

grassroots campaign calling on the Governor to commute death row before leaving office in December 2024.

The EU Delegation to the US organised several briefings for Member States with civil society groups and administration officials on capital punishment, Guantánamo Bay detention facility, immigration developments, sentencing reform, arbitrary detention, antisemitism, US support for a tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine, and global democracy developments. The EU Delegation also met with numerous human rights defenders. In addition, the EU Delegation and Member States worked together to promote human rights through a variety of events including on the death penalty, press freedom, religious freedom, and LGBTI rights, among others.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained an open and productive dialogue with the US government on a wide range of human rights issues. This included, amongst others, coordinating closely on, the death penalty, migrant and asylum seekers' rights, further accountability for human rights violations in Ukraine and the promotion of human rights in multilateral fora. In April, the EU and US held their annual consultation on human rights in Brussels, which provided an opportunity to discuss domestic developments, and to explore opportunities for EU-US collaboration and synergies, while also conveying EU concerns on some aspects of US policy such as the continued use of the death penalty. In October, the EU-US Summit reaffirmed the joint commitment to defend the shared values of human rights, democracy and respect for the rule of law.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation to the US promoted the EU's human rights values by financially supporting a Europe and World Day against the Death Penalty event in conjunction with the French and Spanish Embassies, which featured an art exhibit by an exonerated death row inmate, and a musical performance that included an individual incarcerated on Ohio's death row. The EU Delegation also funded a dinner and panel discussion with the North Carolina Alternatives to the Death Penalty group during the annual death penalty outreach trip to North Carolina. Additionally, the EU Delegation financed an event on the occasion of Pride Month that featured a screening of the Belgian film "Lola by the Sea" and a panel discussion on challenges to LGBTI rights.

5. Multilateral context: The EU and the US strengthened coordination on UN affairs, particularly in response to Russia's illegal and unprovoked military aggression in Ukraine, including through a more systematic monitoring of key resolutions and coordinated efforts to promote and defend the UN Charter. The EU and US worked closely together at the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), especially in successfully promoting the election of Bulgaria and Albania to represent Eastern Europe, and ensuring Russia was unable to re-join the HRC.

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: For years, Venezuela has been enduring a deep political and socio-economic crisis, with a serious and worrying impact on the

human rights and humanitarian contexts. This multifaceted crisis has led to the largest migration wave in the history of the continent, with estimated 7.7 million Venezuelans having left the country by November 2023⁴⁸. In terms of civil and political rights, the government-led crackdown on opponents and civil society has quantitatively slowed down in 2023. However, targeted repression on civil society activists and key political figures, such as political disqualifications, arbitrary detentions and harassment continued throughout the year. There were also increasing restrictions to civic space, which limited the work of civil society organisations, as well as to fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of media (16 radio stations closed in 2013). Moreover, there was a widespread application of Constitutional Law against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance to criminalise and delegitimise the work of human rights defenders and journalists.

The beginning of 2023 was marked by the protests in demand for better salaries and working conditions, whilst the revival of the political agenda with the opposition primary elections of 2023 dominated the domestic agenda in the second half of the year. The landslide victory of Maria Corina Machado (Vente Venezuela) in the primaries of 22 October coincided with an intensification of repression against political opponents in the last quarter of the year. In parallel, the signature of two partial agreements between the government and the opposition on 17 October in Barbados was a milestone setting an electoral road map towards inclusive and competitive elections in 2024.

The climate of violence in border and mining areas continued throughout 2023, often controlled by illegal armed groups (dissident FARC and ELN), local gangs or military groups. NGOs report some 130 disappearances in these regions between January and September 2023. Human Rights Defenders continue denouncing episodes of violent attacks and harassment.

The rights of vulnerable groups are impacted in a differentiated manner by this multifaceted crisis. The NGO CEPAZ recorded 201 femicides between January and September 2023: 9.5% of the victims were girls under 11 years old, and 8.5% of them were between 12 and 17 years old. Independent NGOs denounce the widespread corruption within Venezuelan judicial system, which results in the widespread impunity of the perpetrators. LGBTI persons also face discrimination and a series of legal and social barriers that undermine their rights. However, on a positive note, the Supreme Court issued a decision lifting the ban on gay, lesbian and bisexual people to serve in the military.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Venezuelan civil society has a long tradition of activism, displaying large expertise on documentation and advocacy. Contributing to strengthening of their capacities is one of the key priorities guiding EU human rights action in Venezuela. The EU supports projects that contribute to reinforcing the resilience and capacity of civil society working on human rights such as capacity building for women organisations to participate in public affairs, protection of human rights defenders and human rights education for youth

The EU Delegation has been implementing since 2021 a nexus approach focussing on humanitarian aid, development and peace, by improving basic services, building resilience in the population and promoting dialogue at the community level the actions. The actions remain highly relevant and necessary, supporting the improvement of the living conditions

⁴⁸ R4V Platform: <https://www.r4v.info/es/home>.

and socio-economic rights of the beneficiary population with access and improvement of water and sanitation services and solid waste management.

The EU has continued its work on promoting transparent, inclusive, accountable, participatory, and representative decision-making for example with activities promoting the participation of civil society in the electoral process. The EU has supported fight against disinformation for example through CSO projects combining online fact-checking tools, and various educational resources for different audiences.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and its MS in Venezuela actively engage in public diplomacy to promote the EU's democratic and human rights values, prioritising the support to independent civil society and relevant stakeholders. On 13 November 2023, the Council decided exceptionally to extend its restrictive measures for six months only instead of one year, until 14 May 2024, in connection with the signature of the Barbados agreements, which were a necessary first step in Venezuela's return to the democratic path. The Venezuelan government and opposition agreed in Barbados to extend an invitation to the EU to observe the presidential elections in 2024. The EU expressed its readiness to consider any formal invitation by the Venezuelan authorities.

4. EU financial engagement: For the third consecutive year, the EU is the main donor to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Venezuela. EU support focuses on the Office's work with civil society and human rights defenders with EUR 3 million for the period 2022-2025 (nearly 60% of their overall funding). The office continues strengthening civil society organisations and working closely with journalists and human rights defenders, including through field missions, trainings and the regular implementation of a mechanism to follow up on cases and situations of concern.

5. Multilateral context: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which has a field presence in Venezuela since 2019, has published several reports on the human rights situation in Venezuela, the latest in June 2023⁴⁹. The report acknowledges the steady decrease in the number of gross human rights violations documented, including the threats and stigmatisation of civil society activists and other dissenting voices. Yet, these trends remain preoccupying. Other sources of concern for the High Commissioner were the restrictions on public information, as well as on freedoms of opinion and expression. The European Union supports as well all other human rights mechanisms on Venezuela such as the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission and the International Criminal Court (ICC) proceedings. The Venezuelan authorities signed in 2023 a Memorandum of Understanding with the ICC, which comprises the creation of field office of the ICC in Caracas.

In February 2023, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) participated in the government-led Social Dialogue Forum. This initiative is aimed at providing a space for union confederations, employers' organisations and government to discuss ILO Conventions and the criminalisation of union leaders and elections.

⁴⁹ See: https://www.civilisac.org/civilis/wp-content/uploads/A_HRC_53_54_unofficial-translation-es.pdf.