



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Genocide Watch Emergency: Venezuela September 2021

Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Emergency for Venezuela.

Since 2014, economic collapse coupled with severe state-led repression has forced more than [5.4 million refugees](#) to flee the country. The government of Nicolás Maduro continues to detain, torture, and kill civilians. State security forces and armed groups are committing rights abuses.

Venezuelan security forces are carrying out a systematic campaign of violence targeting alleged political opponents of the Maduro regime. In crackdowns on political opponents, as well as in efforts that supposedly target armed groups, [security forces](#) have killed [tens of thousands](#) of civilians and committed [egregious human rights abuses](#), often targeting residents of Venezuela's [most vulnerable neighborhoods](#).

Government-backed forces are [perpetrating crimes against humanity](#), including forced disappearances, torture, sexual violence, and arbitrary imprisonment. Security forces carry out [extrajudicial killings](#) of civilians, often claiming their victims have ties to armed groups by [planting evidence](#), with [over 18,000 victims](#) since 2014.

The Maduro regime [uses detention to punish](#) those who threaten his political power. Political opponents are [arbitrarily detained](#) for indefinite periods of time and [tortured](#). Efforts by Venezuelan [state security forces](#) that are nominally focused on countering “terrorists” and armed groups are used to target [human rights defenders](#), political opponents, and protesters. The government has used the COVID-19 crisis to further suppress dissidents and [strengthen its control of the country](#).

[Armed groups](#) also use violence to control the lives and everyday activities of Venezuelans, often with the tacit consent or cooperation of the [state security forces](#). Along the Venezuela-Colombia border, a power vacuum has allowed [armed groups to establish control](#). Colombian rebel groups like the ELN, alongside other criminal gangs and armed groups operating on Venezuela's border, are [smuggling drugs and arms](#) between the two countries. Recent fighting between government forces and non-state groups has [displaced thousands](#) in the border region.

Armed groups are committing widespread [human rights violations](#) with impunity, including targeted killings, forced disappearances, sexual violence, and forced labor. These groups use violent threats to maintain control, including [the explicit threat to commit “social cleansing” of “undesirable” populations](#) such as suspected criminals and drug addicts.

Amid a man-made humanitarian and economic crisis, millions of Venezuelans cannot access food, basic healthcare, or water. Civilians face immediate and ongoing risk of violence from both the government and non-state armed groups. Genocide Watch considers Venezuela to be at **Stage 6: Polarization** and **Stage 8: Persecution**.

Recommendations:

- The Inter-American Court of Human Rights should prosecute Nicolás Maduro and other members of the Venezuelan government for human rights violations.
- As party to the ICCPR, Venezuela must cease arbitrary arrests and detentions; as party to the Rome Statute and per the Venezuelan Constitution, Venezuela must uphold its mandate to protect human rights and should prevent torture.
- Donor nations should provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan civilians and refugees.