

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

Venezuela: Authorities must stop criminalizing and killing young people living in poverty

The Venezuelan state is using lethal force with intent to kill against the most vulnerable and socially excluded people in the country. It is violating their rights and treating them like criminals because of the circumstances in which they live, when it should be implementing preventive crime control policies that are in line with international human rights standards, said Amnesty International in a report published today.

“The government of President Maduro should guarantee the right to life, instead of taking the lives of the country’s young people. All young people living in poverty should have equal opportunities for their future, and not live with the fear that the police or military see them as enemies that must be eradicated,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International.

This is no way to live: Public security and the right to life in Venezuela highlights the responsibility of the Venezuelan state for violations of the right to life and physical integrity of thousands of people. The state is not only failing to guarantee the life and security of the population in the context of alarming levels of insecurity, but it is also implementing repressive measures using military methods, supposedly to tackle crime. The result has been more than 8,200 extrajudicial executions between 2015 and June 2017.

Last year, at least 95% of the victims of homicides – both in the context of crime and at the hands of the security forces – were young men aged between 12 and 44 living in the country’s poorest neighbourhoods. Almost 90% of recorded homicides are committed using firearms in urban areas and in rural areas where there are high levels of illicit activity, such as illegal mining.

In 2016, Venezuela experienced the highest homicide rate in its history, with more than 21,700 people losing their lives due to the insecurity in the country. Taking into account that each person killed in gun violence is on average survived by three or four others, Amnesty International estimates that between 65,000 and 87,000 people were victims of violence in that year alone.

In 2017, the Venezuelan government shared inaccurate figures in a PowerPoint slide posted in a tweet, with no disaggregated or reliable data that totally left out the deaths committed by security forces, which would set the homicide rate at 62 per 100,000 people. Figures from non-governmental organizations set this number at 89.

Amnesty International has noted that, despite the implementation of at least 17 security plans in the past 17 years, the state has not fulfilled its obligations to prevent armed violence and its consequences. The state has also failed in its duty to investigate and punish human rights violations and to provide reparation to the victims. Instead, the authorities have publicly stated that killing people in the context of security operations is a successful practice, despite the fact that this constitutes a clear setback in relation to human rights guarantees as well as a breach of the law on police procedure.

Venezuela has been experiencing a serious human rights crisis for several years. Amnesty International has consistently highlighted serious violations of the rights to health and food; the persistent practice of politically motivated arbitrary arrests; torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; and the use of military courts to try civilians, among other violations of civil and political rights.

One of the most notable consequences of these mass human rights violations and the lack of public security has been a dramatic increase in the number of people fleeing to other countries, mainly in the Americas. The UN estimates that 2.3 million people have left Venezuela since 2014.

“Venezuela is going through one of the worst human rights crises in its history. The list of crimes under international law against the population is growing. It is alarming that, instead of applying efficient public policies to protect people and reduce levels of insecurity, the Venezuelan authorities are using the language of war to try to legitimize the use of excessive force by police and military officials and, in many cases, the use of lethal force with intent to kill,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas.

“The government must urgently launch a national programme to reduce homicides and effectively implement a policing model that includes guidelines on the proportional and differentiated use of force and firearms that fully comply with international human rights norms and standards.”

Amnesty International calls on the Venezuelan state to implement a public security plan that ensures respect for the right to a trial with all due process guarantees and especially the elimination of procedural delays and flaws in the Venezuelan criminal justice system. The authorities must reduce the high levels of impunity in cases of human rights violations and homicides, and ensure that victims’ relatives obtain fair reparation, including appropriate compensation, psychosocial support and guarantees of non-repetition.

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Further information:

‘This is no way to live’: Public security and the right to life in Venezuela (Research, 20 September 2018)
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/8975/2018/en/>

Venezuela: Regional governments must provide protection for people fleeing the country (News, 3 September 2018)
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/venezuela-regional-governments-must-provide-protection-for-people-fleeing-the-country/>