investigations within a reasonable period of time, avoiding delays and unjustified hindrances "that lead to impunity. Excessive delay in the investigation of acts of violence may in itself constitute a violation of judicial guarantees."<sup>45</sup>
- Remove legal obstacles to the proportionate and effective investigation and punishment of the most serious crimes against journalists. "The IACHR has called particular attention to the use of general amnesty laws to hinder the

investigation of serious human rights violations committed against journalists"<sup>46</sup>.

- Facilitating the participation of victims or their families "in all stages of the investigation and in the corresponding trial"<sup>47</sup>.

## V. Adoption of domestic law provisions

Inter-American jurisprudence has specified a general obligation for States to adopt the provisions ratified in ISHR treaties into the domestic law of each member, stating that: "But, once a State has ratified an international treaty such as the American Convention, its bodies and judges, are also subject to it, which compels them to make sure that the effects of the provisions of the Convention are not affected by the application or interpretation of laws contrary to its object and purpose"<sup>48</sup>

# III. Methodological Framework

For the development of the Annual Report on Freedom of Expression, the general objective was to analyze the respect, guarantee, assurance, cooperation, promotion and adoption of measures in domestic law of the right to freedom of expression and access to information in Venezuela in the period described, as well as the specific objectives of:

**36** Corte IDH. Caso Perozo y otros Vs. Venezuela. 2009. Pág 23, párr. 79.

**37** Ibidem. Pág 46, párr. 160.

**38** Ibidem, párr. 9

**39** Ibidem, párr. 10

**40** Ibidem, párr. 11

(i) documenting violations concerning the obligation to respect the right to freedom of expression; (ii) analyzing the policies employed by the State to determine compliance with the obligation to guarantee the right to freedom of expression; and (iii) evaluating the procedures for compliance with the obligation to promote the right in question. These obligations are: respect, guarantee, promotion, cooperation and adoption of provisions in domestic law. In this way, a study of results was carried out through indicators based on the general obligations of the States in the area of rights. The indicators in this context are used to make the information tangible, and thus indicate the state or level of freedom of expression in Venezuela during the year 2024.

They seek to generate uniformity in the value of a variable obtained from the different primary and secondary sources analyzed in the research. At the same time, the research carried out in the report was conducted through a documentary methodology, this consisted of the collection of data provided by various bibliographic sources, press articles and reports from other organizations that document the situation of this right in the country; and the second based on the practice of interviews with experts in specific thematic areas.

In reviewing the obligations and rights on which the indicators of both reports were based, a definition was made of the attributes that each right or obligation possesses, generated by the information in the relevant international instruments.

This facilitated the process of selecting and developing appropriate indicators for a clear, concrete and objective categorization. Indeed, knowing the attributes of an obligation makes it possible to pinpoint the content of that obligation that the State may or may not be complying with, thus generating, on the one hand, a link between the indicators of an obligation and, on the other, the norms related to that right. Three types of indicators were used to achieve this:<sup>49</sup>

- Structural indicators: help to capture the State's intention, acceptance and commitment to implement measures that are in line with its human rights obligations.
- Process indicators: measure the actions being taken by the guarantors of rights to transform their commitments in this area.
- Results indicators: they assimilate individual and collective achievements that reflect the state of enjoyment of human rights in a given context.

For this reason, as regards documentary research, an analysis of international criteria and jurisprudence emanating from the Inter-American system and the universal system of human rights was carried out, from which the necessary

**41** Ibidem, párr. 12 Ibidem, párr. 15 Ibidem, párr. 20

**42** Ibidem, párr. 21

**43** Ibidem, párr. 22

**44** Ibidem, párr. 23

information was obtained to carry out a detailed study regarding the fulfillment of the obligations of the States in relation to Freedom of Expression. Likewise, a database was developed, in order to have updated information compatible with the Venezuelan context in the year 2024, based on the investigations of the denunciation platforms of organizations and endorsed by Sin Mordaza such as Espacio Público, the National Union of Press Workers, the National College of Journalists, VE sin Filtro, Realidad Helicoide, as well as various communication and information media.

#### IV. Results

During the first semester of the year 2025, the systematization of violations of the right to freedom of expression in Venezuela was once again evident, according to the records of the nongovernmental organization Espacio Público. According to data compiled by this NGO, between January and June<sup>47</sup> 144 reported incidents were documented. Therefore, despite the fact that during the first semester of 2025 violations of freedom of expression obligations continued, the following sections analyze the main differences with respect to 2024 in the patterns of censorship and persecution, paying special attention to the large number of arrests during the eve of the regional and legislative elections of May 2025 and the escalation of persecution of economists and web pages that showed the movement of the parallel dollar and official dollar in the month of June. These structural factors hinder the effective exercise of freedom of expression from a collective dimension.

#### Compliance with the general obligation to respect the right to freedom of expression.

For the analysis, it is first necessary to evaluate the existing legal and regulatory framework regarding freedom of expression for journalists and citizens. Currently, Venezuela has 17 rules that directly or indirectly regulate the operation of the media, digital platforms, social networks and websites.<sup>51</sup> In addition, there are 35 regulations and 35 additional administrative decisions, all with legal support. This reflects an imbalance in legal certainty and the rule of law, as the broad discretion granted by these provisions reduces the ability of Venezuelans to fully enforce their civil and political rights, leaving them without adequate avenues of defense against possible abuses by the authorities.

One of the main problems identified in the regulations related to this right continues to be the questioned Constitutional Law against Hate, Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance (LCOCP), illegitimately enacted by the National Constituent Assembly (ANC). Said legal instrument has been widely criticized since its genesis due to the fact that the ANC lacks legitimate powers to issue laws of constitutional rank, since it is a body created outside the established institutional channels.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has expressed its concern over the Anti-Hate Law, calling it "alarming".

**47** Ibidem, párr. 24

**48** Corte IDH. Caso Fontevecchia y D`Amico Vs. Argentina. 2011.



Edison Lanza, the IACHR's special rapporteur for Freedom of Expression from 2014 to 2020, warned that this legislation would have an inhibiting effect on criticism within the country, as in a regime without guarantees, fear of reprisals limits freedom of expression. In addition, the severity of the sanctions contemplated in the law, which include prison sentences of up to 20 years, comparable in criminal law with extremely serious crimes such as homicide. Likewise, he pointed out that the deterioration of guarantees in Venezuela has been progressive, but until now there were certain legal limits that allowed for release from prison in some cases. However,<sup>53</sup> with this new regulation, ambiguous criminal types are established that facilitate the persecution of opponents and consolidate a totalitarian State model. This calls into question the substantive validity and legality of this regulation, as it derives from an instance whose powers are not supported by the current legal system.<sup>54</sup> This generates uncertainty as to its adherence to the democratic framework and fundamental rights that guarantee freedom of expression in Venezuela.

Through this problematic law, the State has granted itself discretionary powers that allow it to severely restrict freedom of expression. For example, by imposing barriers to certain content, blocking websites or arbitrarily revoking media licenses, as well as sanctioning them without due guarantees for disseminating speech or opinions subjectively qualified as "incitement to hatred".

The norm established a dangerous mechanism of prior censorship that contravenes the provisions of Article 57 of the Constitution<sup>(55)</sup>, which guarantees the right of all persons to freely express their thoughts and ideas. This implies a limitation of what journalists and citizens can communicate publicly, since the concept of "hate" is subject to discretionary state assessment.

In the typification of thirty-three crimes that, according to the reform carried out in 2022 by the illegitimate National Assembly elected during 2020, establish an average penalty close to three years of imprisonment for any action aimed at affecting State property. However, this type of sentences would hardly imply the effective entry of the sentenced person to a prison, except for specific exceptions. The foregoing calls into question the effective deterrence and prevention of behaviors that this type of sentence seeks to punish, as well as its guarantees of regular compliance with the law.

It should be noted that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has expressed its concern about the LCOCPT, stating that *"restrictions of such caliber could seriously hinder the exercise of freedom of expression in Venezuela and generate a strong intimidating effect incompatible with a democratic society"*<sup>55</sup>. Although the law defines hate speech as a punishable offense, it does not establish precise limits for such speech.

49 Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, "Indicadores de derechos humanos. Guía para la medición y la aplicación", (2012)

qualification. The lack of a clear legal definition of these concepts facilitates state arbitrariness when determining their scope and application, putting at risk the guarantee of this fundamental right. The Venezuelan State has evidenced a legicentric tendency to privilege laws over the supreme constitutional norm, which undermines legal certainty. This is due to the excessive use of indeterminate legal concepts and lack of precision in the regulations, granting excessive discretion to public officials. Such discretionality transgresses the provisions of at least 6 articles of the Magna Carta. The use of uncertain factual assumptions and legal consequences allows the arbitrary application and interpretation of criminal sanctions by administrative bodies, whose competence is outside the limits established in the legal system.<sup>58</sup>

In the year 2024, two laws with a marked repressive approach towards the population were enacted, being sanctioned and published in the Official Gazette and a bill approved in first discussion after the results of the presidential elections of July 28, being configured as legal instruments designed to promote censorship and self-censorship, with serious implications for fundamental rights and civic space in Venezuela.

In the first place, **the Organic Law Liberator Simon Bolivar Against the Blockade and For the Defense of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**, enacted on November 29, 2024,<sup>59</sup>

constitutes a normative instrument that substantively and negatively impacts the exercise of freedom of expression in Venezuela, enshrined in Article 57 of the CRBV. In theory, the objective of the law is based on counteracting the effects of the international economic sanctions imposed against Venezuela. Its main objective is to protect the interests of the State and guarantee the economic and political stability of the country, granting the National Executive exceptional powers in economic, political and security matters.

However, such law grants broad and discretionary powers to the National Executive to implement measures that include the blocking of digital platforms, social networks and other means of communication, under the argument of protecting the economic and political interests of the State. These provisions not only lack clear and objective parameters, but also violate the principle of legality established in Article 137 of the CRBV, which requires that all actions of the public power be subject to the Constitution and the law.

Additionally, by facilitating the adoption of opaque decisions devoid of effective control mechanisms, the law violates the right of access to public information, which is protected by the Constitution.

in Article 28 of the CRBV. This right is essential to guarantee citizen scrutiny of the acts of public power and to safeguard accountability as a guiding principle of a participatory democracy, as provided in Article 62 of the Magna Carta.

**50** Espacio Público. “Resumen mensual de junio de 2025: Libertad de Expresión en Venezuela”. 08 de julio de 2025. Disponible en: <https://acortar.link/74lGo6>

**51** CONATEL. Marco legal. Recuperado de: <https://bit.ly/3wXMpNc>

The power to block websites and limit access to digital content directly affects the ability of citizens and journalists to inform themselves and communicate information of public interest, severely restricting the space for public debate and criticism of power. Likewise, the restrictions contemplated in the law establish a censorship regime that, although not formally presented as prior censorship, produces an inhibiting effect on the exercise of freedom of expression and press, also violating Article 25 of the CRBV. This article prohibits that the acts of the public power that violate constitutional rights have any validity whatsoever, and establishes that the officials who execute them will incur personal liability.

On the other hand, by not guaranteeing mechanisms of due process and effective control in the application of these measures, the law violates Article 49 of the CRBV, which ensures the right to defense, the right to be heard and other judicial and administrative guarantees in proceedings that may affect fundamental rights. This regulatory context fosters an environment of legal insecurity in which the authorities may exercise their powers in an arbitrary and disproportionate manner, contravening the principles of proportionality and reasonableness provided for in Article 12 of the Organic Law of Administrative Procedures (LOPA).

The requirement of mandatory registration, the excessive control over financing and the control of activities through government registries established in Articles 18, 22 and 26 of the law, contravene Article 52 of the CRBV, which guarantees the right to associate freely without arbitrary interference. These provisions also violate Article 28 of the CRBV by imposing mandatory disclosure of sensitive information, such as the identification of donors, violating privacy and facilitating potential reprisals against organizations and their collaborators.

Article 23 of the law, which prohibits receiving foreign funding or carrying out activities considered "political", constitutes an unacceptable limitation to Article 62 of the CRBV, which guarantees citizen participation in public affairs. This type of restriction reinforces an environment of censorship and self-censorship, limiting the ability of NGOs to denounce abuses of power or promote political reforms in favor of democracy and human rights.

Furthermore, the possibility of imposing disproportionate economic sanctions, provided for in Articles 36 and 38, together with the threat of dissolution of organizations for ambiguous or discretionary reasons, violates Article 137 of the CRBV, which requires that all actions by the public authorities be duly grounded and proportional. Likewise, these measures contradict Article 49 of the CRBV, which protects due process and judicial guarantees, by failing to provide clear criteria and impartial appeal mechanisms.

**52** Infobae. "La SIP y la CIDH también condenaron la nueva "Ley contra el odio" impulsada por el régimen de Nicolás Maduro". 10 de noviembre de 2017. Disponible en: <https://acortar.link/EaywtZ>

**53** Ibidem

**54** Ibidem

**55** CRBV. Artículo 57.

Finally, Article 15 of the law, which prohibits the registration of organizations whose purpose may contradict constitutional provisions, uses vague and subjective concepts that allow arbitrary and selective interpretations, violating Article 21 of the CRBV on equality before the law. This puts at risk the existence of critical organizations, consolidating a system of legal repression that goes against the fundamental principles of a democratic and social State of Law and justice, established in Article 2 of the CRBV.

Accordingly, the purpose of the Artificial Intelligence Bill is to regulate the use, development and protection of artificial intelligence (AI) in Venezuela, ensuring that it adheres to ethical principles and respects human rights. The law is applicable to both natural and legal persons, public and private, within the national territory. Its guiding principles include ethics, transparency, privacy, non-discrimination, adaptability, international cooperation and respect for human rights.

The law establishes the creation of a regulatory body, the National Artificial Intelligence Agency (ANIA), which will be attached to the Ministry with competences in the area of Science and Technology. This agency will have the capacity to supervise and sanction all AI-related activities, issue technical standards and promote international cooperation. However, the concentration of power in ANIA could generate discretionary decisions that affect the impartiality of regulation.

In addition, the law classifies the risks associated with AI into four levels: unacceptable, high, medium and low. The riskiest categories include dangerous manipulations, mass surveillance and lethal autonomous decision making. Despite the restrictions, the law allows exceptions in high-risk cases for national security purposes, which opens the door to abuses of power, especially in a mass surveillance context.

Among the most critical articles are those addressing exceptions for the use of unacceptable AI (Article 46), the definition of unacceptable AI (Article 45), and the obligation to provide information to the state (Article 47). The vagueness in these articles poses risks of abuse, as they allow the State to use AI for purposes of social control, surveillance and repression of opponents. In addition, Article 56 establishes criminal offenses related to the manipulation of audiovisual content, misuse of information, and threatening national security through AI. Penalties include prison sentences that may be disproportionate. There are also administrative penalties for violators of the law, ranging from fines for minor infractions to severe financial penalties for serious violations. In the context of an authoritarian regime, such as the one in Venezuela, this bill could be used as a tool of repression. Activists and human rights organizations would face criminalization for the use of AI technologies in denouncing human rights violations. Laws related to the manipulation of audiovisual content and disclosure of information could be used to persecute journalists, activists and organizations critical of the government.

- 56** CIDH. Relatoría especial para la libertad de expresión. “Comunicado de prensa R179/17”. Recuperado de: <https://bit.ly/2TrglN6>
- 57** Acceso a la Justicia. “¿Qué debes saber sobre la llamada “Ley Constitucional contra el Odio”?”. 2017. Disponible en: <https://acortar.link/UCmrBV>
- 58** Efecto Cocuyo. “Ley contra el odio atenta contra seis artículos de la constitución, según expertos”. 9 de noviembre de 2017. Disponible en: <https://bit.ly/3cEMLnE>

The law could also facilitate mass surveillance, preemptive repression and digital censorship. High fines and the obligation to hand over information to the state would put the safety of activists and their collaborators at risk. Selective application of the law would allow censorship of content deemed high-risk or unacceptable by the regime, affecting freedom of expression and the ability to denounce human rights violations.

Additionally, on August 12, 2024, Decree No. 4,975 was enacted, published in the Official Gazette on August 20, 2024<sup>61</sup>, which establishes the creation of the National Cybersecurity Council in Venezuela. This body, under the direct authority of the Head of State, will have a permanent character and will be consultative and advisory, with the purpose of "preventing illegal uses of communication and information technologies". However, the broad power conferred to the president over the Council raises concerns, especially in a context where the repression of expressions on the Internet has intensified. The creation of this Council takes place in a scenario where pro-government leaders have criminalized the legitimate use of digital platforms to disseminate, seek and publish information, as well as the exercise of the rights to association and peaceful demonstration, rights guaranteed by the National Constitution.

According to Article 2 of the Decree<sup>62</sup>, the functions of the Council include advising the President and the National Defense Council on cybersecurity

policies, proposing regulations, supervising their implementation and managing a 24-hour telematic incident monitoring network. However, these functions lack an adequate framework of human rights principles and guarantees to regulate them, opening the door to abuses in the digital environment. In particular, the capacity for continuous monitoring and the collection of personal data could legalize invasive practices that violate citizens' freedom of expression and privacy. The absence of independent bodies to oversee the actions of this Council increases the risk that it will be used as a tool for the repression and persecution of political dissent.

UN RELE has warned that several countries, including Venezuela, resort to vague legal frameworks to justify the use of invasive techniques in digital surveillance.<sup>63</sup> Decree No. 4.975 reflects this trend, raising the risks of human rights violations, especially for vulnerable groups or critics of the government. The creation of the Council without a robust human rights protection framework reflects the Venezuelan state's poor legislative practices, including ambiguities about the scope of restrictions and the Council's total dependence on the central government. The implementation of similar regulations in other Venezuelan laws has resulted in discriminatory censorship, motivated by the interests of the ruling elite, and this decree appears to be no exception.

In a context of scarce guarantees of privacy on the net, the National Cybersecurity Council is created without clear definitions on the protection of personal data or adequate oversight mechanisms.



This increases insecurity in the use of the Internet and could generate a chilling effect on citizens, limiting their ability to express opinions, demand rights and participate in civic activities without fear of reprisals. The combination of an extensive surveillance policy and the lack of transparency in the management of digital rights represents a serious threat to peace, the rule of law and human rights in Venezuela. Currently, during the first semester of 2025, UMSM documented a total of 231 cases, generating 302 violations of the right to freedom of expression in Venezuela. These records evidence not only the continuity, but also the refinement of repressive tactics implemented by the Venezuelan State and allied actors to stifle dissent and restrict the free flow of information. The violations fall into four broad categories, all interrelated as part of a broader strategy of censorship and social control.

**1. Forced closure of traditional and digital media:** 4 cases were documented involving the arbitrary closure or confiscation of equipment in radio stations, news programs and independent podcasts. Most of these occurred in rural areas or cities in the interior of the country, where the media play a fundamental role in denouncing abuses and disseminating community information. This type of closure, although smaller in number, has a high symbolic and practical impact, as it silences voices that were already operating with limited resources.

**2. Blocking of web pages and social networks:** 61 cases of digital blocking were recorded, both by TCP/IP protocol and by deep packet inspection (DPI) methods. Among the censored pages are independent media outlets, portals that report the price of the parallel dollar and platforms that monitor human rights. This practice has become a sustained pattern that seeks to reduce the access of the common citizen to alternative information, especially in times of political or economic tension. The digital blockade in Venezuela has become a direct extension of the repression, sophisticating the methods of censorship with the support of state internet providers.

**3. Arbitrary detentions of journalists and civilians:** With 148 documented cases, this category represents 64% of all violations during this period. The detentions, many of them without warrants, affected both journalists and ordinary citizens who shared information, criticism of the government or economic analysis on social networks. The increase in arrests of economists, financial disseminators and account managers who report the difference between the official exchange rate and the parallel market is striking. This trend shows that the State has extended its censorship policy towards technical and professional sectors that influence public opinion.

**4. Harassment, aggressions and threats:** 18 cases were reported in which journalists and citizens were victims of threats, intimidation, physical aggressions, confiscation of equipment and defamation campaigns in social networks.

Most of these acts were carried out by State security forces, such as SEBIN, DGCIM, GNB or PNB, but actions by armed civilian groups or those affiliated with the government, who act with total impunity, were also detected. These actions generate a climate of constant fear that hinders the exercise of freedom of the press and citizen participation. This panorama not only evidences a State policy aimed at systematic repression, but also shows how a mixed model of censorship has been perfected, in which traditional methods - such as the closure of the media- converge with new technological and judicial tools. What used to be carried out through crude mechanisms of repression is now being of repression is now presented as part of an institutional scaffolding that persecutes, criminalizes and silences. The first half of 2025 confirms that the right to freedom of expression in Venezuela is not only severely restricted, but is under strategic and sustained attack, targeting both those who generate information content and those who consume it. The State has expanded its range of repression from journalists to economists, researchers, human rights defenders, students, community activists and any citizen who dares to express an opinion on social networks or disseminate information not aligned with the official discourse. Faced with this reality, this report seeks to document, denounce and make visible each of these violations, providing verifiable evidence to support future national and international advocacy actions.

### **a. Arbitrary detentions of civilians and journalists**

During the first semester of 2025, 148 documented arbitrary detentions were recorded in the national territory. Although this figure represents a decrease with respect to the levels reached in the last semester of 2024, it does not imply a structural improvement: on the contrary, it reflects a return to the usual pattern of political repression exercised selectively by the State. These arrests especially affected people linked to the political opposition, human rights defenders, journalists and citizens who recognize Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia as presidentelect. The criminalization of this political recognition has become a red line for the repressive apparatus, which operates on the basis of public intimidation and deprivation of liberty. In this context, the IACHR and the RELE CIDH have warned about the consolidation of a pattern of State Terrorism, in which fear, censorship and structural repression are used to dismantle citizen participation and peaceful protest.<sup>64</sup>

A critical point was the electoral day of May 25, corresponding to the regional and legislative elections. In the days leading up to this process, at least 70 people were arbitrarily detained, under accusations of alleged terrorist attacks, conspiracies or "destabilizing plans", none of which have been publicly verified or accompanied by evidence presented in court. Among the most emblematic cases is the detention of Juan Pablo Guanipa, a political leader apprehended with no guarantees of his release.

Of due process and whose initial disappearance was publicly denounced by human rights organizations.<sup>65</sup>

In several of these cases, forced disappearances of short duration took place, a systematic practice by the Venezuelan State security forces that consists of denying the detention and hiding the whereabouts of the person for hours or days, with the aim of generating uncertainty, preventing access to defense and demobilizing public denunciation. This tactic has been repeatedly denounced before international bodies for its inhumane nature and for constituting a serious violation of human rights, prohibited by international law.

### **b. Persecutions, threats, harassment, aggressions, assassinations and intimidation of journalists and civilians exercising their right to free expression**

During 2024, 18 documented cases were recorded, involving a total of 24 incidents of threats, harassment or aggression against civilians and press workers in Venezuela. These events included threats on social networks by public officials, persecution, confiscation of equipment and work material, intimidation, as well as physical, psychological and moral aggression.

Of the total number of cases, 4 were directed against civilians and 14 against press workers, representing 22% and 78% respectively. This disproportion evidences a systematic pattern of repression aimed mainly at silencing the media and limiting the exercise of free journalism.

Regarding the 24 incidents committed by State officials or persons linked to the regime, the following types of acts were identified:

- Harassment: 12 incidents (50%)
- Intimidations: 2 incidents (8.3%)
- Assaults: 3 incidents (12.5%)
- Threats: 6 incidents (25%)
- Trespassing: 1 incident (4.2%)

As for the agencies responsible for these incidents, the data show that the main perpetrators were the following:

- Paramilitary groups linked to the government: 4 incidents (16.7%).
- Address General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM): 2 incidents (8.3%)  
Military Counterintelligence Directorate (DGCIM): 2 incidents (8.3%)
- Bolivarian National Police (PNB): 2 incidents (8.3%)
- Bolivarian National Guard (GNB): 1 incident (4.2%)
- Plan República: 3 incidents (12.5%)
- Minister of People's Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace: 2 incidents (8.3%)
- Governor of the state of Trujillo: 1 incident (4.2%)
- President of the Republic: 1 incident (4.2%)
- Indira Urdaneja (political scientist sympathetic to the State): 2 incidents (8.3%).

**61** Decreto N°4.975. Gaceta Oficial N° 42.939 del 20 de agosto de 2024.

**62** Ibidem, Artículo 2.

**63** CDH ONU. "Informe del Relator Especial sobre la promoción y protección del derecho a la libertad de opinión y expresión, Frank La Rue". 17 de abril de 2013. A/HRC/23/40.

This pattern of aggressions not only involves State security forces, but also civilian and political actors sympathetic to the regime, including paramilitary groups and officials from different levels of government. The continuity and multiplicity of these attacks, as well as their extension to various public officials, suggest that this is a deliberate and coordinated policy to silence dissent and control the public narrative.

The analysis shows that, although the security forces -such as the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), the Bolivarian National Police (PNB), the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) and Plan República- are the main executors, there are also civilian and political officials who promote, protect and justify these repressive practices. This situation configures a serious scenario of political repression that has a negative impact not only on the right to freedom of expression, but also on democracy and the right of citizens to have access to truthful, plural and free information.

Incidents of harassment, aggression and persecution have become increasingly systematic and aimed at silencing critical voices. They are not only limited to journalists, but also include civilians exercising their right to protest or express dissent. The participation of actors outside the formal state sphere, such as irregular groups linked to the government, consolidates a comprehensive repressive strategy that transcends traditional control mechanisms and represents a serious risk for the full exercise of human rights in Venezuela.

### **c. Impact on the media**

An analysis of the different means applied by the State to repress the alleged offenses contained in the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media (Resorteme Law), shows that it contains sanctioning procedures of an administrative nature, which confer the power to block web pages, impose disproportionate fines, confiscate equipment, temporarily close down or permanently any media outlet directly or indirectly, as well as the existence of judicial prosecution mechanisms specifically linked to cases in which alleged crimes are committed that are linked to the Anti-Hate Law and the Penal Code. The reasons given by CONATEL for the actions taken are generally based on the termination of concessions or irregularities with administrative permits, which are necessary requirements for the regular development of journalistic activities. However, telecommunications experts affirm that the possible legal non-compliance of broadcasters is not their responsibility, but rather the responsibility of the deficiencies of the regulatory agency in charge of granting and monitoring them.

During the first semester of 2025, 4 cases of direct aggressions against traditional media and podcasts were documented, specifically 4 radio stations, reflecting the continuity of institutional harassment to limit freedom of the press in Venezuela. Of these cases, in 3 there was confiscation of equipment and work material, seriously affecting the operational capacity of the media outlets involved. The affected media outlets include:

- Two radio stations in Portuguesa state.
- A radio station in Táchira state.
- One radio station in the state of Bolívar

These actions reflect a systematic policy of censorship and control of information at the regional level, which not only seeks to silence critical voices in large cities, but also to restrict access to pluralistic information in the interior of the country. The confiscation of technical equipment and work material constitutes an act of symbolic and material violence that discourages journalistic work and undermines informative diversity, aggravating the crisis of the right to freedom of expression in Venezuela.

Article 31 of the Organic Law of Telecommunications (LOTEL)<sup>66</sup>, states that if Conatel does not pronounce within the established timeframe on a request for the granting of a license or concession, it will be understood as a denial of the request. This means that this administrative silence is automatically an unmotivated refusal for the development of freedom of expression.

#### **d. Blocking of social networks and media websites**

During 2024, 126 incidents were recorded with 61 cases of blockades of websites and social networks in Venezuela, in which the State used direct and indirect mechanisms to restrict access to information and limit freedom of expression in the digital environment. These blockades not only prevented access to independent media and human rights organizations, but also affected the ability of citizens to inform themselves about the political and social situation in the country, especially in the days of Nicolás Maduro's inauguration.

## **Types of blocking and how they work**

### **1. DNS type blocking**

DNS blocking occurs when Internet Service Providers (ISPs), under orders from the State, modify the configuration of their Domain Name Servers (DNS) to prevent certain web addresses from being correctly resolved. In simple terms, even if a page is still online, the user trying to access it from Venezuela will receive an error because his provider cannot find it. In the first half of 2025, 50 DNS blocking incidents were recorded. This type of blocking is relatively easy to evade by changing the DNS servers in the device configuration or by using VPN. Generally, it is applied against news sites and NGOs reporting human rights violations.

### **2. TCP/IP blocking**

A TCP/IP block is a technical method that prevents communication between devices on the Internet by filtering or blocking traffic based on IP addresses or ports, preventing certain users from accessing websites or digital services. In other words, it is like closing a digital door so that you cannot enter a site or use a platform, and in contexts of censorship, as in Venezuela, it is used to restrict access to informative content or content critical of the government.

During the first half of 2025, 32 incidents of TCP/IP blocking were recorded, which reflects a persistent and systematic strategy of digital censorship in Venezuela.



### 3. UDP blocking

UDP blocking is a technique that prevents the transmission of data through the User Datagram Protocol, mainly used for services that require fast and unconfirmed communications, such as live broadcasts, video calls and other real-time applications.

Blocking this protocol affects the quality and availability of these digital services, limiting access to key platforms for freedom of expression and information flow. During the first semester of 2025, a case of UDP blocking was registered in Venezuela, evidencing the continuity of digital censorship tactics in the country

### 4. HTTP/HTTPS blocking

In this case, the Internet provider prevents access to certain pages by directly blocking HTTP requests, i.e. the connection between the user and the web server. As a result, the browser displays a connection error. Thirty-nine cases of HTTP/HTTPS blocking were reported in the first half of 2025. This blocking is more difficult to evade than DNS, as it directly affects the communication between the user and the website. Its use is directed against specific media that report on sensitive topics.

## Status of compliance with the obligations of Guarantee and Assurance of the right to Freedom of Expression

### a. Repression of freedom of expression. Recommendations to the Venezuelan State

The use of force by State officials in protests is a clear and notorious violation of the right to freedom of expression, the protection of the right to freely express oneself in peaceful protests is protected in the laws in force in the country, the main rule being Article 68 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, there are also regulations that allow to exercise control over the violations committed in the demonstrations, as well as to indicate the mechanisms to which citizens can resort to denounce these attacks.

State officials have the obligation to comply with the procedures established in the constitutional, legal and sub-legal norms, which must be followed and applied at all times so that freedom of expression and other human rights are guaranteed. According to the provisions of Article 58 of the CRBV, censorship is prohibited; as well as Article 337 which recognizes the right to freedom of expression as one of the intangible rights that cannot be restricted even in a state of emergency; and Article 3 of the RESORTEME Law on the respect for the guarantees provided by law to safeguard the right by the democratic State.

**64** CIDH. "CIDH y RELE condenan práctica de terrorismo de estado en Venezuela." 15 de agosto de 2024. Disponible en: <https://acortar.link/IXh2me>

Swissinfo. "Venezuela reporta más de 70 detenidos, extranjeros entre ellos, por plan contra comicios". 23 de mayo de 2025.

**65** Disponible en: <https://acortar.link/jxokDc>

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## **Obligations to Cooperate, Promote and Adopt Measures in Domestic Law on Freedom of Expression**

The Venezuelan State has signed the UDHR, in addition to signing and ratifying various treaties on freedom of expression, among which are the International Covenant on Civil and

It is due to this inaction of the State in the face of the call of different international organizations that when reviewing the ranking on the World Press Freedom Index 2025 carried out by Reporters Without Borders (RSF); Venezuela is in position 160 out of 180 countries studied, dropping 4 positions compared to the result of the world classification of 2024 (156 out of 180 countries)<sup>72</sup>. Likewise, the Internet Freedom Index of the Freedom House organization in 2025 scores Venezuela with 30/100 in the Internet Freedom Score and 13/100 in the Global Freedom Score, qualifying it in both scores as a State without freedom<sup>73</sup>. This proves that the State has not sought to take measures to ensure access to information and freedom of expression as the country is positioned in such low numbers in these rankings and ignores the consequences of this internally for citizens.

## V. Infringement of digital privacy as a threat to freedom of expression

One of the most recent and serious threats to freedom of expression in the Venezuelan digital environment was the massive leak of personal data of more than 3.2 million Movistar Venezuela users, denounced on April 30, 2025

by the program Ve Sin Filtro of the organization Conexión Segura y Libre. The information, which includes full name, ID number, telephone number and geographic region, was stolen and published by a malicious actor in a clandestine forum, where it was offered for commercialization.<sup>74</sup>

This incident was added to another alarming fact: the leak of a database of the Administrative Service of Identification, Migration and Foreigners (SAIME), also publicly exposed in networks related to illegal activities in the dark web. The file - whose authenticity has been pointed out by multiple digital observers- would contain biometric data, addresses, photos, and migratory records, potentially affecting millions of Venezuelans inside and outside the country.<sup>75</sup>

Both leaks represent not only a massive violation of the right to privacy, but a structural threat to freedom of expression. In a country where the use of surveillance mechanisms to intimidate journalists, human rights defenders, opponents and dissident citizens has been documented, the exposure of sensitive data opens the door to new forms of repression, selective persecution and self-censorship.

The lack of specific legislation on personal data protection in Venezuela, added to the inaction of the authorities in the face of these facts, reinforces the perception that Venezuelan citizens are completely unprotected against digital vulnerability. While in other regions of the world companies or public entities are required to notify those affected, in Venezuela neither Movistar nor the SAIME have issued an official statement, nor offered mitigation or repair measures.

In this context, the leakage of personal data is no longer a technical problem but a tool for social control, aligned with the ecosystem of censorship, surveillance and political repression that prevails in the country. Digital information, which should be protected by the State, ends up being a new flank of threat to civil rights, particularly the right to express oneself without fear.

## VI. Violations of freedom of expression: repression against independent economic analysis

Since May 2025, the Venezuelan State intensified a systematic policy of repression against economic analysts, academics, communicators and citizens who have investigated or disclosed information on the unofficial exchange market, known as the "parallel dollar". This strategy represents a clear criminalization of the fundamental right to inform and receive truthful information on economic matters, seriously affecting freedom of expression.

Attorney General Tarek William Saab announced the arrest of 58 people<sup>76</sup>, among them prominent economists and academics such as Rodrigo Cabezas, former Minister of Finance, and Rodrigo Cárdenas, former Minister of Finance.

during the government of Hugo Chávez<sup>77</sup>, and collaborators of the Venezuelan Finance Observatory (OVF), such as the administrator Gerardo Cacique<sup>78</sup> and the economist Daniel Cadenas.<sup>79</sup> These detainees are charged with severe charges -terrorism, money laundering, criminal association, misleading offer and improper capture- without concrete evidence to justify such accusations, which reveals an arbitrary use of the judicial system for political purposes.

In parallel, the arrest of the administrator of the Instagram profile "Monitor Dólar" took place, as well as the blocking and restriction of multiple digital platforms linked to the dissemination of the parallel exchange rate. At least 50 websites, mobile applications, social network accounts and messaging groups have limited or suspended the publication of rates other than the official rate set by the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV).<sup>80</sup> In this context, two web pages - [monitordolarvenezuela.com](http://monitordolarvenezuela.com) and [yadio.io](http://yadio.io) - were blocked by several internet providers, while three more were voluntarily withdrawn and eleven remain active, although without updating or publishing only the official rate. Geographic restrictions were also identified to prevent access from Venezuela to certain platforms.

Similarly, at least 16 Instagram accounts stopped publishing information on the parallel dollar, one was deleted, and three Telegram channels suspended their updates.<sup>82</sup> Five mobile applications to consult or calculate the exchange rate stopped working properly or applied geographic restrictions preventing their use within the country. An app for buying and selling cryptoassets also restricted its operation in Venezuela.<sup>83</sup>

These measures not only constitute direct attacks on freedom of expression, but also limit access to vital economic information for citizens, especially in a context of hyperinflation and rapid devaluation. Censorship and persecution seek to control the economic discourse and silence critical or independent voices that highlight the structural crisis Venezuela is going through, affecting the right of the population to be informed and to participate in the public debate.

## VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

The first semester of 2025 showed that the Venezuelan State has consolidated a model of political and social control based on structural and sustained repression of freedom of expression. With 302 violations documented by Un Mundo Sin Mordaza, it is confirmed that the restrictions are not isolated facts, but part of a systematic policy aimed at silencing dissidence, inhibiting citizen participation and consolidating a single discourse under the control of the central power.

The holding of the regional and legislative elections on May 25 marked a turning point in this period. In the days before and after the elections, at least 70 arbitrary arrests of citizens, activists and political figures were recorded

under unfounded accusations of terrorism and conspiracy. This use of the judicial and police apparatus as a tool for political punishment reinforces the authoritarian nature of the regime and the absence of minimum judicial guarantees.

In addition, cases of forced disappearances of short duration were documented, which aggravates the situation as it is a serious violation of human rights, recognized as an international crime under the Rome Statute. The concealment of the whereabouts of detained persons, even for short periods of time, not only violates the integrity of the victims, but also generates fear and uncertainty in the entire population, contributing to the paralyzing effect of the repression. At the same time, there was a sustained offensive against the media and press workers. Of the 18 cases registered in this category, 24 incidents were identified that included threats, harassment, physical and psychological aggression, intimidation and confiscation of equipment. Most of these acts were committed by state officials or actors linked to political power, confirming the institutionalized use of violence as a method to control the public narrative.

Repression also reached the traditional media in the interior of the country, with at least four cases of closure or confiscation of equipment documented in radio stations in the states of Portuguesa, Táchira and Bolívar. These actions directly affect the right of communities to stay informed and deepen the information disconnection between the center and the periphery, contributing to the isolation of the most vulnerable populations.



In the digital sphere, technological censorship continued to expand. There were 32 cases of TCP/IP blocking and 1 case of UDP blocking, mechanisms that prevent free access to information platforms, digital media and communication services. These technological measures, arbitrarily applied by Internet providers under non-transparent orders, restrict the space for action of independent journalism, civil society and citizens in general, configuring an increasingly closed digital environment.

The pattern of repression has extended beyond journalists and traditional actors. The voice of ordinary citizens, influencers, economists, students, artists and social activists who use social networks to express their opinions, protest or share information has also been criminalized. This reflects an expansion of the regime's objective: it is not only about silencing media, but also about controlling the entire public discourse, even in the personal and everyday sphere. Overall, the facts documented during this semester show that the Venezuelan State continues to execute a planned and structured political strategy to restrict the right to freedom of expression, silence dissidence and sustain itself in power through fear and communication control. This situation not only violates multiple international human rights treaties and standards, but also undermines democratic foundations, erodes the social fabric and progressively reduces spaces for participation and resistance.

In view of the above, the following recommendations are made to the Venezuelan State:

- Immediately cease arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances of citizens, activists, journalists and political opponents, guaranteeing their release and respect for due process, in accordance with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Guarantee the full exercise of freedom of expression, both in traditional media and in digital environments, refraining from applying any measure that may be necessary to prevent the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. - legal, administrative or de facto- that restrict the right to express opinion, inform and receive information without interference.
- Put an end to the use of the justice system as a tool for political persecution, stopping the criminalization of speech, the instrumentalization of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the arbitrary application of regulations such as the Anti-Hate Law.
- Investigate and punish civilian and military officials and actors linked to power who have participated in acts of threats, harassment, aggressions, raids or confiscations against journalists, media or citizens.

**68** CIDH. "Comunicado de prensa". Recuperado de: <https://bit.ly/2UvyLE0>

**69** Alerta Venezuela. "Venezuela se despidió del EPU debilitando la cooperación internacional". 6 de julio de 2022. Disponible en: <http://bitly.ws/z9Rs>

**70** Ibidem

- Stop digital blockades and restore access to media and information platforms, immediately eliminating restrictions based on TCP/IP, UDP protocols and other forms of technological censorship implemented without transparency or judicial control.
- Respect and protect the work of the media, especially in regions in the interior of the country, ceasing confiscations, forced closures and operational restrictions that affect the right of communities to be informed.
- Adopt urgent measures to guarantee the physical and digital security of journalists, human rights defenders and civil society organizations, publicly recognizing their work as essential to democratic life.
- Bring the Venezuelan legal framework in line with international standards of freedom of expression, reforming or repealing laws that allow censorship and limit the work of the media, NGOs and organized citizens.

**71** Ibidem RSF. “Clasificación mundial de la libertad de prensa 2025”. 3 de mayo de 2025. Recuperado de: <https://acortar.link/Z2Fgz6>

**72** Freedom House, 2025 Venezuela Country Report. 26 de febrero de 2025. Recuperado de:

**73** <https://acortar.link/ZV4TUO>

**74** Bloomberg. “Movistar de Telefónica sufre masiva filtración de datos en Venezuela, según ONG”. 30 de abril de 2025. Disponible en: <https://acortar.link/4DhJ0x>

**75** Dark Web Informer. “Alleged Sale of Sensitive Venezuela Citizen Documents”. 2 de mayo de 2025. Twitter. Disponible en: <https://acortar.link/VgUnqu>

