

[Venezuela: End reprisals against those cooperating with the Inter-American Commission](#)

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Venezuela must cease intimidating and threatening human rights defenders who expose human rights abuses and seek justice through the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, ISHR said today.



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(Washington DC) - Venezuela must cease intimidating and threatening human rights defenders who expose human rights abuses and seek justice through the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the International Service for Human Rights today.

The call came as the Inter-American Commission itself expressed alarm at reprisals against Venezuelan human rights defenders participating earlier this week in human rights hearings at the Commission's 154th Session.

[In a press release issued on 20 March](#), the Commission highlighted cases of individuals 'singled out, intimidated, and discredited' in advance of and following their visit to Washington DC for Commission hearings, calling such reprisals 'absolutely unacceptable'.

'We are pleased that the Inter-American Commission has responded swiftly and categorically to denounce intimidation against those that cooperate with the body,' said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw.

On 18 March, the names, date and time of arrival and departure of seven human rights defenders were listed on the website of the TV programme 'Con el Mazo Dando', hosted by the President of the National Assembly Diosado Cabello and run on State channel VTV. The webpiece is entitled, [Marco Antonio Ponce \(OVC\) Heads List of NGOs Traveling to Washington DC and Miami to Conspire against the Government of Venezuela.](#) Several of the defenders had been mentioned on the same programme on 11 February, with their photos published on the programme's website.

The defenders referred to in these webpieces and on Radio Sur TV include Marco Antonio Ponce of the Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVC), Rafael Uzcátegui of the Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos (PROVEA), Ligia Bolívar of the Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB), Carlos Nietos of Una Ventana para la Libertad, Rocío San Miguel of Control Ciudadano, Carlos Correa of Espacio Público, Liliana Ortega of COFAVIC, Aurelio Fernández Cochenzo of Transparencia Venezuela, and Feliciano Reina of CODEVIDA.

'We are deeply concerned to hear of these acts against Venezuelan defenders exercising their right to participate at the Inter-American Commission session. These include defenders with whom ISHR works

closely and who are forced to look to human rights mechanisms outside the country for redress and to hold the State to account,' Ms Openshaw said.

The Commission followed up on its press statement by issuing precautionary measures - the international law equivalent of a protective injunction - for one of those singled out by the programme, 'Con el Mazo Dando', Marco Antonio Ponce. The Commission noted that the precautionary measures were being issued due to 'ongoing acts of harassment by Venezuelan State officials' against Mr Ponce, who information suggests is 'in a grave and urgent situation.' Precautionary measures are issued by the Commission in 'serious and urgent situations presenting a risk of irreparable harm to persons'.

Another of those mentioned in the articles, Humberto Prado of the Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP), is already subject to provisional measures by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as a result of ongoing threats to his security.

'We call on Venezuela to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all those that have been singled out by these State-run media outlets in a bid to stigmatise and discredit them, and to comply fully with the precautionary measures issued in relation to Mr Ponce,' said Ms Openshaw.

This week's reprisals come in a context of mounting harassment and stigmatisation of human rights defenders by State-run media outlets in the country. In December of last year, Mr Caballo made similar statements regarding human rights defenders on his weekly television show.

In addition, Venezuela has made inflammatory statements regarding civil society actors in past Commission sessions which the [Inter-American Commissioners have been swift to decry](#). The Chair of the Commission, Tracey Robinson, has issued frequent reminders to States during public sessions of the Commission's absolute repudiation of reprisals against those cooperating with the mechanism. However, today's press statement and issuance of precautionary measures is a step up in the Commission's response to reprisals.

In May 2014 the Organisation of American States adopted a [significant resolution regarding the protection of human rights defenders](#) in which they registered both their support for human rights defenders' work at national and regional levels, and resolved to condemn actions that 'may prevent or hinder, whether directly or indirectly, the work of human rights defenders in the Americas.'

'The Organisation of American States must be clear in condemning these recent reprisals against Venezuelan activists and reassert in the strongest terms the rights of individuals to engage with human rights bodies,' said Ms Openshaw. 'Cooperating with human rights systems - whether to provide information, expose violations or seek justice - is a right for each and every individual that must be defended by all member States. Venezuela has shown little respect for the human rights mechanisms in recent times, as evidenced through its withdrawal from the American Convention on Human Rights in September 2013, but attacking a human rights defender cooperating with a human rights body is a grave provocation tantamount to attacking the human rights system itself.'

'As the current session of the UN Human Rights Council enters its final week we call on States to categorically denounce reprisals and demand that membership of the Council - as in the case of Venezuela - require the highest standard in the promotion of human rights,' Ms Openshaw concluded.