

New Research Report: “The Defense of Human Rights in Venezuela”

This report is the result of an assessment of the obstacles that civil society organizations are facing, as well as their resistance and resilience in their continued defense of human rights.

Civil society organizations in Venezuela have found themselves greatly weakened by the complex humanitarian emergency and the restriction of democratic spaces. For more than 17 years, the state has adopted a series of measures that have negatively affected the institution of civil society, including posing obstacles for these organizations to receive international funding. Defenders of human rights are forced to lead despite the limitations associated with their position, and do so in a context of vulnerability and persecution.

“Defending Human Rights in Venezuela: Challenges Facing Civil Society in Confronting the Closure of Democratic Spaces,” aims to amplify the voices of Venezuelan activists to the rest of the region, raise visibility of the precarious situation that they face and the strategies adopted to drive the movement and, ultimately, offer a series of recommendations to other regional actors that seek to support the human rights movement in Venezuela.

Research for this report was collected through semi-structured interviews of human rights defenders of 30 different organizations working at the national and regional level in seven cities across Venezuela. The diagnosis included a number of challenges and tensions facing organizations, as well as resilience strategies that they have used to overcome these difficulties.

Among the main barriers that prevent organizations from carrying out their work and achieving their planned goals are the attacks on personal and organizational security and integrity, the absence of protective institutions, and legislative and financial restrictions. The interviewed organizations also highlighted other indirect obstacles such as difficulties in accessing public services, weak organizational infrastructures, insufficient donor relations, and the financial situations of the organizations themselves.

With the goal of empowering the Venezuelan human rights movement, this report offers recommendations for actors outside of the country seeking to sustain these organizations in Venezuela. The main recommendations are:

- **Go from providing one-time aid to building lasting alliances:** With the goal of effectively contributing to the strengthening of these organizations, we recommend considering support for extended periods of time. One way to establish lasting alliances is to act as an “umbrella” organization by channeling projects and funding to organizations working on the ground.
- **Support small organizations with limited experience:** This would support the development of projects to strengthen small organizations’ capacities for planning and accountability. It is also worthwhile to flexibilize some donor requirements that may be difficult to fulfill in the Venezuelan context.
- **Encourage the exchange of researchers and work experiences:** Collaboration and direct assistance strategies increase the chance of positive outcomes for the movement.

- **Prioritize organizations located outside of Caracas:** Organizations operating in other regions of the country are doing tremendously important work, as the majority of human rights violations occur outside of the capital, and human rights defenders working there have unique experiences with these realities. Despite this, they at times find themselves isolated and without a platform to share these experiences.
- **Promote incentives:** Encourage the distribution of scholarships, awards, paid internships, individual contributions, etc. that help to establish safe spaces for work, reflection, and the development of skills.

It is our hope that this investigation will be a useful tool for all who seek to support the human rights movement in Venezuela.

If you would like to learn more about the challenges and opportunities facing civil society organizations in Venezuela, download the attached document.