



Human Rights

Event Monthly Report

September 2021

This monthly report was written by Gabriel Borba and Thamires Herzing (interns), under the guidance of Angela Roncetti, Coordinator for the South America team.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
BRAZIL	5
COUNTRY BACKGROUND	5
HUMAN RIGHTS EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 2021	6
<i>Protests on September 7th, Independence Day in Brazil</i>	6
<i>Human rights lawsuits increased 243% during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil</i>	7
VENEZUELA	9
COUNTRY BACKGROUND	9
HUMAN RIGHTS EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 2021	10
<i>Why does the shortage of bicarbonate put the lives of thousands of dialysis patients in Venezuela at risk?</i>	10
<i>Indigenous women on the Amazon frontier: between keeping a home and emigrating</i>	11
COLOMBIA	14
COUNTRY BACKGROUND	14
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST MINORITIES IN COLOMBIA	14
HUMAN RIGHTS EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 2021	16
<i>Violence against human rights activists</i>	16
<i>Violence against the Awá indigenous population</i>	17
CONCLUDING REMARKS	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY	20

Introduction

This report intends to raise awareness on the difficulties minorities and marginalized groups face in Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil. The report covers some of the significant human rights events concerning these groups in September 2021.

Brazil

Country Background

Population	213 million (213.254,279)
Capital	Brasília
Major languages	Portuguese is the official language. However, there are more than 305 indigenous ethnicities that speak 274 different languages.
Religion	64% Catholic; 22,2% Protestant; 8% non-religious; and unspecified religions represent 3.2%.
Ethnic composition	Approximately 47.73% of the population is white, 43.13% classify as <i>pardo (biracial)</i> , ¹ 7.6% black, 1.09% of Asian origin, and 0.43% fall within the indigenous category.

¹ This word is used to refer to Brazilians of varied ethnic ancestries, and defines many different personal identities in Brazil (please see IBGE - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics for more information).

Human rights events of September 2021

National and international organizations created a commission to monitor human rights violations during the acts on September 7th, Brazilian Independence Day



Source: Hugo Barreto in Metr pole, 2021.

Marked by patriotic displays and military parades in most Brazilian cities, Independence Day in Brazil (September 7th) is commonly feared by human rights activists, given the many human rights violations that routinely occur during these protests, especially regarding tensions between the country's two largest political groups (that is, those supporting the government and those against it). This is the main reason why national and international human rights organizations allied themselves to form an *ad hoc* Commission to observe and denounce human rights violations succeeding September 7th 2021 (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2021).

The Commission aimed to register and denounce, to national and international human rights

bodies, any abusive action or omissions committed by violent groups or by the police, as well as violations arising from acts and movements incited by President Jair Bolsonaro's allies. The Commission set up a direct channel with the aforementioned human rights bodies, as to report violations in real-time. The Commission's main goal was to prevent aggression, violence and threats that often result from acts mobilizing anti-democratic agendas, such as those on the 7th of September (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2021).

Human rights lawsuits increased 243% during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil



Source: Luiz Silveira, 2021.

According to data presented on September 28th, lawsuits regarding human rights matters increased 243% during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. The report entitled *Justiça em Números 2021* (“Justice in Numbers 2021”, in English) released by the Brazilian National Council of Justice (*Conselho Nacional de Justiça* or CNJ) demonstrated that the number of new human rights cases in the Judiciary level and in local tribunals increased by 243% from 2019 to 2020. The number rose from 18.9 thousand claims to 64.9 thousand in the timeframe of a year (Consultor Jurídico, 2021).

Most of the new cases (that is, 46.3 thousand lawsuits) refer to governmental social assistance resulting from the COVID-19 crisis and the exponential increase of situations of economic vulnerability among the Brazilian population. The human rights issues that were most disputed in court in 2020 involved the disabled , the elderly, access to food, and housing (Consultor Jurídico, 2021).

Venezuela

Country Background

Population	28 million (28,887,118)
Capital	Caracas
Major languages	Most residents are monolingual Spanish speakers, which is the official language of the country. In addition to Spanish, the Constitution recognizes more than thirty indigenous languages, including Wayuu, Warao, Pemón, and many others, for the specific use of the indigenous peoples.
Religion	88% of the population is Christian, primarily Roman Catholic (71%), and the remaining 17% Protestant, primarily Evangelicals. 8% of Venezuelans are irreligious (atheists and agnostics account for 2%, and 6% are indifferent).
Ethnic composition	Approximately 51.6% of the population are <i>pardos</i> , meaning of mixed European, African, and Amerindian ancestry; 43.6% of Venezuelans identify as European, 3.6% identify as Afro-Venezuelan and 2.7% identify as Amerindian.

Human Rights events of September 2021

Why does the shortage of bicarbonate for dialysis put the lives of thousands of dialysis patients in Venezuela at risk?



Source: UW Medicine, Newsroom, 2020.

Kidney patients have reported, in several of the country's states, shortages of bicarbonate concentrate for hemodialysis. This leads to the health deterioration and even death of Venezuelan citizens dealing with chronic kidney failure. These complaints have been made since late August 2021. It is estimated that 1,000 patients in the states of Lara, Falcón, Bolívar, Táchira, and Carabobo are affected by the deficit of the concentrate. These patients have had their time hooked to the hemodialysis machine shortened from four to two hours per session (El Diario, 2021).

Those diagnosed with stage 5 chronic kidney failure must undergo mandatory hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis. Only by doing this are they able to replace the functions that healthy kidneys fulfill: eliminating toxins, liquids and waste, and providing the body with hormones

that balance minerals, nutrients, and cells in the bloodstream (El Diario, 2021).

“The kidney also produces three important hormones: erythropoietin, which stimulates the production of red blood cells in the blood; renin, which regulates blood pressure and calcitriol, which is the active form of vitamin D, which fixes calcium in the bones and maintains the normal balance of calcium and phosphorus”, explained Lucilla Velutini, member of the Board of the Organizational National Transplant of Venezuela (ONTV), exclusively for El Diario (El Diario, 2021).

Why is the bicarbonate concentrate necessary?

One of the functions of the concentrate is to cleanse blood during the dialysis process. For this cleansing to be efficient, it is also necessary that the water used is of optimum quality, and that the blood filtration phases are fulfilled.

The amount of bicarbonate that a patient receives during hemodialysis must be regulated. In the case of a concentrate “overdose”, metabolic problems can occur; and if insufficient bicarbonate is used the body accumulates toxins (El Diario, 2021).

Risks and health impacts of the shortage on dialysis patients

Anabela Arminio, ONTV medical advisor, told El Diario (2021) that if a patient receives less time on dialysis than needed for a long period, they will present various damaging symptoms in consequence of their health deterioration. Nausea, vomiting, edema (swelling due to fluid accumulation), arterial hypertension, worsening of anemia, circulatory overload and frequent pulmonary edema are some of the manifestations that appear in this situation (El Diario, 2021).

“The patient would return to a state of uncontrolled severe chronic kidney disease. It is important to remember that dialysis does not cure the disease, but rather controls it and allows the necessary adjustments to have better health and quality of life”, clarified Arminio.

Indigenous women on the Amazon frontier: between keeping a home and emigrating

Keila is an indigenous woman of the Baré people, head of her family and mother of three girls aged 7, 10 and 14. In 2020, Keila began to communicate with a Colombian friend. After several months of conversation, she accepted the invitation to go to Colombia to pursue a relationship and to see what opportunities the neighbouring country had to offer her (El Diario, 2021).

“I was looking for better opportunities for my daughters while there, unlike what was being lived here. At that time, I was earning 3 million bolivars (3.00 US\$) and that didn't give me enough to supply my three daughters, I only had enough for a day's worth of food. I was looking for new horizons, seeing possibilities of offering something different to them; I really did it thinking about them” Keila told El Diario. Unfortunately, her stay in Colombia was unrewarding and in June 2021, she returned to Venezuela.

Like Keila, other indigenous women living near the borders (of Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil) have seen in migration a solution to improve their living conditions. *“Indigenous women have been affected by lack of employment, medical assistance, and political persecution. Many of them have migrated to other countries and also to the mines, some are subjected to sexual slavery, human trafficking and racial discrimination. They go out in search of opportunities to provide a daily livelihood for their children, their parents”* stated Mirlenys Guerrero, a member of the Network of Human Rights and Indigenous Rights Defenders in Amazonas (El Diario, 2021).

Gender violence

Educator Oriany López explained that gender-based violence is a situation that responds to parenting patterns. In this context, it is important to note that the report of the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence in the Amazon revealed that in the first semester of 2021, 53 cases

of violence were registered, of which 66% were documented by women, including indigenous and Creole women.

Despite the advances in their struggles, indigenous women still have a long way to go in terms of gender equality. Most remain relegated to the domestic scenario, excluded from the education system, and without guarantees in food and health security (El Diario, 2021).

Colombia

Country Background

Population	48 million (48.258494)
Capital	Bogotá
Major languages	The overwhelming majority of Colombians speak Spanish (99,2%), but 101 languages are listed in the Colombian Ethnologue database.
Religion	79% are Catholic Christians; 6% adopt Pentecostalism; 2% are mainline Protestants while 6% follow other protestant credo; 2% practice other religions and 5% are unspecified.
Ethnic composition	Approximately 4.4% of the Colombian population belongs to the Country's 115 indigenous groups; 7.3% of the Colombian population belongs to the Afro-Colombian population and 0.01% belongs to the Romani people.

Human Rights violations against minorities in Colombia

Human rights activists

Despite the signing of the Peace Treaty between the Colombian government and the main armed group in the region, FARC, that aimed at ceasing armed conflict (National Legislative Bodies, 2016), human rights activists still suffer from constant violence and persecution. Since 2016, 174 leaders and human rights activists have been killed in Colombia (El Espectador, 2021b).

Crimes against indigenous population

Colombia is home to 102 indigenous groups that span across almost 31,1 million hectares of its territory (FAO, 2021). Even with international conventions and local legislations assuring their rights and obligations, the indigenous community has been suffering from persecution of armed groups in Colombia. In the future, it is estimated that 62,7% of the indigenous community in its entirety may be extinct due to armed conflicts on Colombian territory (ONIC, 2018).

Human Rights Events of September 2021

Violence against human rights activists



Source: Contagioradio, 2021.

The *Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz*² released an important statement on the 15th of September expressing that, since 2016, 174 human rights leaders and activists have been killed in Colombia (El Espectador, 2021c). Commonly referred to as INDEPAZ, the Institute is a non-governmental organization that has contributed to peacebuilding and non-violent actions since 1984, providing training, research, and opening space for dialogue to explore issues of development and peace (INDEPEZ, 2021).

Since January 2021, 52 Human Rights activists have been killed, among them, five women, 47 men, three indigenous and five afro descendants. Furthermore, it was found that indigenous and afro descendants were killed while defending their communities and their territories (INFOBAE, 2021). Such atrocities were 13% higher than the numbers in 2020 (El

² The Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (in English).

Espectador, 2021). There was also an increase in so-called “non-lethal attacks”, such as threats, arbitrary detentions, information theft and sexual violence (Somos Defensores, 2021).

One should note that, recently, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights visited Colombia and presented observations and recommendations concerning human rights violations in the country (IACHR, 2021). In this document, published in July of this year, the Commission pointed to a disproportionate use of force by police forces against human rights activists, and suggested a new dialogue between the Colombian government and social movements to advance the investigations about police brutality (IACHR, 2021).

Furthermore, the *Somos Defensores* program, a regional non-governmental organization, during the newest publication concerning violence against activists, stated: *“This is a sign of the excessive use of force during the protests, which affected thousands of people, including those who defend human rights. This behavior caused the public force to appear for the first time as the presumed responsible for the greatest number of aggressions, above the unknown actors, paramilitary groups and the FARC dissidents”* (Somos Defensores, 2021).

Violence against the Awá indigenous population



Source: El Ciudadano, 2018.

In September 2021, John Alberto Pacal, 25-years-old, member of the Awá indigenous community, was murdered by an anti-personnel mine (El Espectador, 2021a). Hours later, an

armed group invaded the same community and removed a local family from their home, including a minor.

To further explain, anti-personnel mines are banned by the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines and can be defined as “*small explosive devices placed under, on or near the ground. They are victim-activated and designed to detonate when a person steps on, handles or comes near them, regardless of whether that person is a soldier or a civilian man, woman or child*” (ICRC, 2009).

Considered an ancient group, the Awá population is settled in Nariño, near the Colombian border with Ecuador - the group comprises almost 65 families (International Organization for Migration, 2020). In 2020, *la Unidad Indígena del Pueblo Awá* (UNIPA)³ celebrated 30 years of assiduous projects towards “*collective and community construction for the defense of rights, under the principles of unity, territory, autonomy, survival and the culture of the Awá indigenous people*” (OIM, 2020).

UNIPA has been vocal about countless breaches of human rights and violence on social media, pointing at the heavy presence of armed groups within the region (El Espectador, 2021a). Furthermore, the Awá community is a constant receiver of death threats and incursions by armed groups, as well as dispossession of their lands (El Espectador, 2021a).

BBC NEWS UK (2011) has also stated that the Awá population may go extinct due to the conflicts in the region. The Awá population has been forced, time and again, to migrate to other regions, in search of better opportunities, and to escape from armed conflict violence (BBC NEWS, 2011).

El Espectador (2021a), a renowned newspaper in the region, has reported that, according to the Awá population: “*the interests of these armed groups correspond to the fact that the region encompasses strategic areas for mobility and the development of highly profitable illicit activities. There coexists and articulates the obtaining of income derived from drug*

³ In English: “The Indigenous Unit of the Awá People”.

trafficking, due to the increase in coca crops, illegal mining, extortion, among other illegal economies”.

Concluding Remarks

- A sharp observation of social and human rights policies in Brazil is necessary, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to guarantee the promotion of human rights in its procedures.
- The International Community should monitor violence against human rights activists and assure proper access to justice. Furthermore, States should strive to strengthen relationships with local and international human rights organizations to exchange better practices. Moreover, proper monitoring of indigenous communities in accordance with their rights and local legislations is needed. Lastly, the International Community should invest more in local human rights organizations, in order to carry out *ad hoc* visits to analyze indigenous communities' circumstances.

Bibliography

- Conjur. (2021). *Casos sobre derechos humanos na Justiça aumentaram 342% no último ano*. ConJur. Retrieved October 11, 2021, from <https://www.conjur.com.br/2021-out-11/casos-direitos-humanos-justica-aumentam-342>.
- El Diario. (2021, September 2). *¿Por qué la escasez de bicarbonato para diálisis pone en riesgo la vida de miles de pacientes renales en Venezuela?* El Diario. Retrieved November 10, 2021, from <https://eldiario.com/2021/09/02/escasez-de-bicarbonato-para-dialisis/>
- Simon, M. (2021, September 30). *La mujer indígena en la frontera amazónica: entre mantener el hogar o emigrar*. El Diario. Retrieved October 11, 2021, from <https://eldiario.com/2021/09/30/mujer-indigena-frontera-amazonica/>
- World Wide Fund for Nature. (2021). *Organizações criam comissão para monitorar violações de direitos humanos nos atos de 7 de setembro*. (2021, September 7). World Wide Fund for Nature. Retrieved October 10, 2021, from <https://www.wwf.org.br/?79788/Organizacoes-de-Direitos-Humanos-criam-Comissao-para-monitorar-violacoes-de-direitos-humanos-nos-atos-de-7-de-setembro>
- El Espectador. (2021a). *La violencia se agudiza contra los indígenas Awá en Nariño*. (2021, October 1). *El Espectador*. Retrieved October 1, 2021, from <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia/mas-regiones/la-violencia-se-agudiza-contralos-indigenas-awa-en-narino/>
- El Espectador. (2021b). *Aumentaron las agresiones contra defensores de DDHH en primer semestre de 2021*. *El Espectador*. <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia/mas-regiones/aumentaron-las-agresiones-contradefensores-de-ddhh-en-primer-semestre-de-2021/>
- OIM. (2020). *30 años de vida organizativa de la Unidad Indígena del Pueblo Awá - UNIPA | Organización Internacional para las Migraciones*. (2021). IOM. <https://colombia.iom.int/news/30-a%C3%B1os-de-vida-organizativa-de-la-unidad-ind%C3%ADgena-del-pueblo-aw%C3%A1-unipa>
- BBC NEWS. (2011, October 25). *Los awá: una etnia colombiana en peligro de extinción*. https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2011/10/111024_colombia_conflicto_indigenas_awa_aw
- ICRC. (2009, November 1). *Anti-personnel mines: overview of the problem*. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/faq/mines-fac-cartagena-021109.htm>
- IACHR. (2021). *Observaciones y recomendaciones de la visita de trabajo de la CIDH a Colombia realizada del 8 al 10 de junio de 2021*. CIDH. Retrieved October 21, 2021,

from

https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/ObservacionesVisita_CIDH_Colombia_SPA.pdf

Infobae. (2021). *En Colombia han sido asesinados 52 defensores de derechos humanos en los primeros ocho meses*. Retrieved October 11 2021, from <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2021/09/15/en-colombia-han-sido-asesinados-52-defensores-de-derechos-humanos-en-los-primeros-ocho-meses/>.

FAO and FILAC. (2021). *Forest Governance by Indigenous and Tribal People*. An Opportunity for Climate Action in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago.

ONIC, CRIT. (2018). *Informe sobre Colombia*. Colombia.

National Legislative Bodies. (2016). *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace (2016)*. Colombia. Retrieved October 11 2021 from, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b68465c4.html>.



Human Rights Event Monthly Report September 2021



www.ghrd.org