

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing
on

Human Rights in Venezuela: Status and Opportunity

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STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Submitted by:

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Co-Chairs and Members of the Commission,

My name is Luz Mely Reyes, an independent Venezuelan journalist, co-founder and director of the digital outlet Efecto Cocuyo. I submit this testimony as a journalist in exile in the United States¹ with the purpose of further elucidating the situation of press, expression, and association freedoms in Venezuela. This testimony seeks to demonstrate how the Venezuelan State, even after January 3, 2026, maintains rigid social and political control through a systematic policy of censorship and criminalization of critical thought in the country.

1. Apparent normalization and continuity of repression

Although an apparent easing of pressure on the press has been observed since January 3, human rights organizations agree that these are merely cosmetic gestures. This narrative of normalization lacks institutional grounding: no structural reforms have been implemented to guarantee the free exercise of journalism.

On the contrary, a punitive legal framework designed to persecute dissent persists. Notable among these are:

¹ U.N. Human Rights Council, The State Apparatus, Repression Mechanisms and Restrictions on Civic and Democratic Space: Detailed Findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/54/CRP.8, paras. 918–923 (18 Sept. 2023).

- The Hate Law (Ley contra el Odio), used to imprison citizens for expressing opinions, even via WhatsApp, the main channel for exchanging information in a country where the media are censored.
- The Law on Non-Governmental Organizations, which criminalizes freedom of association and places those who defend fundamental rights in a position of extreme vulnerability.

2. Digital censorship and exclusion of broadcast media

Records from IPYS Venezuela and VE Sin Filtro confirm that at least 43 national and international media outlets, including Efecto Cocuyo and El Pitazo, remain digitally blocked within national territory.

These blocks are carried out under direct instructions from Conatel through the main internet service providers (Cantv, Movistar, Digitel, Inter, and NetUno). The censorship techniques used include:

- DNS filtering,
- interference with HTTP and HTTPS protocols,
- deliberate degradation of traffic to independent media outlets.

This censorship ecosystem constitutes a direct violation of the right to access information and creates a state of opacity that endangers public safety and a transition to democratic governance.

The population is forced to resort to VPNs, costly tools that require digital literacy, in a country with unstable electricity and internet service. This raises the cost of access to vital information, as occurred after the deadly and destructive earthquakes of June 24, and fuels dynamics of disinformation that seriously affect public awareness, trust, and cohesion.

In addition, IPYS reports that since 2010 at least 14 international television channels have been removed from the programming of subscription service providers. Among these outlets is CNN en Español.

3. Persecution, criminalization, and judicial harassment

Venezuela's justice system has been instrumentalized as a mechanism of punishment against journalists and human rights defenders. There is a recurring pattern of:

- judicial harassment,
- arbitrary detentions,
- trials without due process guarantees,
- prolonged precautionary measures that function as forms of psychological torture and also impact the finances of those subjected to these actions.

Between January and March 2026, 26 press workers were released from prison. However, as of July 2026, six of them remain without full freedom, according to the National Union of Press Workers (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa):

- Carlos Correa
- Carlos Julio Rojas
- Rory Branker
- Jonathan Carrillo
- Luis López
- Gabriel González

The impact of these measures is twofold. In the case of Carlos Correa, director of Espacio Público, the restriction of his rights affects not only his life but also the work defending freedom of expression that he has carried out for more than 30 years.

In the case of Rory Branker, who spent a year in prison without access to family visits or legal assistance, his own testimony, published on the social media platform X on July 9, 2026, reveals the extent of the harm: "Going to report to the courts is, for me, a trip to prison; it means encountering my jailers and their contempt for human dignity. Forcing me to go every month is how the regime prolongs its torture and makes clear its persistence in destroying my life, bit by bit. Let no one think that precautionary measures are better than being in a jail cell. THEY ARE NOT."

A report by Espacio Público (June 2026) documents that journalists, media outlets, and citizens were intimidated even amid the national emergency caused by the two earthquakes that struck the northern coastal region.

The situation of these political prisoners demonstrates that there is no judicial independence to protect freedom of the press. Official rhetoric not only revictimizes them but also encourages further attacks against those who remain in the field of journalism.

4. A call to this commission

I conclude this testimony by formally requesting that this commission maintain and strengthen international scrutiny of Venezuela. I urge the honorable members of this commission to support the call for full freedom for journalists, the repeal of the Hate Law and other legal instruments that penalize freedom of expression and freedom of association, the lifting of all digital blocks, and to ensure the guaranteed return of exiled journalists without fear of reprisal.

Venezuela's transition to democracy indispensably requires a truly free press.