

Remarks of the IACHR before the OAS Permanent Council on the situation of Human Rights in Venezuela

Washington, D.C.

August 6, 2025

Remarks by Commissioner Gloria de Mees, Rapporteur for Venezuela

I address you today on behalf of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, one year after the presidential elections in Venezuela. An Electoral process which in whose integrity and results remain deeply contested, and of which whose consequences continue to gravely impact the fundamental rights of the Venezuelan people.

More than a year later, the National Electoral Council still has not released the tally sheets needed to verify the results it declared in favor of Nicolás Maduro. This refusal to provide even the most basic electoral data violates national laws and international standards. It casts a long shadow over the credibility of the electoral process and strips citizens of their right to know the truth about their vote.

The consequences of this contentious process have gone beyond concerns about transparency alone. State repression and serious human rights abuses were committed systematically.

It was Mr. Maduro himself who publicly declared that more than 2,000 people had been detained in connection with the post-electoral protests. It was the Attorney General of Venezuela who confirmed that 25 people had been killed in that same context. Of the 25 documented deaths, 24 were caused by gunshot wounds to the head and thorax, and one by a fatal beating. Only one victim belonged to the National Guard (GNB); the others were all civilians. The victims were all male, with 68% (17 people) under the age of 30. Twelve were classified as youth—aged 24 or younger—and two were minors, aged 15 and 17. Most victims lived in low-income neighborhoods located in regions historically aligned with the ruling party. According to multiple civil society organizations, those killed included workers, motorcycle taxi drivers, barbers, and small business owners.

It was also the State that admitted the detention of hundreds of adolescents, many from low-income areas, who were either arrested during demonstrations or in targeted operations named by authorities as “*Operación Tun Tun*”.

One year later, there is no justice, no accountability, and no meaningful action taken to investigate these deaths or to protect the rights of those who remain detained. Many of the arrests have turned into prolonged arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances. Dozens of political prisoners continue to be held without access to legal counsel or contact with their families, in conditions that may amount to torture or inhumane treatment.

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates, the Commission has executed its mandate on Venezuela with the utmost objectivity and highest standards of quality, for more than 20 years.

Regarding the latest report on grave human rights violations in the context of the electoral process, allow me to emphasize, with utmost clarity, that much of the information we have cited comes directly from official statements by Venezuelan authorities themselves, civil society organizations, and from direct testimonies from victims and survivors. As previously indicated, State officials have owned up to these figures. These are not interpretations—they are facts. The lack of investigations and accountability for the killings, the mistreatment toward children and adolescents arbitrarily detained, can only be interpreted as impunity.

Over the past year, the Commission, through its Special Follow-up Mechanism for Venezuela (MESEVE), has interviewed 91 victims of the regime’s repression in Venezuela, in addition to those in exile in Colombia, and here in the USA. Their testimonies speak to a systematic pattern of abuse and abandonment. We have met wives and children who found out through strangers that their loved ones are being held in El Helicoide, one of the most notorious detention centers in the country.

By April of this year, leading civil society organizations had documented 903 political prisoners in Venezuela. At least 64 families had not been formally notified of the detention facilities where their loved ones were being held. In many cases, relatives still do not know for certain where these detainees are, or even whether they are alive. They are simply instructed—often by unidentified individuals—to bring clean clothes and essential medicines, without any official explanation. In parallel, at least 40 individuals, including human rights defenders, journalists, and political figures, had their passports arbitrarily canceled, without prior notice or

any stated justification. This is not due process. This is not justice. This is fear, secrecy, and cruelty used as instruments of control.

The MESEVE have also interviewed mothers of adolescents who were detained in the context of post-electoral protests. These mothers described with anguish how their children were mistreated, humiliated, and coerced into recording false confessions—videos in which they were made to admit to crimes they did not commit. They told us how their sons were forced to relieve themselves in front of others, stripped of their privacy and dignity. Some of these adolescents later expressed suicidal thoughts, unable to cope with the trauma inflicted upon them. These are not isolated abuses—they are part of a deliberate strategy of repression that targets even the youngest and most vulnerable.

We have received firsthand testimonies from journalists and media professionals, both in exile and within Venezuela, many of whom were arbitrarily detained following post-electoral protests, reflecting a broader pattern of repression. The body of evidence points to a systematic and deliberate policy of persecution targeting the independent press. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission has recorded numerous reports of enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and judicial proceedings devoid of due process—measures aimed squarely at silencing journalists for their work. These actions often originate directly from State authorities at both national and local levels.

Despite the dangers, many journalists continue their reporting with remarkable resolve, operating in an atmosphere saturated with hostility, censorship, and intimidation. Some have had to adopt security protocols, suspend their work, avoid contentious subjects, relocate internally, or flee the country to protect their lives. The general population, too, lives under the weight of pervasive fear. Many refrain from seeking, sharing, or even discussing information—especially content critical of the government—due to fear of reprisals. This widespread self-censorship is compounded by State-promoted surveillance and neighborhood-level denunciation practices, which serve as tools of social control. The result is a profound unraveling of the social fabric: interpersonal trust has deteriorated, avenues for dialogue have vanished, and fear has supplanted freedom of expression as the norm in everyday life.

The regime repeatedly claims that international human rights bodies—such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission—are part of a coordinated

campaign to discredit a so-called legitimate government. But if this is the case, then we must ask: Where are the tally sheets that would validate the results of the 2024 presidential election? Who is responsible for the 25 killings that occurred during the protests that followed? Where are Rocío San Miguel, Freddy Superlano, Juan Pablo Guanipa, Biagio Pilieri, Américo De Grazia, Perkins Rocha; Luis Palocz; Jesús Armas and the other opposition leaders who remain detained? Why have they been denied access to their families, to an attorney of their choice, and to the most basic guarantees of due process? These are not rhetorical questions—they are urgent demands for accountability, rooted in both domestic and international law. Until the Venezuelan State provides clear, verifiable answers, these accusations of bias ring hollow.

The Commission has long warned of the collapse of democracy in Venezuela: the erosion of human rights, the dismantling of the rule of law, and the breakdown of democratic institutions. Today, we see this collapse manifested in a State that represses dissent, silences opposition, and manipulates the tools of justice to entrench its own power.

We must be clear: these are not the actions of a government that respects democracy. These are the patterns of an authoritarian regime that governs through fear.

On behalf of the Commission, I urge the Venezuelan authorities to:

- Immediately publish the full results of the 2024 presidential election, including all tally sheets;
- Release all persons arbitrarily detained, especially those held incommunicado or without formal charges;
- Ensure justice and reparations for the 25 victims of post-electoral killings and their families; and
- Cease the criminalization of students, journalists, human rights defenders, and ordinary citizens who dare to speak out or protest.

Considering the seriousness and persistence of these violations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights formally reiterates its request to the Venezuelan State to authorize an on-site visit. This would allow the Commission to carry out its mandate directly on the ground, engage with victims and authorities, and observe the human rights situation firsthand. In

particular, it urges unrestricted access to “El Helicoide,” where numerous reports of torture, ill-treatment, and incommunicado detention have been documented.

The refusal to engage in international cooperation or submit to even minimal multilateral scrutiny is a defining trait of authoritarian rule. Transparency and openness to cooperation are foundational principles of any society that considers itself democratic—or one that aspires to be.

And to the Member States of this Council, as well as to all who honor us with their presence as Permanent Observers, I respectfully reiterate: Venezuela must remain on our collective agenda. The victims, their families, and the millions of Venezuelans who continue to demand truth and justice deserve nothing less than our sustained attention and solidarity.

Thank you.