

VENEZUELA UNLAWFUL DETENTION

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10 things you need to know about Venezuela's human rights crisis

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The human rights crisis that has engulfed Venezuela for the past few years has shattered the lives of millions of people. Here's what you need to know:

1 - Mass protests

Much of the current unrest in Venezuela can be traced back to 29 March 2017, when the Supreme Court of Justice - backed by President Nicolás Maduro - moved to take over the National Assembly, where the opposition holds a majority. This triggered mass protests from April to July that were repressed by the Maduro administration.

In 2018 there were a record-breaking 12,715 protests across the country, according to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict. These have [continued in 2019](#) after President of the

National Assembly Juan Guaidó called for mass demonstrations against Maduro. Between 21 and 25 January, there were 1,023 protests in the country.

2 - Excessive use of force

Between April and July 2017, more than 120 people were killed, around 1,958 were injured and more than 5,000 were detained amid mass protests. **Amnesty's 2017** report '[Nights of Terror](#)' revealed how Venezuelan security forces and government-sponsored civilian armed groups have violently broken into people's homes as a way of intimidating them against taking part in demonstrations or any other form of protest.

From 21 to 25 January, at least 41 people died in circumstances linked to mass protests, all from gunshot wounds. More than 900 people were arbitrarily detained, including 770 arbitrary arrests reported on 23 January. Amnesty International documented two cases of people who died, and one who was severely injured, due to excessive use of force by the police and military corps.

3 - A policy of repression

State authorities have undertaken a systematic policy of repression throughout the crisis, but recent patterns suggest this is intensifying.

[Recent Amnesty International research](#) showed that Venezuelan security forces under the command of Maduro carried out selective extrajudicial executions as its policy of repression expanded. Impoverished areas of Caracas and other parts of the country were particularly affected, with victims later presented as "criminals" killed in clashes with the authorities.

Of the 41 victims killed in the context of protests in early 2019, Amnesty International documented six extrajudicial executions by state-backed security forces as well as excessive use of force by authorities under the command of Nicolás Maduro.

In the 2018 report '[This is no way to live](#)', Amnesty revealed how security forces were using lethal force with intent to kill against the most vulnerable and socially excluded people in the country under the pretext of "fighting criminality".

4 - Children among detained

State authorities have used the justice system to illegally harass those who think differently. According to the Venezuelan organization Foro Penal, 988 people were arbitrarily detained between 21 and 31 January 2019. Among those detained were 137 children and adolescents, of whom 10 are still in detention. There have also been allegations of torture and other ill-treatment

of detainees. As of 31 January 2019, Foro Penal estimated the number of people detained for political reasons was 942. Although many have since been released, most are facing trial.

5 - Civilians tried in military courts

Arrested protesters have frequently been tried in military courts, which is against international law. Those prosecuted have faced charges such as “association with intent to incite rebellion” and “attacking a sentinel”, which are specifically designed for military personnel. It is yet further evidence of the authorities’ determination to silence dissent. According to Foro Penal, 817 people were tried in military courts between April 2017 and January 2019.

6 - Three million refugees and migrants

It is estimated that more than three million people have fled Venezuela since 2015, equivalent to 10% of the population, according to UN figures. The majority have sought refuge in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Most have cited the denial of their rights to health and food as their main reason for leaving. In other words, they are fleeing for their lives. Amnesty International has [urged governments across Latin America and the Caribbean](#) to give Venezuelan refugees access to the asylum application processes in their countries.

7 - Crackdown on free speech

There have been numerous reports of violations of the right to freedom of expression, including the arbitrary detention and/or deportation of at least 19 media workers, both nationals and non-nationals. In January 2019, at least [11 journalists were detained](#) in a single week, and many of them were expelled or deported from Venezuela, including Jorge Ramos and his team from the TV network Univision. Censorship and orders of closure of radio stations are widespread. The government shut down 50 media outlets in 2017.

8 - Economic meltdown

Inflation in Venezuela stood at a staggering 1,698,488% in 2018, according to the National Assembly. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that in 2019, the annual inflation rate will reach 10,000,000%. Meanwhile, the official minimum wage in Venezuela is US\$6 a month – and this is the income of a large part of the population. The inevitable outcome is that many people cannot afford basic goods.

Shortages of basic supplies such as [food and medicine](#) have left millions of Venezuelans facing alarming living conditions which are getting worse every day. Measures adopted by the state authorities have hit wages and workers’ rights. Up until 2013, the Venezuelan authorities had

made great progress in terms of economic and social rights, but this trend has been emphatically in reverse in recent years.

9 - Government in denial

Nicolás Maduro has repeatedly denied that the country is experiencing a human rights crisis. More damaging still, he has refused to recognize the shortages of food and medicines. The few public official statistics on the welfare of the population are contradicted by the reports of independent bodies.

Because the authorities have denied these shortages, they have not accepted the international humanitarian assistance that has been repeatedly offered. This has had a catastrophic impact, especially on the most vulnerable.

10 - Damaging US sanctions

On 28 January, the US government announced new measures that prevent the Venezuelan state oil company from exporting crude oil to the USA while stopping US suppliers selling the products that Venezuela needs to process its heavy crude oil. Given that the Venezuelan economy is heavily dependent on oil exports and that the USA is one of Venezuela's main trading partners, these measures are likely to make life even harder for people living in the country.

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