



CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOURTH CYCLE OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF VENEZUELA

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REPORT ON THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION SITUATION IN VENEZUELA

I. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report is a joint submission to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Venezuela. It has been prepared by a coalition of civil society organisations: Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Espacio Público, the Press and Society Institute of Venezuela (IPYSVE), PEN International (submitting organisation), PEN Venezuela, and Reporters Without Borders (RSF). It provides verified, up-to-date, and disaggregated information on violations of the right to freedom of expression in the country, specifically covering the period from 2022 to 2026.
2. During the third cycle of Venezuela's Universal Periodic Review, held in January 2022 during the 40th session of the UPR Working Group, the Venezuelan State received a total of 328 recommendations from other States. Of these, Venezuela accepted 221 recommendations and noted or did not support 107.¹ Among the recommendations accepted were those relating to strengthening guarantees for the full exercise of freedom of expression and the right to information, including respect for and protection of the work carried out by journalists.
3. However, rather than implementing these recommendations, the Venezuelan State has intensified its curtailment of the right to freedom of expression in the country, including a systematic policy of attacks against the independent press, as demonstrated by the evidence compiled in this report.

II. CONTEXT

4. During the period under review, Venezuela further consolidated a restrictive legal and political framework that severely limits the exercise of fundamental rights. In practice, this has translated into persistent patterns of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, judicial harassment, censorship and self-censorship. National and international organisations have documented the imprisonment of journalists, restrictions on access to public information, the blocking of media outlets and digital platforms, as well as surveillance and intimidation practices affecting journalists, artists, writers and academics alike.
5. The consequences of these policies extend beyond journalism and have profoundly affected the country's civic and cultural space. Self-censorship has become widespread, driven by fear of reprisals, while the forced exile of journalists, artists and intellectuals continues to weaken public debate and the diversity of voices. Taken together, these factors create an environment in which legal restrictions, repression and structural crises reinforce one another, limiting the effective enjoyment of a wide range of human rights.

III. RESTRICTIVE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

6. In Venezuela, over at least the past two decades, the consolidation of a restrictive legal framework has dramatically curtailed the exercise of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly,² as well as civil and cultural rights.³ This legal architecture is designed to directly affect journalists,⁴ critical voices, media outlets, writers, academics, artists, human rights organisations and activists, among others.⁵ The use of vague concepts such as “hatred”, “public unrest”, “fascism”, “national security”, “blockade”, “treason” or “the interests of the Republic”, allows for broad and discretionary interpretation by the authorities to legally justify limitations on human rights.
7. The Venezuelan Criminal Code is one of the main pillars of the criminalisation of criticism and dissent.⁶ Offences such as contempt of authority (*desacato*), vilification, incitement to hatred, insult and defamation have repeatedly been used against journalists, human rights defenders, academics and others who express critical opinions about public officials or State institutions.⁷ International bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have warned that these offences are incompatible with democratic standards and facilitate the silencing of public debate.⁸
8. In practice, these laws have been used to criminalise criticism, deter public denunciation, restrict investigative journalism, censor content, including online content, close media outlets, block news websites and subject independent organisations, including academic and cultural institutions, to surveillance and scrutiny.⁹
9. The Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media (also known as the RESORTE-ME Law), adopted in 2004 and amended in 2010,¹⁰ grants the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) broad powers to sanction, fine, suspend or close media outlets for content deemed contrary to public order or the

authorities. This law has contributed to administrative censorship, particularly through the precarious renewal of broadcasting licences, the closure of radio stations and editorial self-censorship.¹¹

10. The Organic Law on National Security,¹² adopted in 2002 and amended in 2014, allows for the declaration of extensive “security zones”, which restricts access by journalists, defenders and citizens to geographic areas that are considered to hold strategic significance. In practice, it has limited the ability to report on matters of public interest, including border crises, hospitals, public services and protests.¹³ In addition, the Law against Organised Crime and the Financing of Terrorism has been used to conflate legitimate activities such as protest,¹⁴ human rights advocacy and international cooperation with serious offences including terrorism and organised crime.¹⁵
11. The Constitutional Law against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance, adopted in 2017 by the National Constituent Assembly, establishes prison sentences of between 10 to 20 years for those who “foster, promote or incite hatred”,¹⁶ without clearly defining these concepts.¹⁷
12. In recent years,¹⁸ Venezuelan authorities have strengthened this framework through new laws aimed at controlling civil society, international cooperation, the digital environment and political participation. The Law on the Oversight, Regulation, Operation and Financing of Non-Governmental Organisations and Non-Profit Social Organisations was adopted in 2024.¹⁹ It requires NGOs to register, disclose their funding sources and submit to State controls, while granting authorities broad powers to initiate proceedings against NGOs that may result in fines, suspension or dissolution.²⁰
13. The Organic Simón Bolívar Law against the Imperialist Blockade and in Defence of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, adopted by the National Assembly in 2024, further expands the criminalisation of international advocacy.²¹ Its stated purpose is to sanction natural or legal persons, whether national or foreign, who allegedly promote, invoke, support or participate in coercive or restrictive measures against the Venezuelan State. The law establishes severe penalties, including prison sentences of up to 30 years, political disqualifications and restrictive registries, potentially exposing journalists, human rights defenders, academics and activists who document the Venezuelan crisis before international bodies to reprisal by the State.
14. In 2024, the draft Law against Fascism, Neo-Fascism and Similar Expressions also advanced towards adoption, having been approved at first reading on 2 April 2024. Although it has not yet been brought into force according to the information available, the draft legislation represents a serious risk to freedom of expression due to its vague and punitive wording. Also in 2024, a year marked by the presidential elections held on 28 July, Espacio Público recorded 619 reports of violations of freedom of expression, a 61% increase compared to the previous year.²²
15. These laws have a cumulative effect. They do not operate in isolation but rather as a system of legal, administrative, criminal and economic control. The Anti-Hatred Law punishes speech; the RESORTE-ME Law disciplines the media; the NGO Oversight Law controls civil society organisations; the Simón Bolívar Law criminalises international advocacy; the National Security Law restricts territories and reporting; the

Asset Forfeiture Law threatens property and resources; and the anti-fascism bill could expand ideological persecution. Together, these measures generate self-censorship, fear, a reduction in public debate and the weakening of civil society.

16. The digital environment has also become an increasingly restricted space. The Special Law against Computer Crimes,²³ adopted in 2001, has gained relevance as a tool of persecution in Venezuela. Journalists, activists, public sector workers and users of digital platforms have been investigated or detained under vague offences such as “unauthorised access”, “dissemination of false information” or “damage to systems”, contributing to a climate of surveillance and self-censorship.²⁴
17. Finally, attention should be drawn to the Law on Amnesty for Democratic Coexistence,²⁵ adopted on 19 February 2026. The law was presented as a mechanism for national reconciliation aimed at extinguishing criminal liability for certain acts committed over the previous 26 years. Barely two months later, Delcy Rodríguez declared that the law’s implementation had concluded, claiming that it had benefited 8,616 people (a figure that could not be independently verified, including by OHCHR, which had been invited by the Venezuelan government for that purpose). This prompted criticism regarding the law’s limited, discretionary and hasty application.²⁶
18. The Venezuelan legal framework not only restricts specific rights but also establishes a broader architecture for the control of civic space.²⁷

IV. PATTERNS OF REPRESSION

19. Following years of repression and strict control of information,²⁸ restrictions on the press and access to information continue, leaving the country immersed in a state of profound uncertainty regarding guarantees for freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

a) Arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and imprisonment of journalists

20. The arbitrary detention of journalists has become an established pattern of repression in Venezuela. In 2025, the number of imprisoned media workers rose to 26. Arbitrary detentions of journalists in Venezuela range from arrests lasting less than 24 hours to imprisonment for more than four years, as in the case of *Últimas Noticias* journalist Ramón Centeno.²⁹
21. In at least three cases, arbitrary detention was compounded by the enforced disappearance of the victims, with examples including *La Patilla* journalists Rory Branker,³⁰ and Ana Carolina Guaita,³¹ as well as Carlos Correa, director of the civil society organisation, Espacio Público. In many cases, journalists were detained for carrying out their professional work. However, media professionals have also been imprisoned for their political activities, including Juan Pablo Guanipa, Biaggio Pilieri and Roland Carreño.
22. Violations of due process were a common feature of this extreme form of attack on independent media. In all cases, broad charges relating to serious offences, such as terrorism and criminal association, were brought against those detained. These offences do not allow for conditional release. None of those prosecuted had access to a lawyer of their own choosing. According to a survey conducted by IPYS Venezuela,

the findings of which were published in June 2025, prolonged imprisonment emerged as the principal risk associated with practising journalism in Venezuela.³²

23. On 5 January 2025, during the inauguration of the National Assembly, 14 media workers were arbitrarily detained. Police officers searched their mobile phones and deleted journalistic material. All were released on the same day.
24. On 7 January 2025, Carlos Correa, director of Espacio Público, was detained by masked individuals. After nine days in a situation amounting to enforced disappearance, he was released.³³ On 8 January 2025, Venezuela's Interior Minister, Diosdado Cabello, accused Carlos Correa of using his organisation to launder money and conspire against the country. He was released on the morning of 16 January 2025.³⁴
25. On 14 January 2026, amid the release of political prisoners announced by the authorities, 19 journalists were released from detention:³⁵ Roland Carreño, detained on 2 August 2025 in Caracas; Julio Balza, detained on 9 January 2025 in Caracas; Nakary Ramos Mena,³⁶ detained on 8 April 2025 in Caracas;³⁷ Gianni González,³⁸ detained on 8 April 2025 in Caracas; Carlos Julio Rojas, detained on 15 April 2024 in Caracas; Gabriel González, detained on 17 June 2024 in Caracas; Luis López, detained on 14 June 2024 in La Guaira; Carlos Marcano, detained on 23 May 2025 in Caracas; Leandro Palmar, detained on 9 January 2025 in Zulia State; Belises Salvador Cubillán, detained on 9 January 2025 in Zulia and again on 2 August 2025 in Caracas; Víctor Ugas, detained on 18 August 2024 in Caracas; Ramón Centeno, detained on 2 February 2022; Biagio Pilieri, detained on 28 August 2024 in Caracas; Nicmer Evans, detained on 13 December 2025; Omario Castellanos, detained on 16 October 2025; Yorbin García, detained on 18 October 2025; Carlos Lesma, detained on 8 October 2025; Mario Chávez, detained on 6 May 2025; Rafael García, detained on 22 July 2025; and Ángel Godoy, detained on 8 January 2025.³⁹
26. Subsequently, in February 2026, the following individuals were also released: Jonathan Carrillo, detained in July 2022; Rory Branker,⁴⁰ detained in February 2025;⁴¹ Juan Francisco Alvarado, detained in March 2025; Juan Pablo Guanipa, detained in May 2025; and Pedro Urribarri, detained in May 2025.⁴²
27. Most of the journalists released were required to regularise their legal status under the Amnesty Law, which entered into force on 19 February 2026.⁴³ The State applied the law selectively and at its discretion, and several media workers remain subject to judicial proceedings. As a result, they continue to face restrictions that prevent the full exercise of their rights and negatively affect their professional activities.⁴⁴
28. On 29 July 2024, cameraman Yousnel Alvarado was detained while covering protests in Barinas and charged with terrorism without access to independent legal representation.⁴⁵ He was released on 24 December 2024.⁴⁶ On 30 July 2024, VPITV cameraman Paúl León was detained in Valera, charged with terrorism by a special court and transferred to Tocuyito prison. He was also released on 24 December 2024.⁴⁷
29. In August 2024, security agents detained reporter Ana Carolina Guaita, allegedly as a means of pressuring her mother, who was linked to the political opposition, to surrender to the authorities.⁴⁸ That same month, journalist Roland Carreño was

arrested once again, highlighting a continuing pattern of harassment following his previous imprisonment in 2020.⁴⁹

30. At the time of publication of this report, it had not been publicly confirmed whether all charges against the released journalists had been definitively withdrawn or whether some remained subject to criminal proceedings, precautionary measures or other restrictions.

b) State Promotion of Fear

31. The harassment and intimidation of journalists and others exercising their right to freedom of expression has continued even after Delcy Rodríguez assumed the presidency of the country.⁵⁰ This has fostered a profound climate of fear among both media professionals and the wider public. As a survival mechanism in the face of potential detention and attacks, many journalists have resorted to self-censorship.⁵¹ This has included journalists refraining from including their bylines on articles they have authored, concealing their identities during digital broadcasts, and carrying out reporting assignments without press credentials or mobile phones for fear that a routine inspection by the authorities could be used as a pretext for arrest.⁵²
32. This intimidating environment has also led potential sources of information to refuse interviews or statements out of fear of reprisals. Journalists have experienced a severe impact on their mental health as a result of constant surveillance, relentless pressure and ongoing concerns for the safety of their families, further weakening the quality of information available in the country.⁵³ The authorities have failed to guarantee the safety of journalists, while acts of physical or verbal violence committed by police officers are rarely investigated.

c) Closure of Media Outlets and Attacks on Professional Associations

33. Over the past two decades, the government has shut down more than 400 media outlets.⁵⁴ Today, the print media sector consists of only 24 newspapers, compared with the 110 that were operating a decade ago.⁵⁵ At the same time, regulations governing funding have increased the risk of administrative and criminal pressure being exerted on journalistic projects supported through international cooperation.⁵⁶
34. The collapse of the country's economy between 2015 and 2020 led to a dramatic reduction in the distribution of state advertising, which can be an important source of revenue for media outlets. The criteria governing the allocation of state advertising budgets remain opaque and arbitrary, favouring media outlets that are aligned with the government, while compelling others to disseminate official narratives under threat of closure. The combination of economic suffocation, regulatory pressure and digital restrictions has pushed independent media outlets into increasingly fragile revenue models and, in some cases, forced them to operate from exile.⁵⁷

d) Exile of journalists

35. A study by IPYS Venezuela, published in July 2024, found that widespread hostility and the systematic persecution of the independent media constitute the principal drivers of journalists' exile. According to the study, 85.63% of the journalists surveyed

were forced to flee the country due to the risk of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, judicial harassment and imprisonment.

36. “Exile constitutes a loss for Venezuelan journalism,” IPYS Venezuela warned, noting that 60.78% of exiled journalists did not continue practising journalism in their countries of destination. Furthermore, 43.63% of the Venezuelan journalistic diaspora remain in a precarious migration situation that hinders their access to employment and, consequently, their ability to meet their own basic needs and those of their families.⁵⁸
37. Following the presidential elections held on 28 July 2024, repression against the press intensified with the imprisonment of 14 journalists. In this context, at least a further 22 media workers were forced into exile by December 2024.
38. Documentation of journalists’ exile is increasingly affected by underreporting, as many media workers fleeing Venezuela seek to avoid leaving traces that could place them at risk. Transnational repression is widely perceived as an ongoing and latent threat.⁵⁹

e) Attacks on Foreign Correspondents

39. The foreign press has served as an alternative source of reliable information, as its correspondents in Venezuela have often been able to report with greater freedom. As a result, they too have been identified as adversaries and subjected to reprisals.
40. During periods of heightened political, economic or social tension, and particularly in electoral contexts, attacks against the foreign press became increasingly evident. Eleven journalists who intended to cover the presidential elections of 28 July 2024 were expelled from the country after being declared “inadmissible” by immigration authorities. Six were denied entry upon arrival, while five others were detained and forcibly expelled after having already entered Venezuelan territory.⁶⁰
41. Obstacles had begun to emerge as early as March 2024, when authorities introduced burdensome accreditation procedures and imposed requirements that were difficult to fulfil for foreign journalists seeking to cover the electoral process. In the days preceding the elections, actions were reported against international news agencies including Reuters, AP, EFE and AFP, as well as media outlets such as CNN.⁶¹
42. At the beginning of 2026, during the United States military operation, approximately 200 foreign journalists remained stranded in Cúcuta, Colombia, awaiting authorisation to enter Venezuela. Even those holding valid work permits were often unable to cross the border. Many of those who eventually succeeded in entering the country were subsequently deported.⁶²

V. RIGHT OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

43. The Venezuelan Constitution guarantees access to public information through Articles 28, 51, 58 and 143.⁶³ The Law on Transparency and Access to Information of Public Interest, in force since September 2021, has been criticised for establishing broad exceptions and requiring applicants to justify requests for information.⁶⁴
44. IPYS Venezuela documented 35 violations of the right of access to public information in 2022, 43 in 2023, 59 in 2024 and 15 in 2025, although the latter figure may reflect growing self-censorship among journalists and citizens due to fear of reprisals.⁶⁵

During the first year of the law's implementation, 38 public institutions failed to respond to requests for information.⁶⁶ The Venezuelan State has failed to implement recommendations made by international bodies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, aimed at guaranteeing access to information regarding the administration of public funds.

45. Article 7 of the Transparency Law establishes broad and imprecise exceptions that allow authorities to arbitrarily restrict access to public information. Furthermore, the law requires applicants to justify their requests and explain the intended use of the information, a practice that has been used to deny access to matters of public interest. This occurred, for example, in May 2026, when a request concerning persons detained for political reasons was rejected. In addition, Venezuelan legislation does not comply with the standards set out in the OAS Model Inter-American Law 2.0 on Access to Public Information, as it neither guarantees proactive transparency nor provides for an independent body responsible for overseeing compliance with access to information obligations.
46. During the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, Venezuela accepted a recommendation to guarantee the right of access to public information. However, this commitment remains unfulfilled.

VI. CENSORSHIP IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

47. In Venezuela, 206 websites remain blocked, 65 of which belong to independent media outlets and civil society organisations, according to Ve sin Filtro.⁶⁷ This information blackout in the digital sphere forms part of a pattern of systematic censorship implemented by the Venezuelan State over the past decade.
48. Digital censorship in Venezuela is characterised by arbitrariness. Website blocks are imposed by the State, through the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL), in the course of administrative or judicial proceedings conducted without due process guarantees. These blocks function as permanent sanctions and produce long-lasting effects that are difficult to reverse.
49. According to a report by VeE sin Filtro, among the affected services are national and international news websites, platforms such as X, Reddit, SoundCloud, Signal and Zello, as well as censorship circumvention tools including VPNs and the Tor network. Blocks have also been documented against human rights organisations and political initiatives, in addition to the persistence of residual blocks even when the original orders have been lifted or the affected domains no longer exist.⁶⁸
50. Violations of digital rights in Venezuela are carried out primarily through the following mechanisms: the arbitrary closure and suspension of social media accounts; the removal, arbitrary suspension or de-indexing of content; unlawful access to digital devices and platforms; attempted unauthorised access; phishing; hacking; selective website blocking; large-scale attacks on servers; denial-of-service attacks (DoS and DDoS); restrictions preventing journalists and media outlets from accessing social media accounts; identity theft; abusive copyright claims; unlawful surveillance of digital communications; malware; unauthorised access to servers and network systems (sniffing); and the online publication of a journalist's personal information (doxing).

According to IPYS Venezuela, 128 digital rights violations were recorded in 2023, affecting 64 media outlets and 17 civil society organisations.⁶⁹

51. Digital censorship intensified in 2024 over the course of the presidential elections that took place that year, particularly through the blocking of news websites and civil society organisations dedicated to fact-checking and the promotion and defence of freedom of expression and the right to information. During 2024, the list of blocked websites expanded to include the media outlets *TalCual*, *El Estímulo*, *Analítica* and *Runrun.es*; fact-checking initiatives *Cazadores de Fake News*, *EsPaja* and the *Venezuelan Fake News Observatory*; as well as the non-governmental organisations Medianálisis, Ve sin Filtro, Espacio Público and IPYS Venezuela.
52. Analysis conducted by IPYS Venezuela provides greater insight into the digital blackout in electoral contexts: “The fact that 11 of the 12 documented blocks were implemented by the country’s principal internet service providers (Cantv, Movistar, Digitel, Inter and NetUno) through DNS and HTTP/HTTPS restrictions highlights the degree of coordination behind these measures. Such blocks not only affect the right to information but also limit the exercise of journalism and citizens’ ability to access diverse sources of information, a fundamental right in any democracy. The recurrence of these patterns during electoral periods suggests a deliberate strategy aimed at maintaining control over information and restricting public debate at critical moments for the country.”⁷⁰
53. Social media platforms, which often serve as alternative sources of information, have likewise been targeted. For example, the blocking of the social media platform X, publicly ordered by government authorities on 8 August 2024, remains in force. Under similar circumstances, the encrypted messaging application Signal, which provides enhanced privacy protections, also remains blocked.
54. Among the recommendations accepted by the Venezuelan State during the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, the recommendation put forward by Italy was particularly significant, as it specifically called for the protection of freedom of expression and opinion on the internet and for access to justice for victims of violations of those rights. As demonstrated by the evidence presented in this report, this recommendation has not been implemented. On the contrary, the situation of digital rights in Venezuela has continued to deteriorate.

VII. FREEDOM OF ARTISTIC, CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC EXPRESSION

55. Between 2022 and 2026, artistic expression in Venezuela was affected by censorship, self-censorship, surveillance, arbitrary detention and the use of broadly defined criminal offences to criminalise critical voices. Following the July 2024 presidential elections, there was a notable increase in repression and restrictions on cultural space. Although limited signs of openness have been reported in 2026, practices of control and legal frameworks that continue to restrict artistic freedom of expression remain in place.⁷¹
56. At the same time, significant changes occurred in the conditions under which cultural actors operate, linked to the weakening of independent spaces, increased digital surveillance and the growing precariousness of the artistic sector. In *Art in the Storm* (2022), a regional report by the Artists at Risk Connection (ARC),⁷² Venezuela was

identified as a context in which artists and activists develop strategies of resistance under conditions of high vulnerability, including persistent fear, self-censorship and limited opportunities for collective organisation.

57. These dynamics also extend into the digital sphere. The perception that social media posts, artistic works, or online interactions may be monitored or used to identify, investigate, or intimidate artists has reinforced self-censorship and reduced individuals' willingness to share their work or participate in online spaces for cultural debate and dissemination.

a) Ideological Narratives, Polarisation and Stigmatisation in the Artistic Sphere

58. Venezuelan artists identified that official discourse relies on ideological narratives and national symbolism to legitimise those in power and discredit critical voices.⁷³ Political and social polarisation has resulted in the stigmatisation and silencing of artists, adversely affecting the exercise of freedom of expression. In response, artists have increasingly developed practices centred on personal and territorial experiences as forms of resistance.

b) House Arrest as a Mechanism of Control, Isolation and Invisibility

59. Within the framework of *Art in the Storm* (ARC, 2022), artists reported the arbitrary use of house arrest in Venezuela against artists, intellectuals and other critical voices as a mechanism of punishment, isolation and invisibilisation.⁷⁴ They highlighted the impact of these practices on personal and family wellbeing, as well as the adoption of self-protection strategies based on reducing public and artistic visibility.

c) The Double Exposure of Artists

60. Between 2023 and 2026, cases of censorship, detention, forced exile, confiscation of artworks, cancellation of cultural events and restrictions on artistic freedom were documented.
61. Artists highlighted that in Venezuela those who combine artistic practice with activism face a condition of "double exposure".⁷⁵ This results in a simultaneous increase in both visibility and vulnerability, making them easier to identify and target in contexts of repression.
62. Among the most significant cases are the removal from the airwaves of cartoonist Fernando Pinilla's programme in 2023; the 2024 detention of singer-songwriter Willy Álvarez for a song expressing support for the political opposition; the self-imposed exile of photographer Francisco Colmenárez after being subjected to threats and harassment for documenting post-election protests (2024); and the detention of cultural activist Martha Lía Grajales in 2025 (see Annex I).
63. During the 2024 electoral period, an increase in censorship and the blocking of cultural content was documented. In March 2025, Diosdado Cabello announced a "blacklist" of banned artists, prohibiting them from entering the country or performing publicly. This measure contributed to a widespread climate of self-censorship within the cultural sector.⁷⁶

64. Reports also documented the cancellation of the Venezuelan Film Festival in 2025,⁷⁷ the confiscation and destruction of works intended for international exhibitions, as well as pressure exerted on and the closure of independent cultural spaces and LGBTQ+ events.

d) Practices of Control, Harassment and Intimidation of Artists

65. Between 2025 and 2026, Venezuela continued to experience an environment of repression and control that seriously impedes freedom of expression, artistic creation and cultural participation. Organisations and artists consulted reported the continued use of arbitrary detention in response to critical opinions,⁷⁸ including comments made in private settings, informal conversations or digital platforms, under broad accusations such as conspiracy or incitement.⁷⁹
66. Testimonies collected by ARC describe the constant presence of security forces in public spaces, including routine checkpoints, inspections of mobile phones and street interrogations. These practices have contributed to the consolidation of a widespread climate of intimidation that encourages self-censorship among artists, writers, academics and activists.
67. Self-censorship has become a structural phenomenon within the cultural sector. Artists have requested anonymity at public events, withdrawn artworks or publications, and reduced their public visibility as a means of self-protection. In the literary and academic spheres, cases have been documented of authors declining invitations to radio programmes, withdrawing texts already submitted for publication in long-established supplements such as *Papel Literario* of *El Nacional*, or using pseudonyms to avoid reprisals. Likewise, many writers and poets choose not to participate in readings, anthologies or public events in order to avoid being identified as political opponents.⁸⁰
68. The chilling effect also extends to the Venezuelan diaspora. Academics, artists and cultural practitioners living abroad have limited their public expression out of concern for relatives who remain in Venezuela or due to fears of possible restrictions on their freedom of movement. These concerns intensified following the 2024 elections, when the arbitrary cancellation of at least 40 passports was documented, affecting primarily journalists, human rights defenders and other critical voices.⁸¹
69. These restrictions are compounded by significant economic and structural obstacles. Independent cultural spaces are scarce and, for the most part, survive through small-scale self-managed initiatives operating under precarious conditions and with limited resources. The economic crisis, rising living costs and dependence on informal sources of income have undermined the sustainability of artistic and cultural activities.
70. The deterioration is also evident in the publishing industry. According to the Venezuelan Book Chamber (Cavelibro), the number of affiliated companies fell from 110 in 2013 to just 30 in 2023. In the educational publishing sector, the number of active publishing houses declined from 35 to 8 over the same period. It is also estimated that between 60 and 70 per cent of the country's bookshops have disappeared, significantly limiting access to books, information and diversity of thought.⁸²

71. Taken together, the combination of state surveillance, fear of reprisals, self-censorship, restrictions on freedom of movement and the weakening of cultural industries has created an increasingly hostile environment for the exercise of artistic, cultural and expressive freedoms in Venezuela.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

72. The findings documented in this report demonstrate that, during the period under review, Venezuela maintained and deepened restrictions on freedom of expression through a restrictive legal framework and systematic repressive practices. The use of vaguely defined criminal offences, arbitrary detention of journalists, the blocking of media outlets and digital platforms, and limitations on access to information have contributed to an environment characterised by fear and self-censorship. These restrictions have also had a significant impact on artistic, cultural and academic freedom.
73. The information analysed indicates that Venezuela has not fully implemented the recommendations it accepted during the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review concerning freedom of expression, access to information, the protection of journalists and digital rights. It is therefore necessary for the State to take concrete measures to bring its legislation into line with international human rights standards, guarantee access to public information and end restrictions targeting journalists, artists, academics and human rights defenders, in order to ensure a free, pluralistic and enabling environment for the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Repeal or amend laws that unduly restrict freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, including the Constitutional Law Against Hate, the Simón Bolívar Liberator Organic Law, and the Law on the Oversight of NGOs. Bring the RESORTE-ME Law and the Special Law Against Cybercrimes into line with international human rights standards.
2. Reform the Law on Transparency and Access to Information of Public Interest in line with the Inter-American Model Law 2.0, ensuring independent oversight, proactive transparency, and effective access to public information, including budgetary, economic, and public health data.
3. Immediately lift arbitrary blocks on media, civil society websites, and digital communication platforms, end unlawful digital surveillance and censorship, and guarantee unrestricted access to the internet in accordance with international human rights standards.
4. End arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and judicial harassment of journalists, media workers, artists, writers, cultural actors, and human rights defenders. Investigate all attacks against the press, hold those responsible accountable, and provide effective remedies and reparations to victims.
5. Ensure that Venezuelan journalists, human rights defenders, artists and cultural actors forced into exile can access international protection in accordance with the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984), and refrain from any acts of intimidation or reprisals against journalists living abroad.

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- ¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 40th Session, “Venezuela - The Universal Periodic Review”, December 2022, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session40/ve/2022-12-23/Venezuela.pdf>.
- ² Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela (hereinafter IPYSVE), “Laws to Silence”, August 2022, available at: https://ipysvenezuela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/00_completo.pdf
- ³ Espacio Público, “Incompatibilities of Venezuelan Laws with International Human Rights Law”, 18 February 2026, available at: <https://espaciopublico.org/incompatibilidades-leyes-venezolanas-derecho-internacional-dd-hh/>
- ⁴ Provea, “The Situation of the Right to Freedom of Expression in Venezuela 2024”, available at: <https://provea.org/actualidad/derechos-civiles-y-politicos/libertad-de-expresion/situacion-del-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion-en-venezuela-2024-espacio-publico/>
- ⁵ Espacio Público, “2024: A Year of Restrictions and Repression of Freedom of Expression”, 2 May 2025, available at: <https://espaciopublico.org/libertad-expresion-venezuela-2024-informe-espacio-publico/>
- ⁶ Venezuelan Criminal Code, published in Extraordinary Official Gazette No. 5,768 on 13 April 2005, available at: https://www.unodc.org/cld/uploads/res/document/ven/Ley_de_Reforma_Parcial_del_Codigo_Penal.pdf
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