



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Venezuela – January to June 2023

30 June 2023

02 January 2023

Opposition parties vote to abolish Juan Guaidó's interim government

In two rounds of voting, the delegates of the Venezuelan opposition parties Primero Justicia (Justice First), Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) and Un Nuevo Tiempo (A New Era), with the exception of Guaidó's party Voluntad Popular (Popular Will), voted by a majority in favour of a bill to remove the interim government of Juan Guaidó and to set up a five-member commission to manage Venezuelan assets abroad, including the Citgo oil refinery, among others. In doing so, they approved the reform of the statute that is supposed to regulate the transition to democracy (Estatuto de Transición a la Democracia) with 79 votes in favour, 29 against and eight abstentions. The aim of this step by the opposition is to present a unified alternative to President Nicolás Maduro with a new strategy for the 2024 elections. According to the results of a study conducted by Andres Bello University in November 2022, only about six percent of Venezuelans planned to vote for Guaidó if he participated in primaries; other opposition leaders were more popular; many people in the country are also disappointed with the results of Guaidó's interim government, which many governments abroad have also stopped supporting in recent years.

Migration: 7.1 million people have left the country, 70 persons have died on migration routes

According to the opposition's representative on migration David Smolansky, at least 71 Venezuelan nationals died on migration routes in 2022, including 21 people in the Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama and 18 people on routes in Central America and Mexico, among others. The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, said that a total of 7.1 million people had fled Venezuela by December 2022. However, according to media reports, arrivals of Venezuelan nationals at the US southern border had recently slowed down as part of a reform of entry requirements, including the introduction of a humanitarian residence permit programme.

09 January 2023

Armando.info investigative series on disappearances, secret houses and torture

An investigative series published by the portal Armando.info in December 2022, based on 14 witness reports on disappearances, secret houses (casas clandestinas/casas de seguridad) and torture, confirms recent reports by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela as well as international and national NGOs. Secret houses, often located in residential areas in and around the Venezuelan capital, served as places outside the control of the judiciary, according to the interviewees. They reported that these places were where political opponents were repeatedly taken as part of enforced disappearances in order to obtain information through torture or inhumane treatment before they were officially handed over to the judicial authorities. They said such places had existed for about a decade, used in particular by the Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), however their use had increased since 2018. Moreover, some of these places, such as a farm in La Mariposa,

southwest of Caracas, had now become semi-official headquarters of the DGCIM; many of the buildings used had previously been occupied by criminal groups. According to witness reports, Cuban nationals and partially armed civilians, so-called colectivos, have also been involved in the acts of inhumane treatment in the respective centres. Family members of persons taken to these centres were reportedly also victims of reprisals occasionally during their disappearance or were themselves taken there in order to obtain information about the whereabouts of wanted opposition members. In the states of Carabobo, Cojedes and Táchira, there has allegedly been evidence of houses being used for this purpose. According to a 2022 report published by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, investigations rarely take place, and in fact it is only in individual cases that an investigation is carried out or someone is sentenced for such acts.

Report by Espaja.com (Transparencia Venezuela): restrictions on freedom of information, secrecy

In a report on restricted freedom of information and secrecy as a style of government (Opacidad en Venezuela: una forma de gobernar), the verification portal Espaja.com, a project supported by the NGO Transparencia Venezuela, notes that the government has increased the secrecy of official figures, especially since 2016. Although the Venezuelan Constitution (Articles 58, 141 and 143) guarantees freedom of information and access to public information, the withholding, censorship and lack of transparency of the latter have been common practice for at least eight years, according to the report. For example, epidemiological reports and mortality indices have not been published since 2016. The last population census dates back to 2011; budgets, balance sheets of the individual ministries as well as social and economic indicators are, in some cases, published only sporadically, making a realistic assessment of the socio-economic and humanitarian situation in the country difficult. The report said that although various NGOs tried to fill the information vacuum in different areas, their possibilities were often limited compared to state capacities. It also stated that access to and receipt of social benefits and certain application processes were sometimes not clearly ascertainable through published government information.

Opposition: election of a new leadership body, arrest warrants against participants

After the fragmented Venezuelan opposition voted to remove the so-called interim government of Juan Guaidó in the last week of December 2022 (cf. BN of 02.01.23), the body elected in 2015 and currently acting as a parallel parliament abroad appointed a new leadership team on 05.01.23, which is to set up a five-member commission to manage foreign assets. The three members of the new leadership team of the Primero Justicia (Justice First), Un Nuevo Tiempo (A New Era) and Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) parties are currently in exile. On 07.01.23, an arrest warrant was officially issued for the leaders of the opposition. President Dinorah Figuera and the two vice presidents, Marianela Fernández and Auristela Vásquez, are accused of, among other things, impersonating public officials, treason and "corruption offences in connection with the illegal establishment of a sham parliamentary commission that was set up to steal Venezuelan assets".

16 January 2023

Peaceful social protests are on the rise again

Since the beginning of the year, peaceful demonstrations by teaching, university and healthcare workers, supported by their unions and other state employees, for fairer pay and social benefits have been on the rise again in various parts of the country, but especially in the capital Caracas. Many are demanding a salary that allows them to cover the basic food basket, others the dollarisation of their wages. They are also criticising the large differences between wages in the private and public sectors. In addition, the official exchange rate of the national currency, the bolívar, has deteriorated considerably against the dollar in recent weeks, which is accompanied by a further loss of purchasing power of sections of the population paid in this currency.

On 12.01.23, according to media reports, employees of the largest state-owned steel company, Siderúrgica del Orinoco (Sidor), continued to demonstrate for better pay and working conditions. Union representatives reported dismissals and the media reported two arrests of three workers on 12.01.23. Neither report could be independently verified.

23 January 2023

Social protests

The peaceful protests in Venezuela (cf. BN v. 16.01.23) continue and in week 3 extended across several states of the country. According to the Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS) (Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict), there have already been more than 400 demonstrations in the first 18 days of 2023, the majority of which demand higher wages in the public sector. According to the OVCS, at least eight protests have been stopped by state security forces. Videos of so-called colectivos appeared on social media asking the demonstrators to refrain from further protests. Their authenticity could not be independently verified. According to the Venezuelan trade union network, the state secret service SEBIN also besieged the house of the general secretary of the Corpoelec workers' union in the state of Falcón on 22.01.23. The network sees this as a measure of intimidation to prevent further protests.

At least 18 people have been arrested for obstructing public transport or inciting hatred following protests by workers of various state-owned companies organised in the conglomerate Corporación Venezolana de Guayana (CVG) in Bolívar state. After negotiations were held with the regional government, it was agreed that no employees participating in protests would be dismissed, those arrested would be released and in return road blockades of the local highway would be lifted. The negotiation of salaries and better working conditions was postponed until planned dialogue meetings are held.

Backdrop

The income of persons employed in the public sector and the pensions of persons formerly employed in this sector are based on the minimum wage of 130 bolívars, which was last increased in March 2022. In addition to this basic salary, higher increments are paid for seniority, years of service or higher educational qualifications or bonuses. The latter, however, are paid irregularly or not necessarily on time. In March 2022, the minimum wage in bolívars was equivalent to about USD 30; due to devaluation, the current equivalent is about USD 7. Inflation at the end of 2022 was consistently over 300 %, according to various independent sources. Food prices have risen significantly, the economy has been quasi de-facto dollarised for several years, which is why wages in the private sector are often paid in dollars.

The government had paid a bonus of 580 bolívars (a little less than USD 30) on 15.08.23 for Teacher's Day. The protestors chanted in various videos on social media that they wanted a regular salary linked to the dollar or the basic food basket, not a one-off bonus. The equivalent value of the basic food basket for a family of five was USD 371 in December 2022, according to data provided by the Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas (OVF) (Venezuelan Observatory of Finance) and estimates from the Centro de Documentación y Análisis Social de la Federación de Maestros (Cendas-FVM) (Centre for Documentation and Social Analysis of the Teachers' Federation) were even higher, at USD 485.

Release of former Interior Minister Torres, departure for Spain

On 21.01.23, Major General and former Venezuelan Interior Minister Miguel Rodríguez Torres was released from prison after almost five years of imprisonment for conspiracy. While he was director of the SEBIN (Bolivarian intelligence service) under the Chávez government, he headed the Interior Ministry in 2014 under President Nicolás Maduro, when police security forces were accused of numerous human rights violations in the violent end to protests at the time, as well as acts of torture. After distancing himself from chavismo, he was arrested in 2018 for his "alleged involvement in actions to disturb peace and public tranquillity and in a plot to attack the unity of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB)" and charged with incitement to rebellion, among other things. He has always maintained his innocence. According to media reports, he left for Spain immediately upon his release, which was also due to mediation by former Spanish President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Some voices and media reports suggest that his departure was more likely an expulsion by the authorities.

30 January 2023

Report by several UN agencies on food and nutrition security in Latin America

According to a report (Regional Overview of Food and Nutrition Security in Latin America 2022) recently published by several UN agencies (WHO, FAO, UNICEF, IFAD and the WFP) on 18.01.23, the number of people suffering from

hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean increased to 56.6 million people in 2021 (+30% compared to 2019), of whom 34.2 million alone lived in South America. The latter figure had almost doubled between 2015 and 2021. Venezuela has the highest malnutrition rate in South America at almost 23%, followed by Ecuador (15.4%) and Peru (almost 14%). Only in Haiti (over 47%) is the percentage even higher in the entire region. The percentage for Venezuela means that about 6.5 million people in the country suffered from hunger in 2021. This figure had reportedly increased by 18.4 percentage points between 2013-2015 and 2019-2021. In addition, Venezuela recorded the fifth highest prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under the age of five in the region, at 4.1%. Almost 40% of the total population in Latin America and the Caribbean was affected by food insecurity in 2021, with women often disproportionately more affected than men. According to the FAO, these developments in the world's most unequal region are due to, among other things, the significant impact of the pandemic, as well as strong inflation in the wake of the Ukraine war and the high cost of healthy food. It says the average daily cost in the region as a whole is USD 3.89, which is higher than in other regions of the world, meaning that 131 million people cannot afford a healthy diet.

First vote on new NGO control law

On 24.01.23, the Vice-President of the ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV), Diosdado Cabello, introduced a draft law (Ley de fiscalización, regularización, actuación y financiamiento de las organizaciones no gubernamentales y afines) (Law of Supervision, Regularisation, Performance and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organisations) in parliament aimed at controlling the activities of NGOs, which was passed in a first vote. For final adoption, the law must be discussed article by article a second time before it can be finally adopted and enter into force through publication in the Official Gazette. Although the relevant document has not yet been officially published, a draft is circulating. This will reportedly introduce an accreditation obligation for NGOs as well as stronger regulation and disclosure of their funding. In addition, NGOs will reportedly no longer be allowed to carry out "political activities" or receive funding for them. However, this passage seems to be rather vaguely worded so that the interpretation of which activities fall within this scope will reportedly be up to the authorities. The law reportedly also prohibits CSOs from "promoting or allowing acts that threaten the national stability and national institution". NGOs that violate the new law could be sanctioned with fines of up to 200 Petro (about USD 12,000), among other penalties. Cabello stressed in the meeting that there was already a list of at least 62 politically active NGOs that were in the service of foreign governments, aiming to destabilise Venezuela. Some NGOs, in their criticism of the planned law, were already drawing comparisons with a corresponding Nicaraguan law, on the basis of which more than 3,000 NGOs have had their legal status revoked since its introduction and which is accompanied by similar rhetoric. A first similar Venezuelan bill (Ley de Cooperación Internacional) (Law governing International Cooperation) from 2022 has not yet been discussed and passed in plenary after considerable national and international criticism. Numerous national and international NGOs criticise the current bill as a means of criminalising the work of NGOs and fear their criminal prosecution as well as the closure of corresponding organisations, which play an important role, particularly in alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the country.

06 February 2023

Visit from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, visited Venezuela from 26.02.23 to 28.02.23 at the invitation of the government and held talks with government and opposition representatives as well as numerous NGO workers, human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations. At the final press conference, as well as in direct talks held with government representatives, he said he had called for the implementation of reforms in the justice system and the release of arbitrarily detained persons, and had addressed issues such as prison conditions. He also said at the press conference that extrajudicial killings continue to occur in the country and that people had reported torture in detention to him. In this context, he called for a comprehensive review and prosecution of such crimes.

He also asked the government to review the planned law on the regulation of non-governmental organisations (cf. BN of 30.01.23) and to ensure that it does not restrict civil society's freedom of action. He also reported that numerous NGOs had discussed socio-economic problems and the difficult humanitarian situation in the country at meetings he attended. According to UN figures, about 7 million people in the country are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. In this context, Türk also stressed that despite pre-existing economic problems, it was

clear that "the sectorial sanctions imposed since August 2017 have exacerbated the economic crisis and hindered human rights". He also called for continued dialogue between government and opposition representatives, for which he assured continued UN support.

20 February 2023

Annual report published by the NGO Foro Penal (Penal Forum): review of arrests for political reasons in 2022

According to the 2022 annual report published by the NGO Foro Penal (Penal Forum), a total of 26 people were arrested for political reasons last year, bringing the total number of people held in politically motivated arbitrary detention at the end of the year to 274. The report said that 87 of those detained for political reasons had already been detained for more than three years without a verdict. It stated that the number of arrests for political reasons in 2022 was highest in June (11), followed by July (six); Caracas (13) was the place with the most arrests during the year. Of the 26 persons arrested, 13 were accused of conspiracy and nine were arrested in connection with demonstrations.

Report published by the NGO FundaRedes: review of violence in six border states in January 2023

According to the NGO FundaRedes, a total of 57 persons were killed in six border states (Zulia, Bolívar, Táchira, Amazonas, Falcón and Apure) in January 2023. Most of the cases occurred in the state of Zulia on the border with Colombia, where 30 people have been killed and 13 armed clashes have erupted. The state of Bolívar on the border with Brazil came second with 16 homicides and four armed confrontations.

27 February 2023

Discussion on disinformation campaigns using artificial intelligence in various media

In calendar week 08, various media reported on disinformation campaigns, especially regarding the economic situation in Venezuela, using artificial intelligence. The Spanish newspaper El País, for example, reported on the use of various avatars based on the software Synthesia as alleged television presenters. In several videos of the presumably fictitious news agency House of News live streamed on a YouTube account, which has only existed since 26.01.23, these alleged media professionals reported on a supposed economic recovery in Venezuela, citing unsubstantiated figures and without sources. Several media outlets and NGOs accuse the Venezuelan government of being the originator of corresponding disinformation campaigns and fake news and of using them to spread a pro-government narrative. The videos in question went viral on social media, including Tik Tok, and were also broadcast on the state television station Venezolana de Televisión.

OVP press release: detention conditions in Ciudad Bolívar prison; payments to so-called pranes

According to a press release issued by the NGO Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP), more than 400 prisoners held at the prison Internado Judicial de Ciudad Bolívar, also known as Vista Hermosa, are victims of reprisals because they are unable to pay required weekly levies to prisoners who operate internally as prison bosses (so called pranes). Such payments reportedly amount to about USD 20 per week. Non-payment reportedly results in them being deprived of sleeping places, visits or food brought by relatives.

06 March 2023

Threats following book publication

At least eight relatives of the investigative journalist Ronna Rísquez have been threatened following the publication and presentation of her book on the criminal organisation Tren de Aragua (Aragua Train) in Colombia. Tren de Aragua is a criminal group that was founded in the Venezuelan prison Tocarón and has now spread across much of Latin America. The group's organised crime activities include human trafficking, arms and drug trafficking, but also extortion and kidnapping.

Injuries and one death in armed robberies in Maracaibo

In calendar weeks 07 and 08, several robberies of shops and shopkeepers were reported in Maracaibo. On 24.02.23, masked individuals allegedly threw an explosive device, which did not detonate, at a shop. Armed persons had

launched a firearms attack on a supermarket and a butcher's shop on 18.02.23, killing one person and wounding several others. The police investigation unit CICPC has launched investigations. On 28.02.23, Attorney General Tarek William Saab confirmed that three suspects had been arrested in connection with the attack on the butcher's shop and with their suspected links to extortion offences by criminal groups.

20 March 2023

Economic situation: inflation, loss of purchasing power, public administration wages

According to the independent Venezuelan Financial Observatory (OVF), the monthly inflation rate was 39.4% in January 2023 and 20.2% in February 2023. The minimum income of 130 bolivars has not been increased since March 2022, but its equivalent in USD has since fallen from almost USD 30 to USD 5.40 due to devaluation, significantly reducing people's purchasing power in a largely de facto dollarised economy. According to official figures quoted in media reports, around 5.5 million public sector employees and five million pensioners earn the minimum wage or a multiple thereof. However, according to the salary scales of the Ministry of Education (MPPE), as of January 2023, even the equivalent of a teacher's salary based on a 40-hour contract at the highest salary level VI, for instance, was only about USD 24. In comparison, the equivalent of the basic food basket for a family of five was about USD 400, according to various organisations. In February 2023, almost 90% of the 762 registered protests in the country took place for economic, social, cultural and environmental rights (DESCA). The majority of these protests were held by teachers, healthcare workers, pensioners and other state employees demanding fairer wages and working conditions. Many of these people say they have other, informal jobs in addition to official employment or have to rely on other sources of income, such as remittances from relatives, to support themselves.

27 March 2023

Interactive dialogue on Venezuela at the UN Human Rights Council and oral update by the FFMV

On 21.03.23, a meeting on Venezuela was held at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, where the High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk again reported on his visit to the country in January 2023. He once again called for the release of arbitrarily detained persons and the lifting of sectoral sanctions against Venezuela, which he said had exacerbated pre-existing problems in the country, making life considerably more difficult for local people. According to UN figures, around seven million people in the country still need humanitarian aid. In addition, Türk sees significant human rights problems persisting in various areas, including freedom of expression and freedom of the press, although he welcomed government promises of reform in the areas of justice and security. He said there had also been government commitments in the area of improving the protection of LGBTIQ rights and investigating offences against these groups of people.

On 22.03.23, members of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela (FFMV) gave an oral update to the UN Human Rights Council on the current situation. They said arbitrary arrests for political reasons continue to occur in Venezuela, and procedural guarantees continue to be violated. In addition, attacks on and repression of human rights defenders, media professionals, trade union representatives and political leaders have increased since 2019, as well as repression of protest leaders and participants in the context of the recent social protests. Besides that, the speakers criticised the proposed draft law on the work of NGOs and feared that if it is finally passed in the second reading, the work of such organisations in the country will be significantly restricted. In addition, they made reference to the problematic situation in the Orinoco Mining Belt and the continuing high number of homicides in connection with state security operations. They said the latter gave cause for concern that extrajudicial killings may exist as part of a state policy to combat crime.

Solidarity conference in Brussels: humanitarian aid for Venezuela

According to a press release issued on 17.03.23 at the 2023 International Solidarity Conference, the European Commission will provide more than EUR 75 million and Canada more than CAD 58.5 million in humanitarian aid funding to people in Venezuela and migrants and refugees in host countries, mainly to be used in the areas of healthcare, food aid, shelter and education, among others. According to media reports, the United States also pledged USD 171 million in aid, of which USD 84 million is intended to directly benefit people in the country through humanitarian assistance, according to USAID.

Same-sex relations within the armed forces decriminalised by court ruling

On 17.03.23, the Supreme Court annulled Article 565 of the Military Justice Code, which previously criminalised same-sex relations within the armed forces. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, explicitly welcomed this step in his speech to the UN Human Rights Council on 21.03.23.

Numerous arrests in connection with corruption investigations; Oil Minister resigns

Numerous high-ranking political and judicial officials and functionaries as well as Petroleum of Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) employees have been arrested as part of a comprehensive corruption investigation surrounding the state oil company PDVSA. According to the Attorney General, the total number of people arrested was 21 as of 25.03.23, and 11 more arrest warrants had been issued. Those arrested were reportedly accused of appropriation of public assets, money laundering, influence peddling and criminal association; they may also be charged with high treason. In addition, on 20.03.23, the State Oil Minister and Nicolás Maduro ally Tareck El Aissami resigned. According to reports by Reuters based on internal documents it had seen, PDVSA receivables of more than USD21 billion have been outstanding since 2020, including an estimated USD3.6 billion that may have been irretrievably lost due to unaccounted-for exported cargoes, and numerous oil tankers that left the country last year without official payment. Among those arrested are the MP and former higher education minister Hugbel Roa, who was stripped of parliamentary immunity on 21.03.23, as well as the head of Venezuela's cryptocurrency regulator Joselit Ramírez – both allegedly close allies El Aissami. He is alleged to be a key player in circumventing economic sanctions by selling oil via middlemen on the black market. According to experts, these transactions have also become an important source of finance for corrupt intermediaries and officials, and as a result, part of the revenues have been diverted and have not appeared in the PDVSA's coffers. Some media reports, referring to the arrests, also speculate about signs of possible tensions within the power apparatus and a resulting political purge.

03 April 2023

Gang leader El Conejo killed in security operation, Mayor of Las Tejerías arrested

Interior Minister Ceballos has informed that already on 23.03.23, gang leader Carlos Enrique Gómez Rodríguez alias El Conejo was killed in Irapa, Sucre state, in an operation carried out by the state security forces. El Conejo was the leader of a criminal group in Las Tejerías in Aragua state, who was responsible for extortion, murder and kidnappings in the area. InSight Crime reports that, in addition, a foundation run by El Conejo named Pies Delcalzos Fundación also distributed state-subsidised CLAP food bags and organised social activities for young people, which sometimes also served recruitment purposes. However, El Conejo's relations with the local mayor of the municipality of Santos Michelena (Las Tejerías), Pedro Hernández (PSUV), allowed him to exert considerable influence in the municipality with impunity. As part of the anti-corruption investigation, Hernández was also arrested on 18.03.23 for alleged corruption and links to El Conejo's gang.

Corruption: Investigations against CVG and Sidor, further arrests

Attorney General Saab informed on 02.04.23 that nine people have been arrested in another anti-corruption operation, this time in connection with the state-owned metals conglomerate Corporación Venezolana de Guayana (CVG), including the subsidiary of the steel producer Sidor. Among the arrested are the presidents of the two companies CVG and Sidor. According to official information provided on 03.04.23, this brings to 44 the total number of state officials and businessmen arrested since 17.03.23 as part of a major anti-corruption operation involving investigations into several state-owned enterprises.

Increasing fuel shortages in the interior of the country

In recent weeks, there have been increasing media reports of new fuel supply problems in the country away from the major cities such as Caracas, Maracaibo or Valencia. Apparently, rural and agricultural areas in the interior of the country are particularly affected. Long queues at petrol stations with considerable waiting times have been reported, particularly in some areas of the federal states of Mérida, Táchira and Zulia as well as Bolívar and the island of Margarita.

24 April 2023

Update on corruption investigation, suspected suicide of a detainee

According to the Attorney General's Office, a total of 61 people have been arrested as of 19.04.23 in connection with the ongoing corruption investigations in several state-owned companies (cf. BN of 27.03.23 and 03.04.23). In this context, the president of the company Cartones de Venezuela, Leoner Azuaje Urrea, was arrested on 14.04.23. After an initial hearing, he died in custody on 20.04.23. According to the Attorney General's Office, he took his own life in the El Helicoide prison of the SEBIN secret service.

08 May 2023

Report on alleged extrajudicial killings in police and military operations 2022

The Lupa por la Vida project of the two NGOs Centro Gumilla and Provea has documented more than 820 cases of alleged extrajudicial killings in police and military operations in 2022. Of those killed, nearly 98 percent were men; the proportion of women had doubled, albeit at a very low level. 66 percent of those killed were young men aged between 18 and 30 from poorer, densely populated neighbourhoods (known as zonas populares). The National Police (PNB), the Special Investigation Unit Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas (CICPC) and the Armed Forces (FANB, 129) were responsible for the majority of deaths, accounting for 196, 142, and 129 homicides, respectively. Various state police units accounted for 193 homicides, with the Carabobo and Zulia police units involved in 49 and 41 cases, respectively. There are still no official figures for the number of deaths that occurred during security operations.

22 May 2023

Violent crimes in border areas between 2019 and 2022

Data from the NGO FundaRedes on violence in the border areas indicate that between 2019 and 2022, nearly 4,400 people were murdered or became victims of extrajudicial killings by non-state armed groups or state security forces in the states of Amazonas, Bolívar, Falcón, Apure, Zulia and Táchira. In addition, more than 940 people disappeared and at least 35 people were arbitrarily detained, among them the director of FundaRedes, Javier Tarazona, in 2021.

12 June 2023

Announcement: Opening of an International Criminal Court Office in Venezuela

On 09.06.23, Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan announced the opening of a technical assistance office of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Venezuela. In particular, ICC staff will provide expertise on judicial reforms and assist the Venezuelan authorities in their implementation. In November 2021, the ICC had formally opened an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed by the Venezuelan state.

19 June 2023

Two Sidor union leaders arrested for demonstrating

On 11.06.23, two trade union leaders from the state-owned steel company Siderúrgicas del Orinoco (Sidor) in the state of Bolívar were arrested by officers from the military intelligence DGCIM for protesting to demand better working conditions and higher wages during protests. A third detainee arrested was released a few hours after his arrest. Since then, protests have continued in different parts of the country. Several hundred workers are reported to have been on strike since 07.06.23.

Resignation of eight members of the Supreme Electoral Council, replacement of the body

On 15.06.23, the president of the Supreme Electoral Council (CNE), Pedro Calzadilla, resigned along with seven other pro-government members of the body. Although two members close to the opposition did not resign, the entire body will now be replaced following a decision by parliament. In this context, Human Rights Watch and others have expressed concern that the new composition of the body, which for the first time included some opposition members, may be less balanced and could affect the opposition's internal primaries planned for October

2023 for the presidential elections to be held in 2024. For these elections, the moderate part of the opposition in particular had requested logistical support from the CNE.

26 June 2023

Deaths in violent clashes in border areas

The NGO FundaRedes stated on 21.06.23 that in the first five months of 2023 it had registered more than 85 violent clashes between non-state armed groups and various units of the state security forces at national or local level. At least 119 people were reportedly killed in the states of Amazonas, Apure, Bolívar, Falcón, Táchira and Zulia, covered by the study. Almost half of all security incidents (40) and persons killed (54) were recorded in the state of Zulia.

Freedom of assembly and association: demonstrations in May 2023

The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS) registered more than 600 protests in May 2023, of which more than 85 percent were for more economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights. After more than a quarter, protests mainly related to the demand for better salaries and working conditions. Protests are also continuing over restrictions on basic state services such as electricity, water and gas. In total, OVCS recorded the suppression of 14 demonstrations by state security forces.

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
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