

URGENT ACTION

NGOS IN VENEZUELA AT CRITICAL RISK

On January 9, 2024, the National Assembly resumed consideration of a bill that seeks to restrict and potentially criminalize and close down non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Venezuela. This bill passed a preliminary vote on January 24, 2023, and its final passage into law may be imminent. If the bill is approved, all NGOs will have to comply with abusive measures or face criminal prosecution. These measures would violate the right to freedom of association, the right to privacy and others, putting NGOs and their beneficiaries at serious risk of criminal prosecution and reprisals. We emphatically urge the National Assembly to immediately put a stop to this bill and cease all attacks on civil society.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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

Dear Jorge Rodríguez,

It is deeply concerning that the Venezuelan National Assembly is again moving forward with the proposed Law on the Control, Regularization, Activity and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations against NGOs operating in the country.

This bill is yet another attempt to control, restrict and potentially criminally prosecute non-governmental organizations that make an indispensable contribution to Venezuelan society. The threat posed by this attempt is made even more serious by the backdrop of possible presidential elections this year.

If passed, this law would violate international human rights norms and standards, and the bill severely threatens the work of NGOs, humanitarian organizations and other members of Venezuelan civil society. It constitutes a shameful effort to curtail their vital work to support the country's most vulnerable people.

We emphatically reiterate our call for the National Assembly to immediately drop this bill and ensure an end to all efforts to attack, control, prosecute or censor civil society organizations that are working to protect the rights of all people in Venezuela, particularly those most in need.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The current bill, entitled Law on the Control, Regularization, Activities and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations, is another attempt to restrict and control civil society in Venezuela. The law's strict rules would require NGOs to submit donor lists and lists of their members and staff and their assets, as well as to register their financial transactions. Civil society organizations that fail to comply with registration requirements could be closed down and possibly face criminal prosecution. On January 24, 2023, this bill was considered in a first reading and was put to a vote in the National Assembly. It cleared the preliminary vote, and the bill will continue its path through the legislature unless the authorities halt its advance.

Previous attempts to control and attack civil society in Venezuela include Administrative Regulation No. 001-2021 of 2021 and the so-called International Cooperation Law of 2022. Amnesty International publicly condemned both initiatives, issuing Urgent Action 46/21 in response to the former and sending an open letter signed by more than 500 civil society organizations to Nicolás Maduro in response to the latter. The Venezuelan government amended Administrative Regulation No. 001 by issuing new regulations that repealed its most troubling elements, including the requirement to disclose NGO beneficiaries, the one-month deadline for submitting the information required by the regulation, and potential criminal liability in case of non-compliance. The National Assembly ultimately never deliberated or voted on the International Cooperation Law.

Venezuelan human rights defenders are at constant risk of harassment, attacks and detention. Javier Tarazona, a human rights defender, prisoner of conscience and director of the NGO Fundaredes, continues to be detained and prosecuted for defending human rights. We call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Nicolás Maduro's government has continually harassed, persecuted and censored activists and civil society organizations that are working to protect the rights of Venezuelans in the midst of a complex humanitarian emergency and profound human rights crisis that is pushing an unprecedented number of people to flee in search of safety and protection. As of December 2022, more than 7.1 million people had fled the country.

Since 2020, three reports by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have thoroughly documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial executions; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detentions; and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in the country since 2014. The reports have also exposed how the justice system serves as an instrument of the government's policy of repression, and they concluded that these grave human rights violations may constitute crimes against humanity.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL March 14, 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Venezuelan NGOs (they/them)

LINK TO FIRST UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/6379/2023/es/>