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Experts urge Venezuela to comply with international law to prevent irreparable harm to victims of enforced disappearance



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GENEVA/WASHINGTON – Independent experts* today urged the Government of Venezuela to determine the fate and whereabouts of victims of enforced disappearance in the context of the presidential elections in July 2024, and during and after the presidential inauguration in January 2025.

“Faced with biased and dysfunctional domestic institutions, victims are increasingly turning to international mechanisms to uncover the truth about the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones, prevent any irreparable harm to their life and personal integrity and to seek redress,” the experts said.

They stressed that they had received repeated allegations from relatives, lawyers and civil society organisations seeking to learn the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones and clients that complaints and *habeas corpus* applications were not being processed, and sometimes not even accepted.

“The **increased use of enforced disappearance** as a weapon to silence members of the opposition, those perceived as such, pro-democracy activists and human rights defenders, is intended to have a chilling effect on society as a whole and is fuelled by widespread impunity and selective justice,” the experts said. They noted that previous allegations made to the Government describe the systematic use of so-called “**short-term**

enforced disappearances” since the pre-election process, which continue to take place in the country.

“State authorities who detain individuals and refuse to acknowledge that they are in custody or disclose their fate or whereabouts place them outside the protection of the law,” the experts said. “Such acts constitute an enforced disappearance regardless of the duration of the detention or concealment,” they underlined.

The independent experts urged the Government of Venezuela to comply with the precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), respond to the requests of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in accordance with its humanitarian mandate, provide information on the fate and whereabouts of persons currently forcibly disappeared by the State, and to sanction, prevent and eradicate this crime as a gross violation of human rights under international law.

The experts noted that the reports received disclose a widespread or systematic pattern of enforced disappearance, in the commission or concealment of which several Venezuelan authorities allegedly play a role, including the highest authorities in the Government, the Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN), the General Directorate of Military Counter-Intelligence (DGCIM), the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), the Bolivarian National Police (PNB), the Parachute Infantry Brigade, the State Police, the judiciary, the Public Defender’s Office, and the Attorney General’s Office, among others.

“Persons deprived of their liberty should be guaranteed the enjoyment of all fundamental legal safeguards,” the experts said, “including the right to communicate with and be visited by their relatives, lawyers or any other person of their choice, and to be brought before a competent judicial authority, within the statutory period, to determine the lawfulness of their detention.”

“If the person deprived of liberty is a foreigner, they have the right to communicate with their consular authorities,” they said.

The Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances is in contact with Venezuelan authorities about these issues.

*Experts: Gabriella Citroni (Chair-Rapporteur), Grażyna Baranowska (Vice-Chair) Aua Baldé, Ana Lorena Delgadillo Pérez and Mohammed Al-Obaidi, of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; and **The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)**.

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capacity by the OAS General Assembly and who do not represent their countries of origin or residence.

For further information and inquiries, please contact: Fuensanta Amorós fuensanta.amoroscascales@un.org or hrc-wg-eid@un.org.

For media inquiries about other UN independent experts, please contact Dharisha Indraguptha (ddharisha.indraguptha@un.org) and Maya Derouaz (maya.derouaz@un.org)

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