



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Genocide Watch Alert: Venezuela June 2020

Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Alert for Venezuela.

Political opponents of President Nicolás Maduro’s United Socialist Party are regularly being arrested and detained. [More than 900 political prisoners](#) are currently being held in Venezuela, according to Foro Penal, a non-profit human rights organization. This past year has seen the [highest number of Venezuelan political prisoners](#) in the past two decades.

Maduro launched [Operation Peoples’ Liberation](#) to control political dissidents. He refers to his political opponents as “terrorists,” saying they are threats to “national security.” This dehumanizing rhetoric provides an excuse for grave human rights violations.

Political dissidents are being held for long periods on baseless charges. [Foro Penal](#) has documented over fifty cases where detainees suffered “systematic, planned, and structural” torture by Venezuela’s military counterintelligence forces. Venezuela’s military and police are inflicting sexual abuse, asphyxiation, electric shock, sleep deprivation, starvation, and razor blade torture on political prisoners.

Since President Maduro’s election on April 14, 2013, Venezuela’s government has increasingly cracked down on opposition political parties. The state has reinforced its control over oil resources. Peaceful protesters are regularly arrested by state police and militias. Maduro’s opponents are denied basic food and health care. [The state restricts freedom of the press](#), and arrests journalists who report human rights violations. Professional and business elites are threatened by the military if they do not support the Maduro regime. Those who protest openly are arrested, tortured, or “disappeared,” a euphemism for murder.

In 2017, Maduro bypassed the legislature – which he does not control – and convened a constituent assembly to create a new constitution. The new constitution ensures one-party domination by Maduro’s United Socialist Party. The public was denied the right to vote on the new constitution. Since the strengthening of Maduro’s authoritarian regime, [Human Rights Watch](#) has reported on grave human rights violations by 314 government officials in 13 Venezuelan states. There have probably been many more that remain unreported. No one has been prosecuted for these crimes against humanity.

The Maduro regime denies any government-sponsored torture or human rights violations. Instead, Maduro blames protesters, and uses his accusations to justify violently dispersing protests.

Venezuela’s economy has collapsed. Food is so expensive that most people cannot afford it. There is widespread starvation. Hospitals lack even basic supplies and good health care cannot be obtained. Three million Venezuelan refugees and migrants have fled to neighboring nations.

Genocide Watch urges [regional nations](#) in the Organization of American States to condemn Maduro’s tyranny and demand restoration of basic human rights protections in Venezuela. Refugees must be granted amnesty from any prosecution if they return. The Venezuelan government must be held accountable for its crimes against humanity in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Genocide Watch recognizes these trends in Venezuela as examples of persecution, Stage 8 in Genocide Watch’s [Ten Stages of Genocide](#). Because the persecution targets opposition political groups, it is politicicide, a form of genocide as originally defined by Raphael Lemkin, author of the Genocide Convention.