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HUMAN
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VENEZUELA AND IRAN

Human rights defenders versus autocracies

19 October 2026

09:00-11:00 Venezuelan and US EST | 15:00-17:00 CET | 16:00-18:00 Tehran time
Online on Zoom

A free webinar organised by the European Lawyers Foundation (ELF) and the Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center (KHRC)



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Human rights defenders versus autocracies

Alex Neve

**2026 Findings - Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

19 October 2026, Online on Zoom

MANDATE OF THE FACT-FINDING MISSION

Established by the Human Rights Council in 2019 | Renewed for two years under resolution 57/36 (2024)

INVESTIGATIVE MANDATE

Investigate gross human rights violations committed since 2014, including:

- Extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances
- Arbitrary detention
- Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual and gender-based violence

PRIORITIES UNDER RESOLUTION 57/36

- The human rights situation before, during and after the 2024 presidential elections
- Violence by armed individuals known as “colectivos”
- Combating impunity, ensuring accountability and justice for victims

REPORTING TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL | Oral updates at its 58th and 61st sessions; written reports at its 60th and 63rd sessions.

Human Rights Violations and the Continuity of the Repressive Apparatus

Public briefing | Reporting period: 1 September 2025 – 31 August 2026

Five key indicators documented by the Mission

61

politically motivated
detentions
directly documented

47

persons subjected to
enforced disappearance

37

combined cases of torture
and cruel, inhuman or
degrading treatment

3

deaths in custody during
the reporting period

Continuity indicators

12 people previously identified in Mission reports remain in public office; a further 6 officials linked to repressive institutions remain in posts.

Legal framework

11 laws associated with the criminalization of dissent remain in force. The Mission found insufficient elements to conclude that there has been a genuine and sustained break with State repression.

1. Arbitrary detention

The pattern persisted through the end of 2025; long-term detentions later declined, while short-term detentions continued to intimidate.



61

detentions directly
documented by the
Mission

≥214

persons arbitrarily
detained for political
reasons, 1 Sep 2025–29
Jul 2026

379–500

people reportedly still
detained, according to
civil society

33

short-term
detentions (2–10
hours)

94%

of the ≥214 detentions
occurred before end-
2025

Mission-documented detentions by period



61 is the number of detentions directly documented by the Mission; ≥214 is the broader legal-analysis figure. They are different measures.

Key findings

- At least 33 short-term detentions of journalists and political-party members were recorded, concentrated in May and June 2026; under-reporting is likely.
- Civil-society estimates of people still detained ranged from 379 to 500 at the end of the period.
- The Government's figure of 8,740 people benefiting from the Amnesty Law could not be verified by the Mission.

2. Enforced disappearance

The practice continued after 3 January 2026; State authorities failed to provide official information on the whereabouts of victims.



47

persons documented as victims during the period

10 days–6 months

documented duration

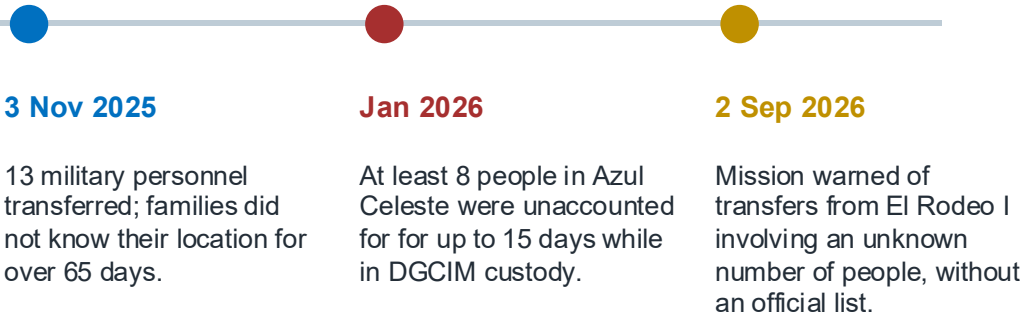
11

people in the Plaza Venezuela case

≥8

people disappeared for up to 15 days in the Azul Celeste case (Jan 2026)

Illustrative documented cases



Institutions and legal assessment

- Detentions involved DGCIM, SEBIN, PNB and CICPC; families and judicial authorities were denied official information.
- In the Plaza Venezuela case, 11 people (7 men and 4 women) were held incommunicado for 2–6 months.
- Enforced disappearance is a continuing violation for as long as the State fails to truthfully disclose the person’s fate and whereabouts.

3. Torture

The Mission documented torture and ill-treatment of people detained for political reasons, including methods not previously recorded.



≥37

combined cases of torture
and cruel, inhuman or
degrading treatment

Victims within the combined figure of 37



21 men (57%)

16 women (43%)

≥6

cases of forced feeding by
intubation at El Rodeo I

The figure of 37 combines torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; it is not a separate count of torture alone.

Documented sexual and gender-based violence

At least 4 cases of forced urethral catheterization of detained men as punishment; systematic forced nudity, including approximately 62 days for detainees in the Plaza Venezuela case.

Torture, sexual violence and legal findings

- Documented methods included beatings, electric shocks, suffocation, suspension, forced nudity and prolonged isolation.
- Sexual and gender-based violence included electric shocks to the genitals, threats of rape, sexual touching and invasive surveillance of women in detention.
- The Mission concluded that torture constituted a crime against humanity for events from 1 September 2025 to late January 2026; torture and ill-treatment continued during much of 2026.

Source: CRP.5, paras. 331, 387–401, 410, 484 and 498. No separate aggregate count of sexual violence is given in the key points.

4. Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

Detention conditions, inadequate medical care, incommunicado detention and invasive searches continued to undermine human dignity.



Same combined evidence base

37

documented victims of torture
and/or cruel, inhuman or
degrading treatment

Examples of documented conditions

FOOD & WATER

Insufficient or spoiled food; limited access to water.

CELLS

Lack of natural light and beds; extreme temperatures, excrement and rodents.

MEDICAL CARE

Insufficient, delayed or absent care; serious health deterioration.

PRIVACY & DIGNITY

Incommunicado detention, isolation and invasive body searches.

Assessment

- The most severe accounts referred to El Rodeo I and Fuerte Guaicaipuro; in the latter, food was reportedly provided only two or three times per week in some cases.
- A pregnant detainee in Maracaibo was reportedly denied prenatal check-ups for months.
- Some conditions improved partially after 3 January 2026, with differences between detention centres. These reported improvements do not remove the duty to investigate, punish and provide reparation

5. Deaths in custody

Three deaths of politically detained men were documented during the reporting period; circumstances or accountability remain unresolved.



3

deaths in custody during
the reporting period

2

cases for which the
Mission had no
information that an
investigation had been
opened

0

deaths recorded in the
context of protests during
this cycle

1 additional case

Víctor Hugo Quero Navas: death
occurred before this reporting period

Deaths documented within the period

6 Dec 2025

Alfredo Díaz Figueroa

Died after reportedly not receiving specialist medical care in El Helicoide. The Mission had reasonable grounds to believe the lack of specialist care contributed to his death.

10 Jan 2026

Edison José Torres Fernández

Died while detained at PNB Zone 7, Boleíta. The Mission had no information that an investigation had been opened.

7 May 2026

José Manuel García Sabino

Died in Anaco Municipal Police cells. CICPC ruled out suicide; seven police officials, including the director, were charged with homicide.

Quero Navas died on 24 July 2025, before the reporting period; the State acknowledged his death on 7 May 2026. His case is addressed as an enforced disappearance followed by concealment of his death, not as one of the three deaths above.

Continuity of the repressive apparatus

Changes in intensity did not amount to a structural dismantling of the institutions, practices or legal framework identified by the Mission.



≥12

people previously identified
in Mission reports remain in
public office

6

additional officials linked to
repressive institutions
remain in posts

11

laws associated with
criminalization of dissent
remain in force

0 identified

investigations into events
during the Maduro
administration, according to
the Mission

What remained in place

Personnel

Previously identified individuals remain in public office.

Institutions

CICPC, DGCIM and SEBIN retained their structures and rules.

Practices

Arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and sexual violence continued after 3 January.

Legal framework

The 11 laws remained in force; surveillance and restrictions persisted.

Mission's assessment

- The CICPC, DGCIM and SEBIN continued to be implicated in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and sexual violence after 3 January 2026.
- The Mission has not identified sufficient elements to conclude that there has been a genuine and sustained break with the State policy of repression.
- Reported openings were assessed as partial and precarious, and at risk of reversal; they were not accompanied by the dismantling of the relevant security, intelligence and justice structures.

Interpretive caution: the figures shown are not all directly comparable. The 37 cases combine torture and other ill-treatment; estimates of people still detained are attributed to civil-society organizations.



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Human rights defenders versus autocracies

Alfredo Romero

Why do autocracies need political prisoners?
The Venezuelan case

19 October 2026, Online on Zoom

April 11th, 2002, Caracas



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Repression as a pattern. Repression as a Strategy.



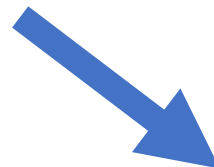
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Victims = Terrorists



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The Playbook



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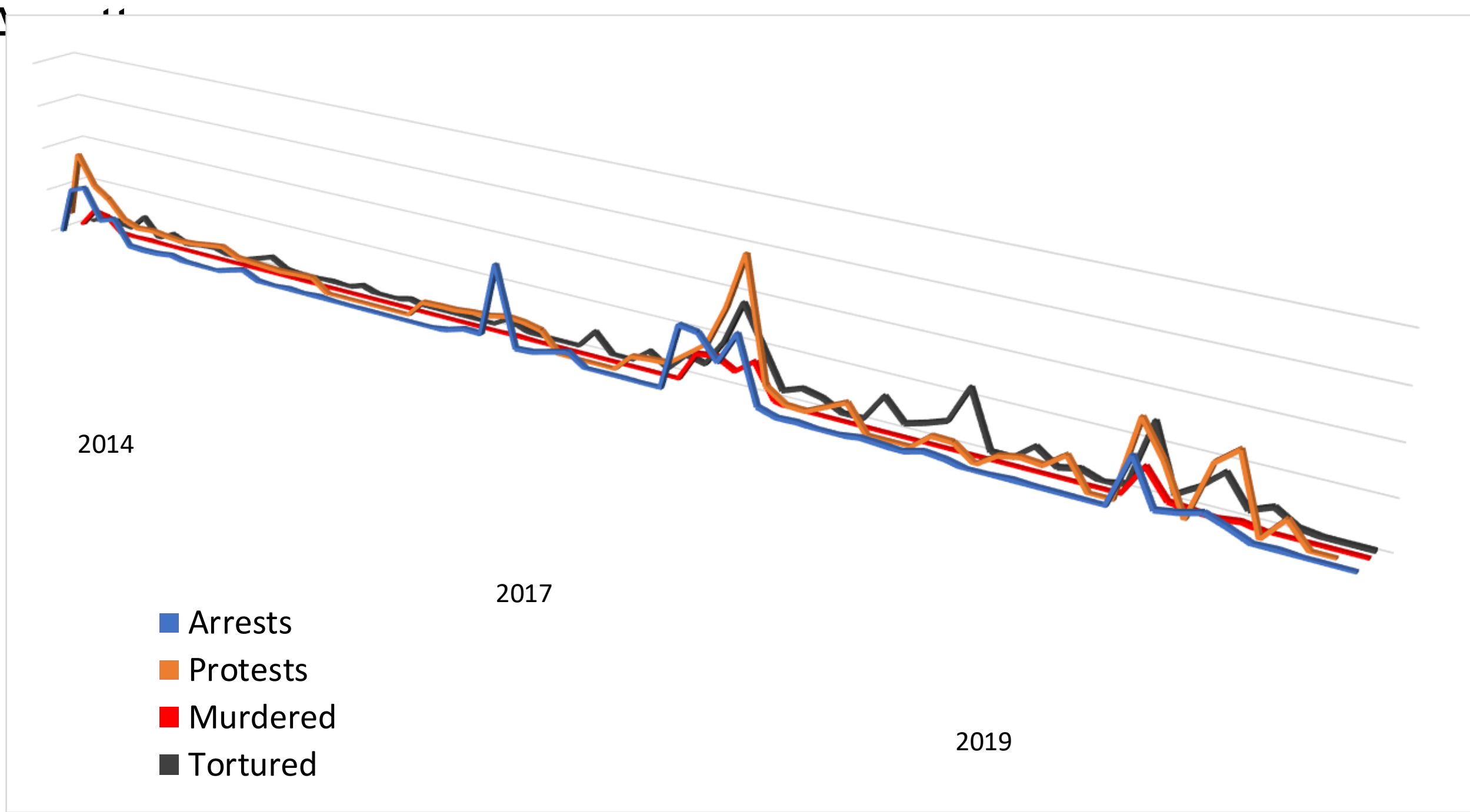
A

2014

2017

2019

- Arrests
- Protests
- Murdered
- Tortured





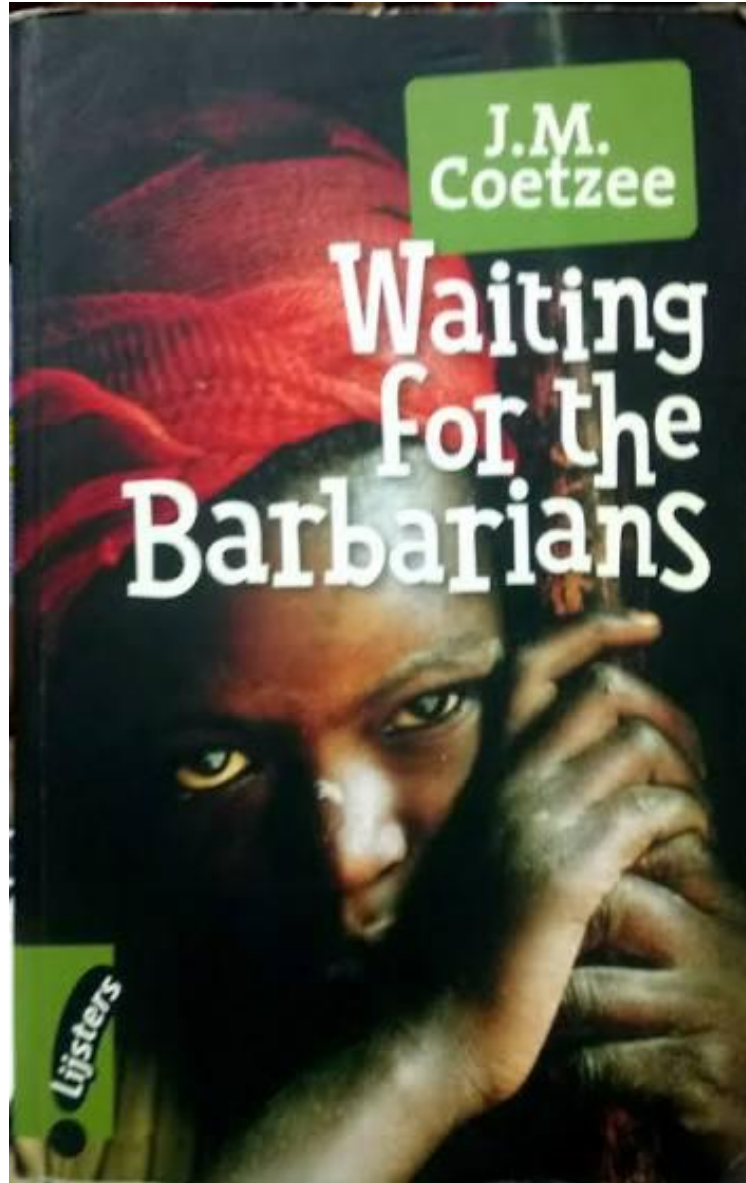
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Why the Regime continue to hold Political Prisoners

The manufactured enemy: *Waiting for the Barbarians*



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Political Stability



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Victims



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Victims



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Ariana Granadillo. 22 years old medical student

On February 1, 2018, DGCIM agents broke into her home, covered her face, and took her to a clandestine house with her father and mother. She was kidnapped, tortured and sexually assaulted to ask for information about his uncle who was lately detained and still in prison. The guards beat her up several times, with her wrists tied, and suffocated her with plastic bags. After a Foro Penal social media campaign,

Victims



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Victims



Emirlendris Carolina Benítez Rosales, a Venezuelan merchant and mother, was arrested in August 2018 while four months pregnant in a case linked to an alleged assassination attempt against Nicolás Maduro. Foro Penal classified her case as “**propaganda**,” involving the detention of individuals, including innocents, to portray the government as a victim. Sentenced to 30 years in prison, she was tortured, suffered the forced interruption of her pregnancy, and sustained severe injuries. Released on August 14, 2026, after eight years in detention, she remains subject to judicial restrictions without full legal exoneration.

Victims



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Victims



Víctor Hugo Quero Navas, a 51-year-old Venezuelan merchant, was detained by military intelligence agents on January 1, 2025, and forcibly disappeared for more than 16 months. Accused of involvement in a nonexistent terrorist attack, he died in state custody on July 24, 2025, without his family being informed. Authorities acknowledged his death only on May 7, 2026. Ten days later, his mother, Carmen Teresa Navas, died after months of desperately searching for her son. Their story exposes the devastating human cost of enforced disappearance and the denial of truth to families.

Rule of Law Facade



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Rule of Law



It is a mistake to say that these regimes have no rule of law.

They have built a facade of legality while turning the legal system into a weapon of political persecution.

The law is no longer a limit on power; it has become an instrument to preserve it.

Kafkaesque labyrinth



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Without human rights defenders, these stories would remain untold.

But the purpose of documenting these cases is not merely to establish that abuses occurred, but to expose what those abuses achieve for the system that allows them.

Expose the mechanism, not just the victims



1. Political prisoners serve a political purpose: silencing dissent, intimidating society, and maintaining power.
2. Releases are not enough. Without institutional reform, judicial independence, and accountability, the system will continue producing new victims.
3. Human rights defenders must expose this strategy, document abuses, break victims' isolation, and preserve the evidence needed for justice.



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Human rights defenders versus autocracies

Azadeh Zabeti

**Defending Human Rights in Iran: Persecution,
Impunity and the Fight for Justice**

19 October 2026, Online on Zoom

What it means to defend human rights in Iran.

WHO DEFENDS RIGHTS?

Lawyers representing political prisoners.
Women challenging discriminatory laws.
Journalists. Minority-rights activists. Workers.
Students. Families seeking justice.

AT WHAT RISK?

Consequences are severe and systematic.
Arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, surveillance,
intimidation, reprisals, professional restrictions,
severe pressure on families, torture & execution.

THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY COURTS

Political dissent and human rights activism are treated as national security threats.

-
- Closed hearings and no transparency
 - Denial of legal counsel
 - Forced confessions under torture
 - Politicised Judges

Maryam Akbari Monfared: a family's search for truth

Punished for asking what happened to her siblings.

- 17 years in prison
- Separated from her 3 daughters

She sought an investigation into the executions and enforced disappearance of four siblings. From prison, she continued to demand accountability through open letters.

“You are paying for your sister and your brothers.”

A reported statement by the sentencing judge



The past is not the past.

THE 1988 PRISON MASSACRE

Families continue to seek answers about relatives who were executed, the circumstances of their deaths and where their remains are buried.

Victims are denied answers, evidence is put at risk and perpetrators are rewarded rather than held accountable.

30,000+

political prisoners executed in summer of 1988

The dismantling of Gohardasht prison raises serious concerns about the loss of evidence of a crime against humanity.

Eight people. Eight lives at risk.



**Zahra Shahbaz
Tabari**



Arghavan Fallahi



**Amir-Hassan Akbari
Monfared**



**Mohammad Javad
Vafaei**



Bijan Kazemi



Loghman Aminpour



Sepehr Emamjomeh



Ali Moezzi

Visibility matters. Public attention tells the Iranian authorities that these cases are being monitored.

Visibility is a form of protection.

WHAT LAWYERS & INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CAN DO

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|--|
| 01 | Name the prisoners | Keep individual cases visible in public statements and advocacy. |
| 02 | Demand due process | Call for access to lawyers, fair trials and an end to torture. |
| 03 | Oppose executions | Support prisoners' resistance, including "No to Execution Tuesdays". |
| 04 | Preserve evidence | Press for independent investigations and accountability for past crimes. |

Justice begins with refusing to let these cases disappear.