

# DEVASTATED BOLÍVAR

AUGUST 2019

"I HAVE SACRIFICED  
BUYING FOOD TO BUY  
GASOLINE"

THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE  
OF BOLÍVAR IS BUT A MIRACLE  
FROM HEAVEN

EXECUTIONS AND DISAPPEARANCES:  
"THE MADNESS IN BOLÍVAR  
WAS HORRIFYING"

THE GOLD THAT FUELS  
VIOLENCE AGAINST  
WOMEN

WEALTH AND PAIN  
IN A SINGLE REGION

BOLÍVAR EDITION

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL







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## HOWEVER DARK THE CRISIS, WE WILL NOT BE SILENT

A country's airports, especially those that connect its capitals with the rest of the world, are the first glimpse of the city and the country that awaits us after we pass immigration and customs. They are the first encounter and the first impression of whoever lands in a place, whatever the reason for the visit. Venezuelans, now scattered around the world in a forced exodus to which we have just begun to "get used", enter —when we do it by air—through the Aeropuerto Internacional Simón Bolívar de Maiquetía or, as we call it: "Maiquetía."

I arrived in Maiquetía a couple of months ago as I have in recent years: with a suitcase full of medicines. Over are the days when we brought gifts for our families. Now we address needs instead of gifting objects from the places that have welcomed us.

When I got off the plane, I was shocked: the airport felt dark. In fact, to be more precise, it was flickering. In one of the long corridors leading to the immigration area, a group of lights on the roof would turn on, go out immediately, and then turn on again. Most passengers, like me, walked in silence trying to understand how an international airport could afford to have a damaged electrical system. Upon arrival at the immigration area, we feel the Caribbean heat. The air conditioners are either half working or not working at all. Leaving Maiquetía to get to Caracas meant darkness again, this time on the poorly lit highway leading to the capital. From the moment of landing, those who arrive in Venezuela begin to perceive the darkness that now engulfs almost an entire country.

Those who live in Caracas often comment that their life is "a little easier than that of the people who live in the interior of the country" (i.e. outside the capital). They say this because the lack of public services —such as water, electricity and gas— has become acute and unliveable in many places outside Caracas. International news often cover "mega blackouts" —those involving simultaneous power outages in all states of the country, usually for periods ranging from 12 hours to 4 days.

While no one can deny how tragic and dramatic it is for a population to experience a power failure of such magnitude that it plunges a whole country into darkness for several days, it is imperative to expose the reality of the different regions of Venezuela that suffer local failures of many

basic services on a daily basis. These failures have a disruptive impact on people's lives, since it takes away something essential for anyone: the possibility of planning and living with a minimum of certainty.

This series of Amnesty International Venezuela seeks to continue exposing the tragedy of those who, despite resilience and personal and collective struggles, continue to suffer the crisis of public services in Venezuela. The crisis of such services is not a particular juncture. It is a crisis within a deeper crisis: the human rights violations that each Venezuelan suffers daily, whether they are in the country or abroad.

After a few days in Caracas, in which I obviously experienced lack of water, power outages and dark avenues, I travelled to the plains to visit my family. I arrived home with the hope that characterizes every person who comes from afar to visit their relatives: to eat the food that you feel "only family can make". I felt excited at the table and suddenly we were all left in the dark. What we had planned to be a family reunion became, in a matter of minutes, a hasty search for candles, matches, flashlights and even mosquito repellent, for they would soon invade the house due to lack of ventilation.

The meal ended quickly. The joy of the reunion ended quickly. We sat in the small courtyard trying to escape the anguish resulting from being at 38 degrees Celsius without a fan and the uncertainty of not knowing for how long a vital service for the normal functioning of any family is being taken away without any warning. I thought about the very semantics of light, water, and gas supply, called basic services precisely because we consider them to be essential

for human survival, and yet Venezuela has become a country where the population is often deprived of their necessary enjoyment.

I also thought about the different ways in which we experience the tragedy that has befallen the country: How does a child understand the lack of electricity? How does my mother, whose cognitive impairment does not let her understand why this is happening, experience it? She, in her own way, shows her discomfort because of the heat and lack of cold water —which she prefers given the high temperatures in the place where she lives. Currently, as a country, we have many more questions than answers and many more needs than solutions.

The human rights crisis affecting Venezuela crossed borders several years ago. The departure of millions of Venezuelan refugees to neighbouring countries, coupled with the possible commission of crimes against humanity, as documented by Amnesty International in May this year, have made the Venezuelan situation a global crisis. With more than 4 million Venezuelans living abroad, with at least 7 million people inside the country in need of humanitarian aid and with a host of serious allegations of human rights violations in the main international agencies, including the report submitted by Michelle Bachelet —the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights— in July this year before the United Nations Human Rights Council, show the widespread concern of the international community about the country. From the High Commissioner's report, it is worth highlighting paragraph 12, which relates to the state of economic, social and cultural rights:

Misallocation of resources, corruption, lack of maintenance of public infrastructure, and severe underinvestment has resulted in violations to the right to an adequate standard of living related to the collapse of public services such as public transportation, access to electricity, water, and natural gas.

Despite documentation of serious violations committed against the population and overwhelming evidence that Venezuela is experiencing a profound human rights crisis, Nicolás Maduro's administration has chosen to continue denying the existence of the crisis. Such denial only contributes to perpetuating a crisis that continues to undermine people's fundamental rights and life projects.

The recent arrival of humanitarian aid in the country is a step in the right direction and can help the deteriorating national health system. However, the magnitude of the current humanitarian needs undoubtedly requires much greater efforts in the face of the challenge of addressing the humanitarian emergency. At the same time, the collapse of basic services as a result of the diversion of resources and lack of maintenance, among other causes, as stated in the High Commissioner's report, calls for urgent solutions in which international cooperation and the collective efforts of all social and political actors in the country will most likely be required.

I spent several days with my family sharing the anguish caused by frequent hours-long blackouts and trying to put a good face on the lack of water supply, which should resume almost immediately after power comes back but that in reality remains lacking regardless of the extreme heat, the aggressiveness of the mosquitoes and the pressing need to enjoy our fundamental rights.

I said goodbye at the Arturo Michelena International Airport, which operates from the city of Valencia, and that again reminded me of how the lack of electricity affects even the tiniest things that we usually take for granted when we travel. Airport security, boarding pass scanners, X-rays for baggage screening and even the speakers that announce the next flight and allow for better passenger management rely to a large extent on the airport's power system. Everything was only half-working at the South American country's international airport. Everything was a little dark, like the rest of the country. In the end, the darkness becomes a cruel metaphor for a crisis that has become perpetual in the lives of millions of people and that requires urgent and fair measures for the sake of all.



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# CRISIS IN BOLÍVAR NARRATED BY ITS VICTIMS

Bolívar, despite being the largest and the sixth most populous state in Venezuela, is neglected by the authorities and its inhabitants suffer the consequences every day. This magazine compiles a series of articles and testimonies describing the impact of the massive human rights and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. Even though their land is rich in natural resources, minerals and energy sources, the people of Bolívar have to deal with major problems ranging from fuel shortages, lack of transport and power cuts to the mafias that have settled in the region, who benefit from operating in a border area with large deposits of gold and minerals.

The state-led Orinoco Mining Arc project (Arco Minero del Orinoco), located in northern Bolívar, has been devoted to gold mining and the extraction of mineral resources since 2016. This project has had a devastating environmental impact that has been denounced by NGOs, local leaders and various agents. It has also worsened the violence and clashes between irregular groups and government agencies that want to take control of the mining business. Indigenous communities are under the scourge of criminal gangs that promote terror, sexual exploitation and death, which particularly affect girls and women.

Fuel shortages are another problem for Bolívar state residents, who have to wait in kilometers-long lines for several days to refuel their vehicles at the few gas stations that are working. Many have complained that they are only allowed to fill between 20 and 30 liters of gasoline so that it does not run out. The authorities announced in August 2018 that gasoline would be sold at international prices to those not registered in the national census of motor vehicles. Almost a year later, this mechanism has not been applied. The fuel shortage has triggered a decline in public and private transport that prevents people from getting to work or school.

The production, distribution and shipping of food and basic goods are also almost halted. Domestic gas has also disappeared in many places, while in others it is irregularly available at the regulated price. Residents of various sectors of the state have complained of being without it for months, which has led them to use firewood for cooking. Protests for the full restoration of the service are escalating in a number

of sectors. Power outages, after the national blackout and the announcement of an electricity rationing plan that is not being complied with, have become frequent and keep the population in a state of uncertainty that makes them interrupt and adjust their schedules.

Representatives of the health sector have denounced that in recent months there has been an epidemic of amoebiasis and hepatitis A in Guayana City, with the preschool and school-age population being the most affected. These diseases are related to the consumption of contaminated food or water. In several communities, people complain that not only is the drinking water supply to their homes irregular, but that when it is restored, the water is yellowish and gritty. Malaria is also a big problem in the state —Bolívar accounts for over 70% of the reported cases in the country. Experts credit the increase in the number of cases of the disease to gold mining and the Orinoco Mining Arc. This activity also contributes to spreading of the disease to Brazil and Colombia. Widespread corruption and medicine shortages have led to the illegal trade of antimalarial drugs and increased health emergencies, according to local NGOs. The national shortage of supplies, medicines and health personnel has significantly affected the region. This situation has led to the technical and total closure of important healthcare centers, such as the oncology center of Bolívar City and the Menca de Leoni pediatric center, the largest hospital in the east of the country.

Waste collection services are not working properly. Entire communities must survive surrounded by piles of garbage and debris that are not collected. This waste can remain outdoors for days, leading to the proliferation of insects and rodents. The same thing happens in streets, avenues and in front of retail food establishments and grocery stores.

We are grateful for the efforts of all the journalists, activists and courageous people who, in spite of suffering all the consequences that the lack of state attention unleashes in their region, offered their testimony to make visible the context of human rights violations in which they live.



# “I HAVE SACRIFICED BUYING FOOD TO BUY GASOLINE”

By Marcos David Valverde

Guayana City. Is there a date to point out? Yes: April 21, 2019. Monday after Holy Week. It is not a date that marks, appealing to a common experience, a before and an after around a crisis. Because the crisis was already there. But it was the date from which all the factors that highlight that crisis were left in the background and moved to the gas stations in Bolívar state.

**From that April day on, the residents of the border state in southern Venezuela must spend hours and, most recently, days to do something as filling the car's gas tank.**

Why isn't there a before and after? In Bolívar state, this is not the first crisis in this matter. In late 2016, when Nicolás Maduro banned the circulation of the 100 bolívar bill (a measure that led to looting in several cities and towns in the region), the people of Bolívar experienced something similar: protests and curfews prevented the arrival of gasoline trucks. Therefore, they had to wait in line for several hours to get some fuel.

It was not, then, a crisis, but everyday life. This is what the whole state is experiencing today. Until now, there has been no official explanation.

**The life of Ana Milena Castillo, 43, has changed in the last nine weeks. Her rituals have been disrupted. Her daily life has been distorted. One of the most “absurd” moments, as she describes it, took place between June 11 and 14: she waited in line for gasoline all those days.**

That week the plan announced by the state governor, Justo Noguera Pietri, to sell gasoline according to final plate numbers was implemented. The even, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The odd, on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

She was due on Wednesday 12. That is why she got in line at a gas station on Tuesday 11. But the next day, as the line advanced, she got the news: the fuel had run out. She was not discouraged and decided to stay in line until Friday the 14th. That day, at 10 a.m., she was able to buy gasoline: only 30 liters.

“

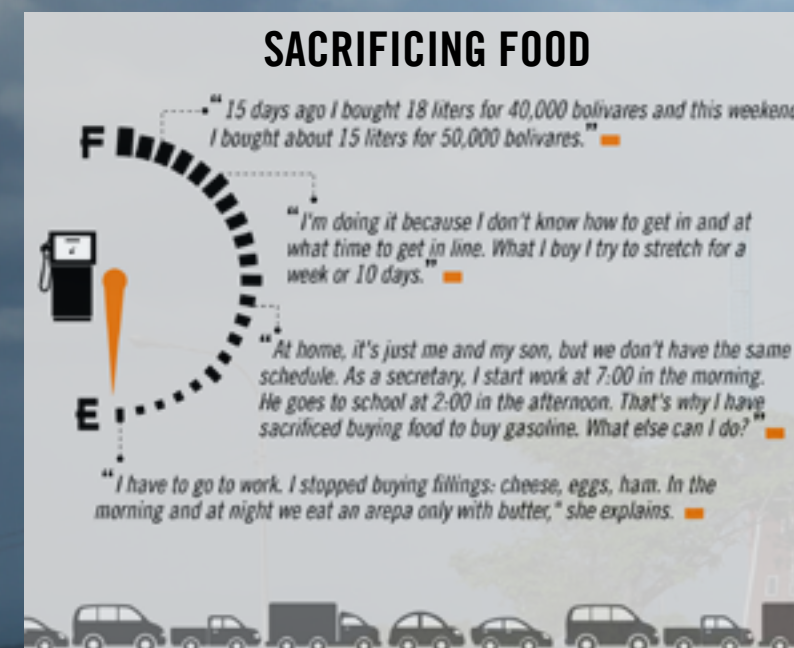
**This is horrible. On Friday, after we were able to get gas at noon, I had a terrible feeling of anxiety. It's like it's all over, but you also feel like they're going to take your spot. It's absurd, but those four days, you leave your house, your pets... everything.**

**It was quite traumatic: the sun, the rain, the heat. Wasting your days to get gasoline. It's not sleeping at the time you should, it's not cleaning, it's eating badly, it's bathing at odd times because you're in line all day. And in the end they give you only 30 liters of gasoline, which last nothing,” she complains.**

One of her daughters, Camila, was with her during those days. “It was horrible and uncomfortable. To be there without a bathroom, without being able to eat well, with the flies getting into the cars. Now, when we want to go out, we consider it carefully because we don't want to spend gas,” she says.

In light of the failure of that plan to control the chaos that has taken over gas stations and their surroundings (some reports describe lines several kilometers long), Noguera announced two new plans. The first was banning lines at gas stations between 6:00 pm and 4:00 am. The second was selling gasoline also by final plate numbers, but no longer in the “even and odd” scheme. Now the system is: from 0 to 3, on Mondays and Thursdays; from 4 to 6, Tuesdays and Fridays; and from 7 to 9, Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Everything has been the same. That is why those who cannot even imagine spending three days waiting in line have resorted to resellers, who charge a dollar per liter of gasoline. Rosa Peñalver has preferred to pay for that and sacrifice other expenses, such as food.







Some prefer not to sacrifice food. Like Josefina Hernández, 69, a San Félix resident, who despite her kidney stones and spikes in blood pressure waited in line for two days:

“

I got in line on Monday at 5:00 a.m. and filled up the tank on Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. How did I do that? I befriended four guys there, offered them food. They looked after my place, they watched my car. I brought them coffee and water and they, delighted, looked after my place for me. After that, I was in bed all day, feeling terrible.”

After nine weeks in crisis, with militarized gas stations and hints of repression, there are no signs that the lines for gasoline are going to stop.

“

One night, the police came and wanted to get us out of line. We stayed put, there was a struggle and they threatened to tow the cars. We told them they were going to have to tow 200 cars and that's how they left us alone,” said Carlos Ortiz, a university professor who waited in line for four days.

In Bolívar state, in the second to last week of June, many await the end of the school year because then, at least, they will not have to spend gasoline on getting their children to school.

Some envy other states not affected by fuel shortages, but they remember that there are no blackouts here. Or not as many as in other regions.

So they resign themselves to thinking that this is the price to be paid by Bolívar state. And they also resign themselves to thinking that there is no solution. The Venezuelan oil industry does not offer solutions. The national and state authorities do not offer solutions. Each person, then, tries to figure out their own days. It is the era of survival in Venezuela.

# BOLÍVAR: THE HARDSHIPS OF A WEALTHY REGION

TWO

By Karla Ávila Morillo

Bolívar state is currently going through a terrible situation that results in environmental, economic, social, material and human damage and losses. The needs have surpassed the capabilities of a region that used to be prosperous.

Whenever Bladimiro Morillo, founder of Ciudad Guayana, talked about his arrival 50 years ago to what is today Puerto Ordaz, he described it as a “huge weedy”. Thanks to the planning of foreign and local workers, it went from a remote jungle to a capital and became an icon of development, productivity, planning and urbanism.

San Félix, the port that blossomed thanks to imports and exports on the banks of the confluence of the Caroní and Orinoco rivers, was the main economic motor between 1865 and 1909. The port's activity gave rise to a great axis of mining and the arrival of Iron Mines of Venezuela and the Orinoco Mining Company.

In this region of southern Venezuela, dreams were achieved by meeting the production goals of basic industries. It was the historical production of metric tons of minerals by the Venezuelan Corporation of Guayana (Corporación Venezolana de Guayana, CVG) that positioned the country at the top of the world economy.

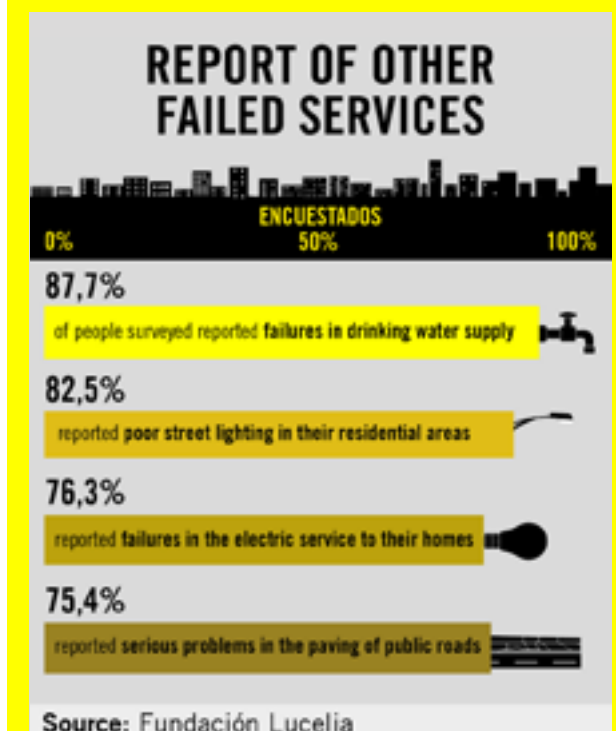
Currently, in 2019, the difference is stark. What exists now is a depressed region, plagued by corruption and lack of basic services.

The focus is on the lack of the minimum public services required by citizens to live with dignity. This violates their human rights and is the reason why there have been over nine thousand protests in the country, of which a little more than four

thousand have been for basic services, according to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social, OVCS).<sup>1</sup>

## INVISIBLE SERVICES

In a survey of 114 inhabitants of Bolívar state, 98 of whom live in Puerto Ordaz (86% of those surveyed), 97.4% reported fuel shortages, 93% complained about poor waste management and 89.5% had problems with Internet access.



A significant 70.2% consider that public transportation is poor, 68.4% find it difficult to secure domestic gas, 68.4% experience frequent failures in mobile telephone services, 67.5 % do not have access to fixed telephones service from the state-run National Telephone Company of Venezuela (Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela, CANTV) or the access is irregular, and 36% of citizens also report sewage spill on public roads.

<sup>1</sup> OVCS: “Situación de la conflictividad en Venezuela en mayo de 2019” [Conflict situation in Venezuela in May 2019] <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/tendencias-de-la-conflictividad/mayo-culmina-con-1-541-protestas-entodo-el-pais> (Spanish only).

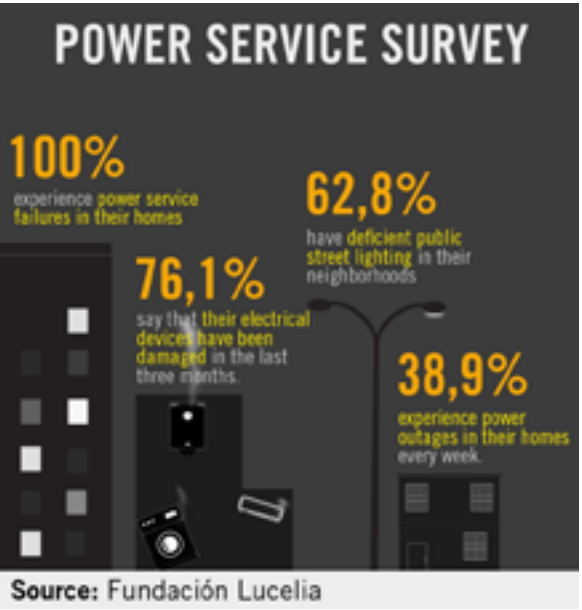


**The lack of public services in the region has had an impact on the way of life of its citizens. For example, the emergency services telephone number (911) is not working properly. The police service, the health service, the domestic gas service —they’ve all deteriorated.”**

Public services are decisive in people’s daily lives. That’s why we, a group of women, created this observatory to monitor the problem, because we need people’s support. We need them to speak up about their needs so that we can collect the information required to address these lacks,” Aliana Estrada, coordinator of the Observatory of Public Services in Guayana, said.

**WE DON’T SEE THE LIGHT**

There is a misconception that in Ciudad Guayana power service never fails because the hydroelectric plants that provide electricity for the whole of Venezuela are located there. However, the truth is that, in sectors like Nueva Chirica in San Félix, there has been no electricity for up to 20 continuous days.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Diario Primicia: “20 días sin luz en Nueva Chirica” [20 days without power in Nueva Chirica] <https://primicia.com.ve/guayana/ciudad/20-dias-sin-luz-en-nueva-chirica/> (Spanish only).



**COME IN, WE CAN FIT A HUNDRED**

In the streets of Ciudad Guayana, you can see the chaos regarding public transportation. There are few units in the streets, all of them full of people who wait for up to three hours in order to get on a bus.

Furthermore, there are robberies both at the stops and inside the vehicles, the costs are high and some routes are no longer available. Likewise, the dangerous use of improvised buses, such as “kennels” —cars with a sort of cage as cargo area— and trucks whose real purpose is to transport construction materials, have caused the death of many passengers.<sup>3</sup>

**Yoel Navarro works in Puerto Ordaz, but he lives in San Félix. On several occasions, he has had to walk more than 10 kilometers to go home: “While I’m walking, I beg for some luck, for a compassionate person to stop and give me a ride home. Sometimes those miracles happen, but not always. The trip that usually takes 15 minutes on public transportation can take me three hours on foot if I’m fast.”**

<sup>3</sup> Transparencia Venezuela: “En Ciudad Guayana el transporte es poco, caro y peligroso” [In Ciudad Guayana, transportation is scarce, expensive and dangerous] <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/ciudad-guayanatransporte-poco-caropeligroso/> (Spanish only).

**GUILLOTINE THAT CURTAILS EDUCATION**

The educational situation, rarely mentioned to public opinion, is also affected. The enjoyment of the right to education of children and adolescents is compromised due to the deficient functioning of the educational system in view of the complexity of the current context, where we can find schools with poor basic services or Schools with poor basic services or no basic services at all.

**There is significant school non-attendance, which forces teachers to develop new strategies in order to finish the school year somewhat successfully. Doris Guzmán, president of the National College of Teachers, Caroní section, says that there is a 50% dropout rate at all school levels.<sup>4</sup>**

In addition, parents and guardians comment on the lack of qualified teachers, since many of them have had to migrate as a result of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency. This contributes to low quality education which, in the medium term, results in students with significant shortcomings in their fundamentals, since they do not complete the curriculum that they should, which in the future will be an obstacle for their higher education.

**QUALITY OF LIFE OR DEATH**

Southern Venezuela is divided among those who love the region and are determined not to let it die and those who are the opposite. The first, they start ventures unrelated to mining and practice solidarity, organization, perseverance, discipline and resilience as values to improve a society that has suffered devastating effects on its essential capacities. The others, they are involved in power struggles to control natural resources and strategic territories and give rise to generalized violence, corruption, restriction of freedoms and the establishment of mafias.

<sup>4</sup> Diario Primicia: “50% de ausencia en aulas por problemas de traslado” [School non-attendance at 50% due to transportation difficulties] <https://primicia.com.ve/guayana/ciudad/50-deausencia-en-aulas-por-problemas-de-traslado/> (Spanish only).

Alí Daniels, from the non-governmental organization Access to Justice, claims: “The situation of public services in Guayana seems like a kind of economic and social apartheid, since the hardship of the other regions of Venezuela turns Caracas into a scenery where nothing happens, where everything is fine. What happens in the interior of the country, Guayana included, is not only discriminatory, but it also reveals the perversity of the authorities, who sacrifice the rest of the country so that Caracas maintains the facade of a government that constantly violates human rights .”

**Life in these regions of the country is not easy —it is as complex as in border regions. The regional impact in terms of restrictions on economic, social and cultural rights hinders all citizens with different levels of intensity, but it still affects them all.**

A huge breach has opened up between those who have means and those who do not. In the same street, you can see the city’s trendy nightclub crowded with cars and, less than five meters away, a long line of over three hundred vehicles that can spend up to three days in line to be refueled. That is the contrast that is lived in Guayana.

The activist claims that “in Guayana, human rights





↑ © 2019 © Correo del caroní

“

**“For example, we already have complaints made visible by the Coalition of Organizations for the Right to Health and Life (Codevida) about kidney patients who not only are asked to bring the supplies for dialysis, but they are also asked to bring fuel for the emergency power system of the health center. Health has been privatized, because the burden of their own health has been placed in the patients’ pockets.”**

are massively and systematically violated, which puts people’s lives at risk.”

In the state’s south, close to Brazil, where the municipalities of El Callao and Gran Sabana are located, the situation is the same or worse in terms of basic services, but fuel shortage is what affects the citizens the most. In areas such as Tumeremo

and Santa Elena de Uairén, people have spent up to seven days without been able to fuel their vehicles.

The lawyer concludes that “in Bolívar, there is also the mining activity, which has turned the rest of the population into economic hostages, because it has altered the prices and values of products, making the cost of living in the region higher than in the rest of the country because gold is worth more than bolívares”.

The greatest desire of Bolívar state residents is that the basic services improve, but they also complain about poor conditions of streets and avenues, garbage accumulation, dark neighborhoods and homes without gas supply nor Internet service.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Diario Primicia: “A la espera por servicios básicos en comunidades de Guayana” [Guayana communities waiting for basic services] <https://primicia.com.ve/especiales/a-laespera-por-servicios-basicos-en-comunidades-de-guayana/> (Spanish only).

# THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE OF BOLÍVAR IS BUT A MIRACLE FROM HEAVEN

THREE

By Gabriela Buada Blondell

In Bolívar state, the health crisis is getting worse. Its inhabitants face the reappearance of mining-related diseases that had been eliminated. They also face the dread experienced by anyone living with a chronic health condition that cannot be treated.

In Bolívar, the municipalities of Heres and Caroní account for most of the population. Today, as in all of Venezuela, to speak of the right to health is to have to mention the multiple complaints of civil society organizations<sup>1</sup> that report the dramatic setback in this matter as a result of a Complex Humanitarian Emergency that affects the entire population. Undoubtedly, this particular right has been severely violated time and time again.

What is happening in this regard has been reported by international agencies, which consider this whole situation to be a massive catastrophe (World Bank, 2019) and an endless spiral of violence (OHCHR, 2018). Venezuela is among the 15 countries that will experience the worst humanitarian crises this year (Europa Press, 2019) and occupies the first places in corruption and lack of competitiveness, with a dramatic collapse of institutions, the economy and welfare, without there having been a war (IMF, 2018).

Since 2013, defenders of the right to health and the right to life have been warning about what is now a reality that the authorities denied so that they would not have to address it. Then, no economic sanctions were in sight and there was time to prevent what we live today or, at least, to react quickly and guarantee health and a dignified life. Today the situation has worsened and there are many obstacles to overcome in this respect.

Hospitals and outpatient clinics in Ciudad Guayana are no longer able to provide services. Many of the private clinics in Puerto Ordaz closed as a result of the severe decline of supply companies. The conditions at the main hospital in Ciudad Bolívar, the Ruíz y Páez Hospital, are inhumane simply because there are no supplies to operate and lives are in imminent danger due to the precarious state of the health facility.

<sup>1</sup> Agenda Venezuela 2030: “Emergencia Humanitaria Compleja en Venezuela. Derecho a la Salud. Reporte del estado Bolívar. Diciembre 2018” [Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela. Right to Health. Bolívar State Report. December 2018] <http://www.agendavenezuela2030.org/wp-content/uploads/Reporte-Bol%C3%ADvar-EHC-Derecho-a-la-Salud-Diciembre-2018.pdf> (Spanish only).

**Yamileth Hernández shares her 12-year-old daughter’s experience with malaria: “At first the doctors couldn’t diagnose her. Few health professionals work at the hospital and they saw her on the third day, when the fever had already caused the girl to have seizures.”**

The malaria epidemic in Guayana worsens and the chemicals used in illegal mining, such as mercury and cyanide, have serious consequences for young women and, in particular, pregnant women. The organic mercury (methylmercury) concentrated in fish in polluted rivers affects pregnancies. Mercury affects the fetus, damaging its nervous system and brain. These chemicals, in the bodies of pregnant women, result in the births of children with serious motor, neuronal and brain deficiencies, according to the Bolívar state Complex Humanitarian Emergency report published by human rights organizations.



(methylmercury) concentrated in fish in polluted rivers affects pregnancies. Mercury affects the fetus, damaging its nervous system and brain. These chemicals, in the bodies of pregnant women, result in the births of children with serious motor, neuronal and brain deficiencies, according to the Bolívar state Complex Humanitarian Emergency report published by human rights organizations.

Today, epidemics and diseases that had been eliminated have progressively spread. A setback that speaks of the collapse of the national health system. The increase of malaria cases in Bolívar, especially since the development of the Orinoco Mining Arc project, as well as the progressive deterioration of the Ministry of Health’s structures for the prevention, control and treatment of the disease, have had serious environmental consequences for the inhabitants and the biodiversity of the region.

There have been several complaints that malaria, measles and diphtheria have spread from Bolívar state as a result of mining.

“The malaria prevention, diagnosis and control program has been gradually deteriorating since 2012, as a result of the political and economic crisis,” which “has led to an unbridled increase in the malaria epidemic,” a research conducted by Dr. María Eugenia Grillet at the Central University of Venezuela indicates.

The World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged the emergency and decided to support Venezuela along with Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen, which are facing a similar situation.

Measles, diphtheria and malaria are at least three diseases that have recently become more prevalent in the region. It seems that they have spread from Bolívar and that is due to mining in the municipality of Sifontes,” warned Manuel Guzmán, Head of the Infectious Diseases department at the Vargas Hospital in Caracas.

ALL AREAS OF HEALTH IN INTENSIVE CARE

Jhonathan Castañeda is a surgeon. He says that his professional experience in Bolívar, particularly in the Ruíz y Páez Hospital, is a nightmare that worsens with time.

“

There is a shortage of everything, especially health professionals, and that creates a serious problem because it accelerates the collapse. In the hospital we lack everything, and therefore, the impact on primary care is impossible to disguise,” the young doctor lamented.

The physician remarks that the exact same thing happens in clinics and that the right to health is not guaranteed. It is with pain that doctors are faced day after day with a situation that no one can stand and that is often known to be happening because the authorities so want it.





**The figures do not come to light and it is difficult to access them because many people profit from this situation. The incidence of HIV in Bolívar state is high and this is something that has been on the rise, as well as cases of tuberculosis.”**

Another example offered by the physician to illustrate the different aspects of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in the region is what happens to people who have to undergo elective surgeries, such as a hysterectomy.

**The patient has to get everything. From the sterile gauze to the solution to be used, including the anesthetic needed to perform the operation. This means that many people are not treated because they don't even have the basic tests required for the surgery, and it means that conditions that could be prevented are left untreated. As a result, many people die from preventable causes.”**

The unprecedented collapse has a considerable impact on the deterioration of the quality of life of Venezuelans and on the increase in deaths from preventable causes, as this is precisely one of the most lasting effects of the health crisis in the country.

## UNFULFILLED PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES

Johonnys Hernández, the first Venezuelan beneficiary of a precautionary measure<sup>2</sup> granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), knows that economic sanctions are not the cause of his deteriorating health.

<sup>2</sup> Provea: “CIDH adopta medida cautelar histórica a favor del derecho a la salud en Venezuela” [IACHR grants historic precautionary measure in favor of the right to health in Venezuela] <https://www.derechos.org.ve/actualidad/cidh-adopta-medida-historica-a-favor-del-derecho-a-la-saluden-venezuela> (Spanish only).

“

**The precautionary measure was not complied with. At first and for six months, I got the drug, but it wasn't because they bought it. What they gave me belonged to people with hemophilia in Ciudad Guayana. In other words, I was being allocated medicine from another region, so that they could say they were complying. They could only do that for a while and the measure was not complied with,” Hernández said.**

Since December, he has been suffering from a lack of not only medicine but also food. In January, Johonnys lost consciousness for over 15 minutes because he had not eaten in several days. Because he cannot secure treatment for hemophilia, the bleedings are prolonged and he cannot work or take care of himself.

“

**I'm very affected, not only physically but emotionally. I am my own psychologist and I try not to become depressed. Acción Solidaria has supported me with food and supplements and with that I have been able to survive. I currently weigh 49 to 50 kg and I am weak. It's not right for an NGO to have to help me. I should have my treatment and be able to work and support myself.”**

The legal department of Acción Solidaria is monitoring the health of Johonnys Hernández, since they are considering requesting that the State be asked to comply with the measure and that they also grant him compensation. The latter because he cannot fend for himself due to a health condition which, with a policy that guarantees medicines to the population, is perfectly preventable.





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# THE CRISIS AND THE MINES TAKE THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY

FOUR

By Luis Alvarenga



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DEVASTATED BOLÍVAR  
WEALTH AND PAIN IN A SINGLE REGION

“They must guarantee my health and I deserve financial compensation for all that I have suffered because it is not acceptable that they do not spend on health, but they do invest in weapons and uniforms for soldiers. People are dying and I believe that they should comply with the IACHR’s measure because, without medicines, I am rendered useless and incapacitated,” he added.

## AN ENDLESS EMERGENCY IN THE COUNTRY’S RICHEST STATE

The Venezuelan government is failing in its responsibility to protect citizens regardless of their political affiliation and the entire world knows this because of the worsening migration crisis. In Bolívar, people with health conditions are forced to migrate to Caracas to save their lives.

“Among the most vulnerable groups are people with chronic and serious illnesses, pregnant and nursing women, newborns, children under five years of age, indigenous people, the elderly, people at risk and people with disabilities. They arrive at the Vargas Hospital in Caracas to save their lives, but not much can be done here,” said Dr. Manuel Guzmán.

Due to the humanitarian crisis, medical care and fuel supply have been severely affected, as power outages deprive the state of basic services. This results in preventable deaths and the resurgence of eliminated diseases.

“

The shortage or absence of medicines and medical attention in the public health services in Bolívar leads us to practices from the Stone Age. Indigenous women and children are not guaranteed access to diagnosis or treatment,” the doctor claimed.

The collapse of basic services aggravates sanitation problems in public health centres and hospitals do not have regular water access. Power outages are a major concern, as there are no emergency power systems to keep life-support equipment on.

The shortage of medicines has also forced emergency specialists to bear costs that they should not. “Many of us, who don’t really earn living wages, pay for gauze, sterile gloves and needles,” said Dr. Jhonathan Castañeda.

An immediate solution and a humanitarian space with international support must be demanded in order to address the healthcare crisis, so that all health situations—which went from being classified as serious, preventable or treatable to becoming a catastrophe that has to stop—can be dealt with. Life in Bolívar and in Venezuela as a whole is a Russian roulette that, in times of economic prosperity, no one expected. Civil society organizations have the fundamental role of continuing to document these cases so that they are not repeated and to make the right to health possible once more.

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The human, economic, cultural, social and environmental rights crisis suffered by people in Venezuela is worsening every day. It causes the quality of life of the country's residents to deteriorate, to the point of surviving rather than living.

The lack of drinking water and the ever-increasing shortage of public transportation, food, fuel, medicines and even cash in Bolívar state prevents people from working, studying or even carrying out activities that allow them to relieve the stress caused by the country's situation.

"John Castañeda" (name changed to protect identity) teaches at a school in Santa Elena de Uairén, the largest border town near Brazil. Both residents of the community and young people from the Pemón indigenous people study at the institution.

The teacher points out that, before the blackouts that took place in March 2019, the community had been somewhat protected from power failures because selling electricity to Brazil was a priority. However, when the Simón Bolívar Hydroelectric Plant collapsed, the region was already suffering another disaster.

**The March blackout coincided with a drought and that was very difficult. No one had water or telephony. We were in the schools and we had classes with nothing but daylight because we have a policy of not suspending classes when possible. However, there was no water in the community and many students and school workers were unable to attend," recalls Castañeda.**

The teacher also explains that the economic crisis affecting Venezuelans has caused yet another growing phenomenon: school dropout. According to several NGOs, it reaches 70%<sup>1</sup> in the country.

**Many students are dropping out. They go to the mines to rummage for their daily sustenance. The economic situation here has been very difficult," Castañeda remarks.**

Of the school's roughly 700 students, 6 or 8 per classroom go to the mines. These are mainly young people from the upper years, who go with their families to try to get the gramas (tiny portions of gold) that will allow them to survive for a few days.

<sup>1</sup> El Universal: "Docentes de Fe y Alegría advierten incremento en deserción escolar" [Fe y Alegría teachers warn about increase in school dropout rates] <http://www.eluniversal.com/caracas/35048/docentes-de-fe-y-alegría-advierten-incremento-de-desercion-escolar> (Spanish only).

**Before, someone who went to the mines and brought two gramas of gold could buy a lot of food, but now that's enough for just a few days because of rising food prices," the teacher explains.**

The school in which he works has relied on partnerships to provide food service to the students, which can help them have healthy lunches, despite all the effort involved.

**We have a partnership with the School Feeding Program of the Ministry of Education, but these years we have hardly benefited from the service. This year, we sometimes get rice, black beans or pasta. Just one or two things, because protein hasn't come for years," he says.**



↑ © Correo del Caroni

## CHILDREN ARE NOT SPARED THE TRAGEDY

Castañeda regrets that many children have gone or been forcibly taken to the mines<sup>2</sup> to be sexually exploited for money<sup>3</sup>.

**There are serious cases of prostitution here. Unfortunately, it has to be said: many girls and boys have been forced into it," Castañeda denounces. In addition, he points out that the authorities do not allow access to or provide information<sup>4</sup> on cases of sexually transmitted diseases in the area, despite attempts by teachers and civil society organizations to take preventive measures against this tragedy.**

<sup>2</sup> La Razón: "Prolifera la esclavitud infantil en las zonas fronterizas" [Child slavery proliferates in border areas] <https://www.larazon.net/2019/07/prolifera-la-esclavitud-infantil-en-las-zonas-fronterizas/> (Spanish only).

<sup>3</sup> Crónica Uno: "Estado venezolano ignora explotación sexual de mujeres indígenas en el Arco Minero" [Venezuelan government ignores sexual exploitation of indigenous women in the Mining Arc] <http://cronica.uno/estado-venezolano-ignora-explotacion-sexual-de-mujeres-indigenas-en-el-arco-minero/> (Spanish only).

<sup>4</sup> Panampost: "Salud en Venezuela está en cuidados intensivos" [Health in Venezuela is in intensive care] <https://es.panampost.com/josefina-blanco/2019/04/07/salud-venezuela/> (Spanish only).

<sup>5</sup> El Universal: Las semillas de El Sistema se dispersan por el mundo [The Universal: The seeds of the system soars across the world] <http://www.eluniversal.com/entretenimiento/44041/las-semillas-de-el-sistema-se-dispersan-por-el-mundo#>

"It is informally known that there are many people with HIV, between 80 and 200, which for this community is a lot of people," he warns.

The authorities' response to this dramatic situation is non-existent. There are no prevention plans, official information is hidden and the possibilities of seeking treatment in nearby Brazilian cities are restricted.

Castañeda recalls when they closed the border in early 2019. The military blocked the passage of people with medical conditions and hospitals were not allowed to refer patients to health centres in Brazil.

## THE SILENCE OF THE CRISIS

Venezuela has been recognized in recent decades as an icon in inclusive music education. The National System of Children's and Youth Orchestras (Sistema Nacional de Orquestas Infantiles y Juveniles), known as El Sistema, stands out as the model for teaching anyone who wishes to transform their life and that of others through music<sup>5</sup>.

However, the human rights crisis has left practice and concert halls in silence. Jorge Montero has a degree in Education for Cultural Development, and is a bassoon teacher and a luthier of El Sistema. He has seen how young people have been forced to give up their dreams in order to survive.



**In the National System of Orchestras, where we teach music and the luthier's workshop, there has been too much dropping out because the high transportation costs prevent the students from attending regularly. How do they get the money to come? Sometimes they can't and have to walk," he says.**

The classrooms where Montero teaches, when students do attend, are located in Ciudad Bolívar, capital of the homonymous state, in a complex called Bolívar Cultural Center that was built for this purpose.

"The severity of the damage caused by the March blackouts was very great, since they wreaked havoc on El Sistema's headquarters. The water pumps broke down, so part of the schedule has been removed due to the impossibility of keeping the bathrooms working all the time we're supposed to be in the classrooms," Montero said.

Before the crisis affected all areas of life, the students were able to have classes every day, but due to non-payment of teacher salaries, inadequate conditions at the facility and lack of transportation, class hours were drastically reduced to just a few per day.

**The educational services situation in Bolívar has deteriorated due to high dropout rates and irregular payments. There are many teachers who have emigrated because of the high cost of living," Montero laments.**

The teacher notes that it was at the end of May when the fuel shortage<sup>7</sup> worsened in the city —despite it being the capital of the state and part of the country with the largest oil reserves in the world. This situation affects the functioning of not only El Sistema, but also of other offices in the Bolívar Cultural Center.

"We could say that we are at a complete standstill," the luthier warns.

Montero also regrets that, due to the crisis, all possibility of education disappears and "that is when other factors detrimental to children development come into play. That would cause major damage to society as a whole."

However, neither Montero nor the remaining teachers intend to give up.

**Those of us who still believe in Venezuela have to keep working even if it is selflessly, because we must not leave everything in the hands of politics. Unfortunately, society is looking bloody, but we have to continue fighting and do our best to keep going," he stresses.**

## A FUTURE WITHOUT LIGHTS?

Many students in Venezuela have had to split their days in two: one part to work and the other to study. Furthermore, for some years now, the time or attention given to classes<sup>8</sup> has been cut back because of the need to help their families to secure water or food, stand in long lines to fuel their vehicles or even buy domestic gas.

Endrich Guzmán has a degree in Theology and is a law student at the Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho University in Ciudad Bolívar, where students and teachers have had to adapt to the situation by changing the class schedules.

<sup>6</sup> Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar: "Niños y jóvenes de Ciudad Bolívar tienen una sede propia" [Children and youth of Ciudad Bolívar have their own headquarters] <https://fundamusical.org.ve/noticias/los-ninos-y-jovenes-de-ciudad-bolivar-tienen-una-sede-propia/> (Spanish only).

<sup>7</sup> Crónica Uno: "Colas kilométricas, extorsión, y protestas: ocho semanas de escasez de gasolina en Bolívar" [Kilometres-long lines, Extortion and Protests: Eight Weeks of Fuel Shortage in Bolívar] <http://cronica.uno/colas-kilometricas-extorsion-y-protestas-ocho-semanas-de-escasez-de-gasolina-en-bolivar/> (Spanish only).

<sup>8</sup> El Nacional: "Deserción estudiantil oscila entre 30% y 40% en las universidades" [University dropout rates range from 30% to 40%] [http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/sociedad/desercion-estudiantil-oscila-entre-las-universidades\\_268494](http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/sociedad/desercion-estudiantil-oscila-entre-las-universidades_268494) (Spanish only).

**I study in the evenings and because of the insecurity we started to leave earlier and we changed the class schedules," Guzmán says. He adds that after the blackouts in March 2019, the university has considered eliminating evening classes due to frequent power failures, insecurity, water shortages and lack of public transportation.**

In addition, hyperinflation in Venezuela (forecast at 10,000,000% in 2019, according to the International Monetary Fund<sup>9</sup>) dilutes the salaries of teachers, who have had to engage in other activities to support their homes, which has resulted in resignations<sup>10</sup>.

Guzmán points out that "the university has asked for police presence during the evenings and we have had to pressure the university not to eliminate evening classes. Besides, professors don't want to teach so late because of the insecurity."

Despite these problems, the student was able to overcome the obstacles using the family car. Until the fuel crisis came. Now, he has to skip classes to look for not only gasoline, but also for other methods to secure drinking water, because with the car he was able to deal with this situation more easily.

**This semester I have had to stop going to university so that I can get water for my family, because my father is an old man and I can't leave it all to him," Guzmán says.**

In a country with dignified living conditions, refuelling only takes a few minutes. But in Venezuela, everything takes long hours out of people's lives. In Ciudad Bolívar, the lines begin to form a day before the gasoline truck arrives, if it arrives at all.

"One night they couldn't pick me up after class because they were going to be waiting in line to refuel the car, because here it's by license plate number,

<sup>9</sup> Univisión Noticias: "10,000,000%: el desmesurado aumento de la inflación que pronostican para Venezuela en 2019" [10,000,000%: The disproportionate increase in inflation forecast for Venezuela in 2019] <https://www.univision.com/noticias/crisis-en-venezuela/10-000-000-el-desmesurado-aumento-de-la-inflacion-que-ponostican-para-venezuela-en-2019> (Spanish only).

<sup>10</sup> El Impulso: "El 50% de los docentes universitarios emigraron y la deserción estudiantil alcanza el 35%" [50% of university professors emigrated and the student dropout rate is at 35%] <https://www.elimpulso.com/2019/02/06/el-50-de-los-docentes-universitarios-emigraron-y-la-desercion-estudiantil-alcanza-el-35-6feb/> (Spanish only).



but when I got home they told me they wasted their time because the gas station had no fuel," he says.

The consequence of these problems is evidenced in student dropout rates and teacher resignations. "From my group of friends in college 3 have left the country, but of the 50 students who started the program, this semester we are less than 16," says Guzmán.

However, not everything is lost. There are still young people who want to solve the country's problems, who believe in it and who struggle to survive this human rights crisis.

**I want to keep studying as long as I can. Whether or not I stay in college, I don't plan on leaving the country. I don't have the heart to leave my family here with this problem," Guzmán ends.**



# EXECUTIONS AND DISAPPEARANCES: “THE MADNESS IN BOLÍVAR WAS HORRIFYING”

By Luis Alvarenga

February 23, 2019 was a day awaited by most of the Venezuelan population, as well as the media and international organizations, since a political sector of the country would achieve the arrival of humanitarian aid<sup>1</sup> across the borders with Colombia and Brazil

The euphoria caused by a multitudinous concert at the border crossing between Cúcuta, Colombia, and Táchira state, Venezuela, extended from February 22 to beyond February 23, date when the entry of humanitarian aid across Táchira and Bolívar states was attempted.

Since then, however, hell has broken loose in the region. “Marcos Rodríguez” (name changed to protect identity), a teacher at a school in the city, has been a witness to the barbarism committed by state security forces and unidentified armed civilians.

On February 22, the Venezuelan government ordered the closure of the border<sup>2</sup> to prevent any action by the opposition and officially increased the military presence in the area, but many unknown people also arrived.

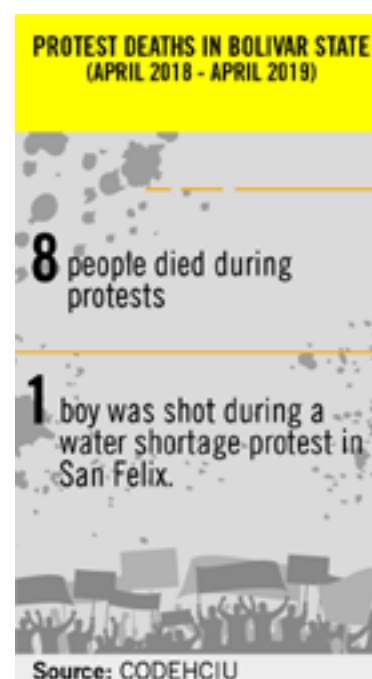
“Here, with the closure of the border, the list of abuses is huge, terrible. The madness here was horrifying and brought out the worst in some people,” notes Rodríguez.

The teacher claims that many people from outside Santa Elena de Uairén and its surroundings were sent to the area to frighten those supporting the entry of humanitarian aid, but the situation worsened.

<sup>1</sup> Asamblea Nacional: “Juan Guaidó: El 23 de febrero será el día del ingreso de la ayuda humanitaria a Venezuela” [Juan Guaidó: February 23 will be the day of the entry of humanitarian aid into Venezuela] [http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/\\_juan-guaido-el-23-de-febrero-sera-el](http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/_juan-guaido-el-23-de-febrero-sera-el) (Spanish only).

<sup>2</sup> Venezolana de Televisión: “Gobierno venezolano anuncia cierre de frontera terrestre con Brasil” [Venezuelan government announces closure of land border with Brazil] <http://vtv.gob.ve/cierra-frontera-terrestre-brasil/> (Spanish only).

The yellow buses, known as Dracula’s buses, came full of criminals and they put them in the Fort Roraima. You could see them and you knew that they weren’t soldiers”, Rodríguez says.



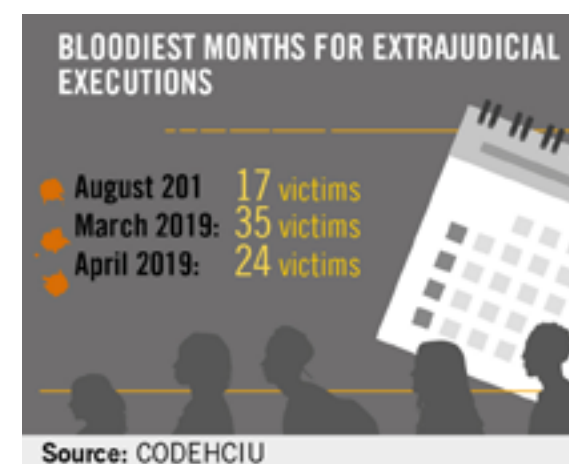
On February 22, social media was full of messages and videos about what was happening in the closed and censored border. Groups of indigenous people who supported the arrival of humanitarian aid were repressed with tear gas and firearms.

I was in La Línea border crossing the day humanitarian aid came in and after that day they persecuted a lot of people. There are a lot of disappeared people and nobody knows where they are,” Rodríguez says.



The consequences of the state’s excessive actions in Bolívar state were not only evident in the days around February 22, but also for a longer time, as exposed in the Annual Report (April 2018 - April 2019) issued by the Extrajudicial Executions Monitor run by the Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship (Comisión para los Derechos Humanos y la Ciudadanía, Codehciu).

According to Codehciu, the bloodiest month for extrajudicial executions has been March, with 35 recorded cases, followed by April with 24 cases.

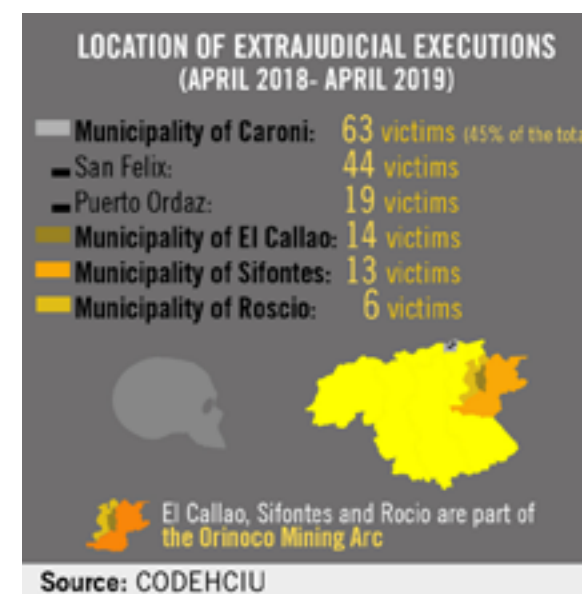


“There were thousands of military officers here and you could see extortions everywhere. In Santa Elena de Uairén, they would go to the shops, ask for whatever they wanted and leave,” Rodríguez stresses.

## CRIMES IN THE DARK

March 2019 saw the largest and longest general blackout in Venezuela’s history. Almost the entire country was left without power, and Bolívar state was no exception.

The virtual standstill of the country was no obstacle for the officers who have the obligation to protect citizens to continue committing human rights violations. The report issued by Codehciu notes that 45% of the extrajudicial executions (63 victims) were committed in the Caroní municipality alone.

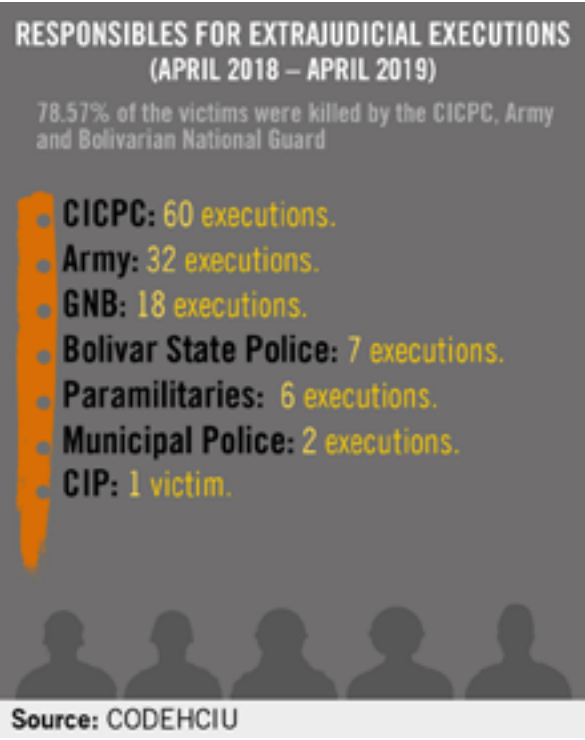




The NGO also points out that, according to witnesses and reports, 78.57% of the alleged extrajudicial executions were committed by the Forensic Criminal Investigations Police (Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas, CICPC), the Army and the Bolivarian National Guard (Guardia Nacional Bolivariana, GNB).

“

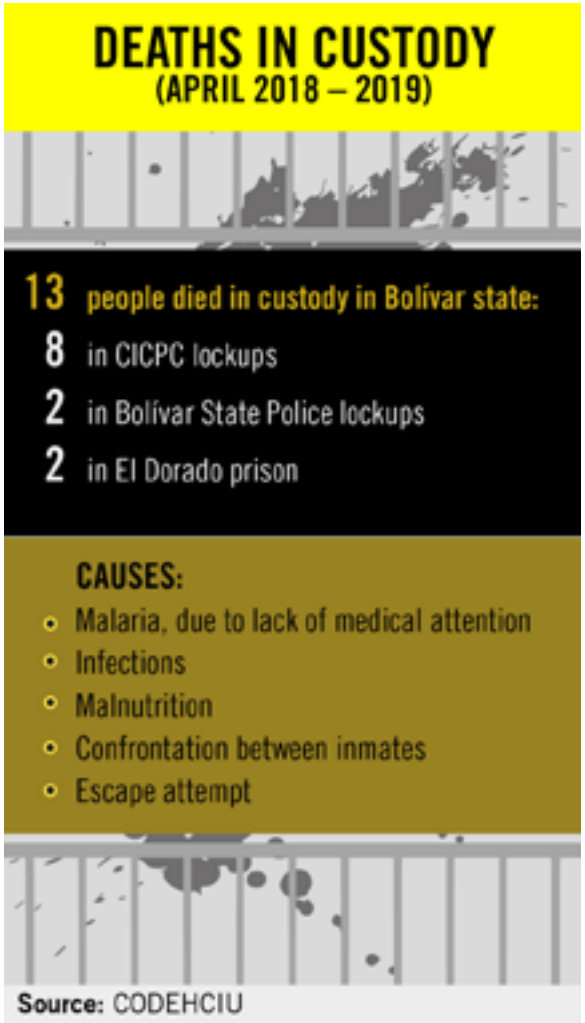
The teacher recalls that “there was a massacre because many of the people who came in buses defected and then they were persecuted. There were days that were 4 or 5 killings, even 9 on one occasion.”



Rodríguez adds that in the border of Bolívar state and in the communities around Fort Roraima, it is known that those who were captured during the days following February 23 have been subjected to torture, beatings and electric shocks.

“They used to say to people, ‘Do you know all the disappeared? They’re burning in that fire’ and they made a bonfire,” the teacher remembers in fear.

Codehciu reports that, between April 2018 and 2019, 13 people died in custody in Bolívar state, where authorities are responsible for their health and safety, as well as for dignified conditions of detention.



The fear of not knowing what might happen and what happened to the disappeared increases every time flocks of vultures circling Fort Roraima, where Rodríguez has observed columns of smoke in the days following February 23.

“

Now, the common belief is that there are mass graves near the fort,” he concludes.

# “I’M ASHAMED TO SAY THAT I’M A BASIC INDUSTRY WORKER”

SIX

By Gladylis Flores

To be a worker in a basic industry in Guayana, Bolívar state, used to be prestigious. The quality of life of a basic industry worker was superior to that of a public administration employee because of the benefits they had thanks to the collective agreement of each company. But this has changed in recent years: agreements are unfulfilled and those who denounce it are persecuted.

The subsidiary companies of the Venezuelan Corporation of Guayana (Corporación Venezolana de Guayana, CVG) do not currently have pay grades, so all workers have the same salary. This is a result of the wage increase following currency conversion in 2018.

This sparked a wave of protests in the region that lasted approximately four months, resulting in the imprisonment of Rubén González, representative of the CVG Ferrominera Union and leader of the protests. He is currently imprisoned in La Pica prison in Monagas state and is being tried by a military tribunal.

His family has repeatedly denounced the conditions in which he is being held. Nine other workers from the state-owned iron company and three from CVG Venalum were also arrested, along with the president of the Unique Union of Aluminum Professionals (Sindicato Único de Profesionales Universitarios de Venalum, Sutrapuval), José Hidalgo. All had denounced violations of collective agreements.

## PERSECUTION TO WORKERS

In addition to the arrests, persecutions have not stopped. The Intersectorial of Workers of Guayana, a coalition of unionists from state-owned companies, has denounced that some of its members suffered harassment at their jobs.

The most affected are the leaders of the trade unions of CVG, of which Pedro Maldonado is the CEO. Noel Hernández, CVG’s labor director, was fired from his position, while Ramón Gómez, general secretary of the Public Employees of CVG Union (Sindicato de Empleados Públicos de CVG, Sunep), was forced to retire —without having reached the minimum retirement age or completed the required years of service.

“

Since Rubén González was arrested, a stronger persecution began against all of us. Since November, they requested authorization to fire me to the Labor Inspectorate for claiming our labor rights,” Aristóteles Maneiro, who worked as a supervisor of heavy equipment operation in the CVG, explains.

The worker claims that the order to fire him was given by the Corporation’s CEO after his participation in an interview on a national television channel, in which he denounced the poor conditions of basic industries in Guayana.





↑ Correo del Caroni | Marcos Valverde

## DECIMATED QUALITY OF LIFE

“José Fermín” (name changed to protect identity) has been working at CVG Ferrominera for 34 years and is close to his retirement. He is afraid to give statements for fear of being fired or victim of some other retaliation from the company.

He says that in order to stretch out the salary he receives from the company, where he works as administrative staff, he must sell ice cream, lollipops and ice in his home, together with his wife, who is also an employee of CVG.

**“The salary is not enough for the market basket, much less to buy clothes. That’s why we have to do what it takes to make ends meet, but we barely eat protein. Thank God my two older children moved out, so we are only three people at home,” says Fermín.**

“The salary is not enough for the market basket, much less to buy clothes. That’s why we have to do what it takes to make ends meet, but we barely eat protein. Thank God my two older children moved out, so we are only three people at home,” says Fermín.

He learned to use public transportation again, because two years ago his car was stolen and he has not been able to buy a new one. This is why he often misses work and is left out of the food bag benefit, on which he depends to complete the food for his household.

After spending the best years of his life in the company, raising his children, traveling around the country on the holidays and having a health insurance that covered all his needs, Fermín’s days have become all about survival.

This is not what workers expect after spending many years of their lives in a company. However, it is the case of many retirees, who envisioned their retirement differently, thinking they would be to be able to enjoy their final years.

**“My life plan for retirement was to buy a little house in Caripe, take cooking classes and open a restaurant. The retirement money was not even enough for grocery shopping. Now I have to look for medicines all day and stretch out the money to buy food,” says Gloria Álvarez, a retiree from CVG Venalum.**

The situation of retirees is similar to that of active workers, since their pay is unrelated to the job they had —they all receive minimum wage.

The various unions and the Intersectorial of Workers of Guayana have reported the deterioration in their quality of life, as well as all the persecution they have suffered in the last few years. However, many continue to work for the recovery of Guayana’s industrial park despite the harassment.

SEVEN

## THE GOLD THAT FUELS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

By Jáckeline Fernández





The Orinoco Mining Arc was officially created on February 24, 2016 as the Orinoco Mining Arc National Strategic Development Zone. It comprises an area of 111,843.70 km<sup>2</sup> —12.2% of the national territory, twice as large as the Orinoco Oil Belt.

Several human rights organizations, such as the Venezuelan Program for Education and Action on Human Rights (Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos, PROVEA), have expressed their disapproval of this project because it violates the right to free, prior and informed consent, no environmental impact assessments have been done, and because of the debt that the State owes to indigenous peoples in matter of land demarcation.

**In addition to the above, there is also concern about the militarization of indigenous areas and the violation of the Mining Arc decree and the right to work, since the government controls hiring.**

The mining areas in southern Bolívar state are notably violent. Although most of the country did not know what was happening there, the notorious Tumeremo massacre exposed the actions of the various power groups that operate in these territories, the indiscriminate use of weapons and the absence of effective state controls.

All these elements are now present in other cities of Bolívar state. And its consequences manifest themselves in a distinct way.

**Mining has very marked patriarchal and macho features. Women assume very specific roles: cooks, prostitutes or partners. In all of them, gender violence is prevalent, because the law is dictated by the power groups.**

When women’s bodies wrapped in plastic bags began to be found on the Upata road, the femicides were attributed to their relationship with power groups. Some people claimed that they had “said too much”. The truth is that these women were murdered because a group of men thought that their power over them gave them the right to take their lives. These femicides were never solved.

It is noteworthy that passive femicides have been increasing in Bolívar state as mining activity has become almost the only economic activity for most of its population. The same has happened with sexual violence.

**Passive femicides include deaths due to unsafe or clandestine abortions, maternal mortality, deaths from harmful practices (for example, genital mutilation), deaths linked to human trafficking and deaths resulting from deliberate acts or omissions by public servants or agents of the state, gang-related activities or widespread armed violence.**

When we read the news, investigative bodies suggest the motives to be revenge or attempted robbery. But these causes are completely distinct and require a differentiated and gender-focused research process. That is not happening. Hence the lack of transparency regarding the data that could allow us to understand gender-based violence in the current context.

Moreover, the absence of mechanisms to collect official data on the expressions of violence that affect women and girls in the mining context is a failure of the government to fulfill its obligations. This compromises the possibility of designing public policies aimed at eradicating the underlying causes of this type of violence.

**Girls and adolescents who have to go to the mines, either alone or with relatives, are exposed to a reality marked by machismo and the exercise of a power asserted through subjugation, violence and fear.**

While violence against women is still considered a “private” matter in certain spaces, in mining areas it is not only a normalized affair between couples, but also a privilege associated with the exercise of temporary leadership by those who have the weapons.

The UN has pointed out that when armed violence is generalized, gender violence increases. Because guns are a privilege of men.

Sanitary conditions in mining areas are another risk element for women. Most of these camps are limited to tents made of wooden sticks and black bags.

**There is no access to drinking water or safe spaces to practice body hygiene. Women are exposed to sexual violence on a daily basis. Normalized in this way, sexual exploitation and forced prostitution are commonplace phenomena considered part of the price to pay for subsistence.**

The culture of violence in mining areas has spread to the city. And all of its manifestations of power and subjugation developed and accepted by the government and by society have begun to affect new venues, fuelled by the absence of development policies, the collapse of the iron industry and the complex humanitarian emergency. Bolívar is a mine... but not a gold one.

#### VICTIMS BEYOND THE MINES

In August 2014, a young woman was murdered in a vacant lot in Villa Betania, a residential complex in Puerto Ordaz. It happened at dawn and in front of her little girl, after being taken around the city by her aggressors, allegedly to look for the money that her partner, murdered months earlier, had saved.

Few months earlier, the bodies of three young women were found on the Upata road, wrapped in plastic bags and showing signs of torture.

In each of these cases, the reaction was total apathy. People said things like “they were looking for it” and “they were with the wrong men”.

**All these women (none of whom were older than 30) had dated men connected with criminal groups. All were killed because of that relationship, as an act of revenge by rival groups.**

Those femicides disturbed me and made me see a side of armed violence that I only knew from the terrible stories of countries like Mexico, Colombia, Guatemala and El Salvador.

I knew that things were changing and that in this state, once considered an example of development, where the most important planned city in the country was built, deep cracks that were allowing an unprecedented type of violence to emerge had opened up.

But women were still silent victims, not only of those who were their direct aggressors, but also of the indifference of society. Because they are not that many, because that “femicide” thing is still not understood by the very authorities who must enforce the law, because in other countries more women are murdered...

**And I felt powerless because for me a life is worth as much as a thousand lives. Because a dead woman is not just her: it is also her sons and daughters, if she has any. I thought of Atlimar, the young woman murdered in front of her daughter, and I could hardly imagine the overwhelming anguish she must have felt when she realized that she would die before the eyes of her little girl, and that she would then be alone in the hands of her mother’s killers. Who could erase that image from her mind?**

Violence must reach pandemic levels for women to become recurrent victims, and that is what is happening in Bolívar. The massacres in the mining areas —the few of which we know, because violence mutes many— are just a sketch of the scenario that thousands of girls, adolescents and women live in search of a normal life. This state has distinct features, mainly due to mining activities and all types of violence resulting from the lack of control, the failure of security policies and the normalization of violence in this complex humanitarian emergency context.

And in a context like this, it is urgent that we understand the need to forget numbers and prioritize lives. A life is not a number but thousands of numbers, thousands of additions and subtractions, of multiplications and fractions, of equations that transform other lives, that build spaces, that change the world.

Armed violence has a greater incidence of male victims, of young people who become disturbing data. And that concern seems to downplay others. But they are there, sometimes hidden in stories about other cases, sometimes only discussed in buses or grocery stores. Because they lack that necessary trait to make headlines: they are not many.

**For those who need numbers to motivate their actions, 54 women killed in a year (42 of them because of mafias, criminal groups or actions of state officials) may not be enough.**

**But I remember their names, or the fact that they were not identified. I remember Marisol, Liskeydi, Yenitza, Angela, Atlimar, Zoraida, Rosa, Yolianny, Rebeca, Yangeliz, Andrelis... Found under a bridge, on the tracks, on a highway, on the river...**

**And I cannot stop writing, talking, feeling that we must take a clearer stance on a monster growing under the shadow of indifference.**

**That is why whenever I have the opportunity, I mention them, I remember them. They are the memories that I keep of this sad time in our history, the ones that tell me that silence is an accomplice to injustice.**

**I won’t be silent!**



# INDIFFERENCE AND CORRUPTION THREATEN SURVIVAL OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN BOLÍVAR

By Daniela Damiano

Indigenous communities in Venezuela have been historically neglected by the authorities. Today, amidst the wreckage of a complex humanitarian emergency, their survival is almost a miracle.

Basic things such as going from their communities to the city, receiving quality medical care, or simply buying food or growing it on their own land, have become very difficult for these people in Bolívar state. Higinio Montiel, 28, leader of the Yekuana people of the Caura region, tirelessly denounces that corruption and the indifference of the state is killing his people.

**We are tired of being ignored by the government and when we demand the guarantee of our rights, we are mistreated and even arrested,” Higinio says. He remarks that in the month of May alone state security officials have arbitrarily detained three social leaders whose work has always been to claim the rights of their people.**

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ATTACKED

On one occasion, an indigenous leader was arrested because he was carrying fuel to drive a person from his community, seriously ill with malaria and who had not received medical treatment for 2 weeks, to the hospital. “The shortage of gasoline has isolated us even more and prevents us from going to health centers or to the city to run errands.”

The military accused this leader of trafficking fuel, confiscated the fuel and arrested him for 72 hours, but the truth is that the indigenous peoples of Venezuela’s largest — and in terms of minerals, richest — state, are forced to buy gasoline on the black market or exchange it for food or medicine, which they do not have to spare.

**The military takes advantage of our people’s desperation. They are often arrested anytime from a week to a month, beaten and forced to give false testimonies. While this happens, the military have already set up their business and they resell the confiscated fuel to miners or armed groups.”**

“It’s been over four months without knowing what to do about the fuel shortage. It’s terrible. We need it to navigate the river because our community is seven days away from the city, where we go to do our errands or when we need specialized medical attention.”

Not only the leaders are distressed by the repression and violence caused by state and illegal armed groups, but so are other people who are not directly related to claiming rights.

“

**Silvia Delgado, the only nurse who worked in the type 1 clinic of the Pemón community, decided to leave after violent events between indigenous people and the military took place in February, where several brothers were murdered. She was very afraid of something bad happening to one of her three children and decided to leave everything and flee to Brazil,” Endy Rodriguez, a Pemón and doctor at the same health center, said.**

The Pemón people in the Gran Sabana municipality of Bolívar have not received justice after the murder of four members of their ethnic group in the military assaults in the Kumarakapay community on February 22, 2019 and in Santa Elena de Uairén the following day<sup>1</sup>.

Olnar Ortiz, lawyer for the Penal Forum, denounced that the persecution and the fear of a new attack have not stopped, which has motivated 966 indigenous people from 14 communities of Gran Sabana to move to Brazil. This was made public during the hearing to follow up on the precautionary measures in their favor and in favor of the indigenous people of San Francisco de Yuruaní convened by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) as part of the 172nd session in Kingston, Jamaica.

He requested the cautionary measures in their favor and in favor of the Kumarakapay community to be ratified and extended to all the Pemón people of the Gran Sabana municipality and to the three indigenous communities in Brazilian territory, such as Bananal and Tarau, where Venezuelan Pemón people have taken refuge.

## BETWEEN VIRAL DISEASES AND PARASITES

The diseases that most affect Pemón and Yekuana people are malaria, respiratory infections, scabies, hypertension, neuropathies, diarrhea, vomiting and parasites. The clinics near these communities do not even have bandages, so residents are forced to leave their lands in order to be seen by a doctor, especially when their ancient medicine is no longer working.

<sup>1</sup> Correo del Caroní: “Denuncian ante la CIDH que 966 indígenas de 14 comunidades de Gran Sabana se han desplazado a Brasil por persecución” [It is denounced before the IACHR that 966 indigenous people from 14 communities of Gran Sabana have moved to Brazil because of persecution] <http://www.correodelcaroni.com/index.php/ciudad/region/1971-denuncian-ante-la-cidh-que-966-indigenas-de-14-comunidades-de-gran-sabana-se-han-desplazado-a-brasil-por-persecucion> (Spanish only).

Endy Rodríguez, a 26-year-old resident doctor, works alone and with very few resources for a population of over 1860 people. There is a shortage of everything in the clinic. The last shipment of medicines arrived 2 months ago. Now, all she can do is refer the patients she cannot cure to the hospital in Santa Elena de Uairén, 45 minutes away.

“

**Each time I tell a person that we can’t take care of them here in the clinic due to medicine shortage, it breaks my heart. I know that if I refer them to the hospital, they probably won’t treat them either, in addition to having to spend a lot of money to get there. Drivers are charging up to 20 Brazilian reals, which is 30,000 bolívares per person. They no longer accept bolívares.”**

“To have a seriously ill person in the community is distressing because it is very hard for us to get them out of town, but the tragedy is that when we are able to take a brother or a sister to the hospital, they tell us that they cannot take care of them because they don’t have medicines or that we must buy them first so that they can see them.”

In May, five Yekuana people died, among children, adults and the elderly, all because they did not receive adequate treatment for their illnesses. “Every day we see how our people get sick, get worse and die. Nobody cares about our suffering.”

## INTOXICATED LIVES

Mining activity has significantly worsened the lives of indigenous peoples and those living on the banks of the Caura River know this firsthand. The extraction megaproject imposed by the Venezuelan government, the implementation of which was not consulted with the inhabitants of the region, has become the main cause of hunger and poisoning.





“

**We cultivate the land to eat — we’ve done it our whole lives. However, mercury from mining is contaminating our food. The plants and animals that we eat are poisoned by this chemical and we are getting poisoned too,” Higinio said.**

A study conducted by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) —a Brazilian health organization—, together with the Hutukara Yanomami Association and APYB, the Yekuana Association, exposes alarming levels of mercury in the Yanomami and Yekuana indigenous peoples.

“

**Illegal gold miners operating on Yanomami land are polluting the Indians’ rivers with mercury, used in the gold-extraction process. The metal then enters the food chain via the river water which the Yanomami drink, and the fish on which they rely as a key part of their diet.”<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> Survival: Mercury poisoning of Amazon Indians: alarming new statistics revealed <https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/11182>

In addition to the contaminated food they eat, these communities are displaced by armed groups who arrive in their territories demanding immediate eviction.

In many occasions, they subjugate the indigenous people and make them carry out activities against their will. “They have kidnapped our brothers to be their motorboat drivers. This makes it easier for armed groups to transport shipments without fear of being detained.”

“Instead of protecting our culture and territories, the government allows illegal groups to kick us out like dogs from the places we have lived in for centuries,” says Higinio, who wants his two children to learn the customs of their people and live in peace.



## RUN AWAY RATHER THAN DIE

The lack of state protection, and the danger to which indigenous peoples are exposed as a result of mining activities, has caused many of them to flee their lands and cross borders —resourceless.

**At least 25% of the Sanema indigenous people —also from the Caura region— have left Venezuela. Many friends from that people could not endure the crisis any longer and decided to leave, alone or with their families, in search of greater security and better living conditions,” Higinio said.**

Endy is part of the Venezuelan talent that is forced to migrate in order to survive. For her, the situation is unsustainable and she is only waiting until she completes her rural practice to go practice medicine in Brazil.

**Here, I earn 36,000 bolívares a month and a kilogram of Harina Pan (corn flour) costs 28,000. I have an aunt who is also a doctor waiting for me in Brazil; she will help me get a job in a hospital.”**

Others are not as lucky to have someone waiting for them across the border. Many other indigenous people do not have the means to get to Brazil and have to spend months working in precarious conditions somewhere else to get the money that will take them to their destination.

NINE

## CRIMINAL AND STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN LIVING SOUTH OF THE ORINOCO

By Andrea Pacheco

Mining is a male-dominated activity. In this context, dramatic forms of violence and exploitation arise —prostitution, trafficking of women, forced labour, forced migration, femicide and teenage pregnancy, among others.

The domain of the country’s indigenous peoples portrays a geographic distribution directly related to extraction areas, such as the Orinoco Mining Arc.

The conflict in that region has been aggravated not only by the Complex Humanitarian Emergency, but also by the State’s macroeconomic plan that has reconfigured the exploitation of the national territory, dividing it into the so-called Special Economic Zones. This, along with the implementation of the “15 Economic Motors” plan formalized in 2014, has established an extractivist logic to the detriment of natural assets, which results in their uncontrolled exploitation.

**Globally, the living conditions of indigenous peoples, and particularly those of their women, fall within certain patterns that accentuate inequality and negatively affect rates of mortality, formal education and life expectancy, among others.**

The need to consider the specificity of the indigenous female population in these contexts evidences the intersectionality approach, including the world view of racialized women as opposed to a universal urban stereotype. This shapes the dynamics and the multiple sexual, gender, class, racial and sexual orientation oppressions that weigh on the shoulders of indigenous girls, adolescents and women.

<sup>1</sup> Crónica Uno: “De cómo se hunden más los motores de la economía” [On how the motors of the economy sink further] <http://cronica.uno/de-como-se-hunden-mas-los-motores-de-la-economia/> (Spanish only).



Progress in terms of legal frameworks and recognition of indigenous rights, as well as the inclusion of the principles of multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity and multilingualism in the Venezuelan Constitution, have not been enough to effectively vindicate indigenous peoples. This has aggravated their poverty and discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

## ORINOCO MINING ARC: WOMEN, ADOLESCENTS AND GIRLS

The increasing environmental degradation resulting from the establishment and expansion of mining projects in the national territory, of which the Orinoco Mining Arc is an alarming case, is having a growing impact, with varying degrees of intensity, on the quality of life of the entire population. Indigenous communities are particularly affected, as there are direct and indirect consequences on their health and living conditions.

Venezuelan indigenous peoples, who represent 2.7% of the population (INE, 2011), participate actively in defending their territories and preserving their environments, which are constantly threatened by multiple interests.

It is worth keeping in mind that the main causes of environmental degradation are the result of profound social, economic and —especially— gender inequalities in the context of a complex humanitarian emergency.

Some testimonies compiled for Mujeres en Línea's 2019 report acknowledged the presence of gold mining sites along the Caroní River.

“

**You don't have to go to El Dorado or to southern Bolívar state. Five minutes away from the checkpoint, there is mining, and malaria, dengue and disease proliferate,” Ana Páez, a 48-year-old teacher, said.**

**Páez also explained that there are no health units in the area and that women must travel at least one hour to get to the nearest health center, because the Guaiparo Hospital closed due to lack of resources.**

“The only hospital we have is the Social Security Hospital in Ciudad Bolívar,” she said.

## MILITARY AND PARAMILITARY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE MINING ARC

In recent years, the military (branches of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces) has been involved both directly and indirectly in the mining, processing and marketing of gold and other minerals extracted in the region, at all scales<sup>3</sup>.

The Mining Arc Decree grants special powers to the military to guarantee the proper development of all mining and commercial activities in the region. In addition, mines are classified as security zones under the administration of the Ministry of Defense, as established by article 38 of the Gold Exploration and Exploitation Act (2015)<sup>4</sup>.

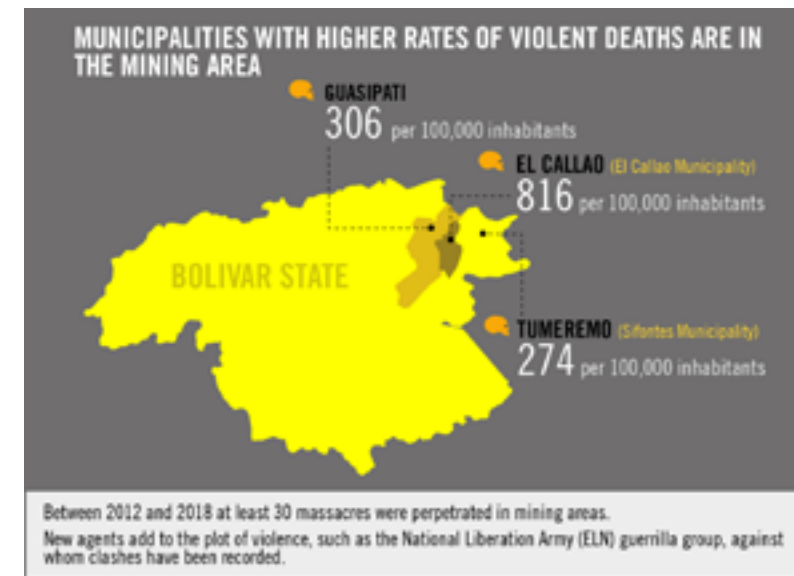
The militarization of the Mining Arc territory, which was declared a military zone, has not diminished violence and criminality in the region. On the contrary, the government acts through a series of overlaps between the pranato —a criminal mob— and the security forces, thus becoming what some researchers have called a “mining pranato”.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Avesa. Informe “Mujeres al Límite” 2019. [Women at the Limit 2019 Report] [https://avesa.wordpress.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/mujeres\\_limite\\_a4web.pdf](https://avesa.wordpress.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/mujeres_limite_a4web.pdf) (Spanish only).

<sup>3</sup> El Libertario: “Militares y pranes matraquean y controlan el tráfico del oro en el Arco Minero del Orinoco” [Soldiers and pranes extort and control gold trade in the Orinoco Mining Arc] <http://periodicoellibertario.blogspot.com/2018/07/militares-y-pranes-matraquean-y.html> (Spanish only).

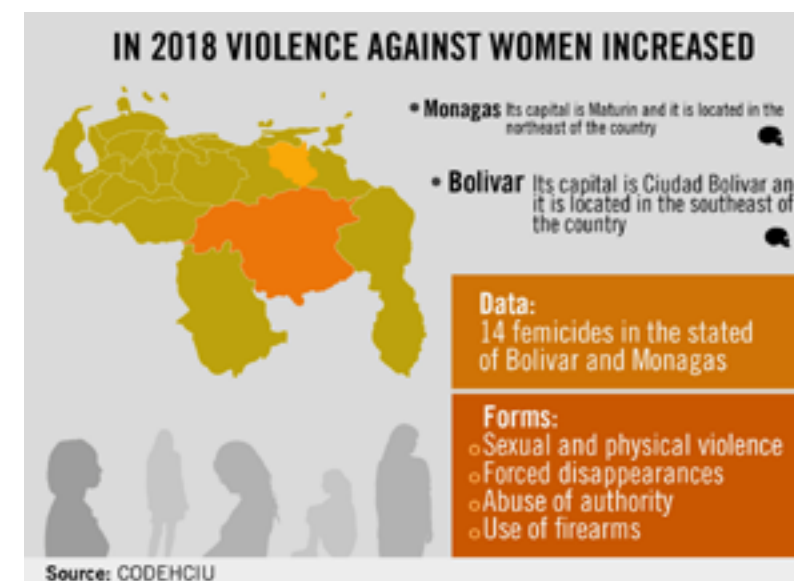
<sup>4</sup> “Ley de Minas” [Mining Law] <http://www.defiendete.org/html/de-interes/LEYES%20DE%20VENEZUELA/LEYES%20DE%20VENEZUELA%20II/LEY%20DE%20MINAS.htm> (Spanish only).

<sup>5</sup> Nuso. “El Arco Minero del Orinoco: Diversificación del extractivismo y nuevos regímenes biopolíticos” [The Orinoco Mining Arc: Diversification of extractivism and new biopolitical regimes] [https://nuso.org/media/articles/downloads/9.TC\\_Ruiz\\_274.pdf](https://nuso.org/media/articles/downloads/9.TC_Ruiz_274.pdf) (Spanish only).



In contexts of violence, gender violence increases considerably, resulting in more femicides, sexual violence, trafficking and exploitation, among others. The Guayana Observatory of Gender Violence reports that in Bolívar state there were 28 femicides during the first semester of 2017, with 40% of victims aged between 13 and 21.

Thus, in 2018, violence against women increased throughout the state. According to the 8th and 9th reports issued by the Observatory on Armed Violence with a Gender Perspective (OVACEG) —run by the non-governmental organization Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship (Codehciu)<sup>6</sup>—, 14 femicides were committed in the states of Bolívar and Monagas between January and June, including cases of sexual and physical violence and a missing woman. The records also indicate that there were 5 victims of sexual violence and abuse of authority by state officials, and even of attempted femicide.



Although there is no data broken down by ethnicity about gender violence and femicide, we can infer that mining contexts are deeply aggressive with creole and indigenous women. In the case of indigenous women, their situation regarding violence is even more complex given the lack of access to justice and means for denouncing.

## WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' LIVES ARE DETERIORATING IN MINING AREAS

The devastating logic of the Orinoco Mining Arc project is not limited to the land demarcation established by Decree No. 2,248. Small-scale mining is proliferating south of the Orinoco River, creating huge inequalities in the states of Bolívar and Amazonas.

Mining activities in the region have resulted in constant clashes between armed gangs and between the gangs and the security forces, a dispute over territorial control. Many of the clashes have taken place in the vicinity of indigenous communities, displacing and frightening the population.



Recent cases of murders of indigenous people in the Pemón community of San Luis de Morichal —municipality of Sifontes— and in the community of Jivis —municipality of Sucre— speak of state and parastatal violence against these populations. It should be noted that reports tend to highlight only male deaths, while little reference is made to cases of sexual abuse and intimidation against indigenous women.

According to the Wanaaleru Organization of Amazonian Indigenous Women in the report *Mujeres al Límite* 2019 (Women at the Limit, 2019), mining-related violence against women revolves around the creation of villages where bars, brothels and food stalls are set up, controlled and managed by the miners themselves. They end up entering the sexual exploitation business, which results in high rates of femicide and territorial violence. These *currutelas* —brothels— run by the people in charge of mining buy women as if they were an everyday object in order to make more profits.

Most of the women sold are girls and adolescents, who are raped, abused and forced to engage in criminal activities by soldiers, miners or armed groups. Girls and adolescents are displayed for sexual exchanges or purchase as slaves and are traded for grams of gold —between 5 and 10. The younger girls are more expensive, because the older the woman is, the less sought after and therefore the cheaper.

## CRIMINALISATION AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

In Venezuela, numerous cases of intimidation, harassment and institutional omission against indigenous women leaders were registered during 2018. These aggressions range from defamation and false accusations to kidnapping and cruel treatment. The cases of indigenous women who were involved in some of these environmental and/or territorial disputes were notable during 2018, but continue to be invisible to the media and government bodies.

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN LEADERS ASSAULTED OR HARASSED DURING 2018

### LISA HENRITO

DATE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGGRESSION

July 23, 2018

She was accused of “treason and secession” by a high military spokesman on a state-owned television show.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

**Although the aggression was strongly rejected by the Pemón people, the harassment has continued and the government has not retracted the accusations.**

### MARY FERNÁNDEZ

DATE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGGRESSION

November 24, 2018

Yukpa teacher and daughter of the Chiefess Carmen “Anita” Fernández. She was kidnapped and tortured for interests related to cattle ranching in the state.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

**She was released on November 29 but although a complaint was filed, there has not been progress in identifying the perpetrators of this crime.**

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN LEADERS ASSAULTED OR HARASSED DURING 2018

### CACICA CARMEN “ANITA” FERNÁNDEZ

DATE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGGRESSION

November 23, 2018

The house of Anita Fernández, Chiefess of the Kuse community in Sierra de Perijá, was looted and burned, and her cattle were stolen.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

**The crime goes unpunished and she has not received compensation.**

### LUCIA ROMERO

DATE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGGRESSION

Throughout 2018

Her struggle for justice in the case of her husband’s, Chief Sabino Romero, murder has led her to a fierce denunciation that has brought more death and repression to her family. During 2018, she denounced threats and aggressions against her relatives.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

**The intellectual authors blamed by the Yukpa community have not been prosecuted. There are no effective protective measures for Lucia or her family.**

Source: Women at the Limit 2019.



Mining is a male-dominated activity. In this context, dramatic forms of violence and exploitation arise —prostitution, trafficking of women, forced labour, forced migration, femicide and teenage pregnancy, among others.

The threat of these dynamics spreading to the rest of the country is extremely serious, since it directly and indirectly affects almost all of the population and territory. Girls and women bear the brunt of this devastating situation, yet the government ignores them. The effort to make these realities visible and to assume denunciation as an urgent cause is in our hands.



## WHO WE ARE

Amnesty International, founded in 1961 and present in more than 150 countries and territories, is a global movement of more than 7 million people. We are independent of any government, political ideology or religion.

We work all around the world to fight human rights violations and to change the laws that sometimes try to legitimize them.

Our vision is of a world in which all people enjoy all the human rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

Our mission is to carry out research and take action focused on preventing and ending serious human rights violations.

Our principles are international solidarity, effective action on behalf of specific victims, universal coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect.

“

**THE INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNITY CANNOT  
TURN ITS BACK ON  
THE VICTIMS OF THIS  
UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS,  
WHETHER THEY REMAIN  
INSIDE VENEZUELA OR  
HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY.**

”

**ERIKA GUEVARA ROSAS,**  
AMERICAS DIRECTOR AT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



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