



The Venezuelan Program of Education and Action on Human Rights, PROVEA presented its eleventh International Bulletin for the month of March 2014. As global topic, we do a retrospective of the past and the present of social protest in Venezuela and the need to refresh the memory of those who manage the force of the State. As specific topic we address the issue of labor protests, which are the protagonists of the first order in the vindication of the rights of the Venezuelan workers with reference to the recommendations of the ILO. As conjuncture theme will address the issue of the national dialogue and the accompaniment of the Unasur as a hopeful element in the quest for social peace while respecting the human rights of the population and resolving collective causes of current social convulsion.

Our newsletter is available in Spanish, Portuguese, English and French on our website <http://www.derechos.org.ve>. We welcome your suggestions and comments to the e-mail boletin@derechos.org.ve.

Want to know the 20 human rights landscape in the **past 15 years in Venezuela**? See our special report "15 years on human rights: social inclusion, political exclusion"

> **GLOBAL TOPIC**

Past and present of protests in Venezuela

The wave of protests in Venezuela since last February 4, when students from the National University of Tachira (UNET) demonstrated against insecurity and the alleged sexual abuse against one of her fellow - 6 detainees- balance, have ruptures and continuities concerning the culture of popular protest developed from 1958, origin of the current democratic in the country. According to figures estimated by PROVEA between the 04.02.14 and the 31.03.14, at least 800,000 people participated in demonstrations carried out in 16 of the 24 States of Venezuela. The duration of the protests and its expansion are two important developments. Another element is its diversity: marches, vigils, human chains, concentrations, banners, flyers, musicians in the street, collective prayers, urban interventions with street art, murals, graffiti, assemblies, classes in the open air, among others.

Despite the existence of hotbeds of violence, especially around the strategy called "guarimbas" -closing of streets with blunt way of barricade objects- a global demonstrations review reveals that they have been mostly peaceful.

How were the protests before 1999? -the date of the first presidency of Hugo Chávez-. The historian Margarita López Maya created during those years the "Bravo Pueblo" database to measure the types and motivations of the protest in the country. Between 1985 and 1999 were three major forms to protest in Venezuela, in order of importance: riots, marches, and closures of roads.

A disturbance is characterized as a form of violent protest, due to the confrontation with police forces and the crackdown on protesters.



"Hulk" rejects repression in San Cristobal. Photo: Social Networking

Street closures were not only done with the bodies of the participants but with blunt objects and burned rubber, as a mechanism to push for a response from the authorities. "The nature and specific forms of popular protest that are generalized in the decade kept a very close relationship with the process of delegitimization of the trade unions and labor organizations since the end of the eighties, with the process of deinstitutionalization of the party system. The vacuum left by the weakening of these institutions of representation and mediation has prompted the appearance of actors in emergency". **As reflected by Lopez Maya on that context.**

Yet it seems premature to diagnose the nature and significance of the current protests in the country. For now we are upgrading the conflict. The Attorney General's Office reported in [04.04.14](#), that facts about the demonstrations had thrown a toll of 39 dead and 608 injured, of which 414 were civilians and other security officials. The Attorney General said they have issued 26 final decisions, of which 21 are accusations of 67 people and five dismissals. She also indicated that the prosecuted received alternative measures to imprisonment, in addition, authorities are still investigating 102 cases of alleged human rights violations, 95 cases by cruel treatment, two of torture, two for attempt of murder and three for murder. For its part, Amnesty International in its report "[Venezuela: rights at risk in the middle of the protests](#)" explained that more than 500 people have been injured and more than 2,000 have been arrested. "The majority of detainees have been freed conditionally while investigations are carried out, but they face charges which carry penalties that can result in years in prison. There are indications that the security forces would have made an excessive use of force, as well as reports of violence by pro-Government armed groups and hotbeds of anti-government protesters. Some detainees have reported having suffered ill-treatment and torture". Two days after the dissemination of this report, [the Spanish Government announced](#) the suspension of the sale of riot gear to Venezuela, and [not to grant any new approval](#) until circumstances change in Venezuela. On the action of paramilitary groups against demonstrators, [a statement of the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference](#) said: "We reiterate our firm demand that the Government disarm the armed civilian groups. Their coordinated action, following certain patterns, demonstrates that it is not isolated or spontaneous, but trained groups to intervene violently." During the day 03.04.14 a group of armed people attacked the Central University of Venezuela, [where 7 students were injured](#), including one who was beaten and stripped naked to humiliate him. Despite the fact that the [President Nicolás Maduro accused](#) "guarimberos"

Tips

Amnesty International presented its [report on the situation of human rights in Venezuela between February and March 2014](#), within the framework of social protests, acts of violence and human rights violations prevailing in the country.

Amnesty International recommended to the Venezuelan State:

- To investigate and punish those responsible for human rights violations during the protests.
- To guarantee detainees access to their lawyers, families and independent medical services.
- Ensure due process to detainees.
- Guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and Assembly without fear of being victimized.
- Ensure the work of the defenders of human rights, the journalists and the media, as well as their protection.

Finally, the Organization urged the Venezuelan Government to implement a national human rights Plan which is the result of a process of national dialogue and suggested some points that should be part of the plan.

-people who protest, identified as part of opposition groups- of this violence facts, testimonies and [photographs](#) indicates that Kevin Avila, a leader pro Government, together with the aggressors were responsables. The priest Raúl Herrera, director of the Center for peace and human Rights of the Central University of Venezuela, [denounced that the aggression was carried out after the Bolivarian National Guard](#) prevented the exit of a peaceful March that was supposed to leave the campus.

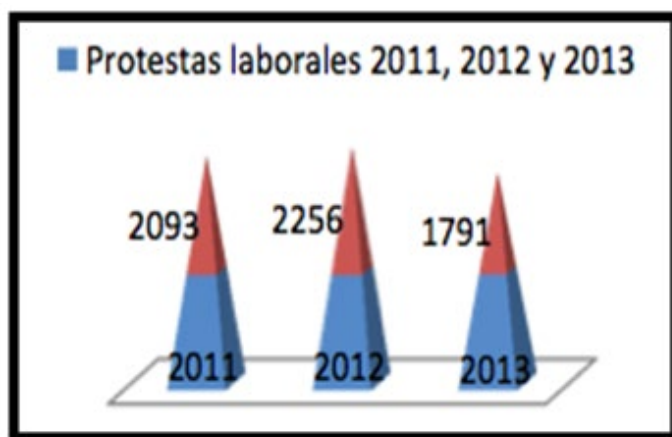
> SPECIFIC TOPIC

Labor protests and ILO recommendations

PROVEA and various organizations for the promotion and defense of human rights in the country, as the [Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social](#) (OVCS by its acronym in Spanish) and [Espacio Público](#), reported that between 2008 and 2013, [16,297 protests](#) were held and that of these, 37% had an occupational cause.

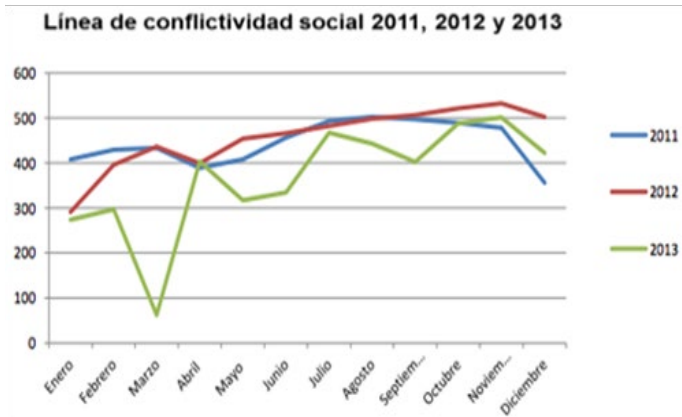
In its [analysis of the main trends of social conflict in Venezuela in 2013](#), PROVEA compares the figures on labour protests in the last three years. The study suggests that while a decrease occurred in mobilizations over the past year, they still present dissatisfaction of rights, expressed in constant patterns, as shown in the following graphs.

Venezuelan labor protests have spread across the country, while the majority is peaceful, including strikes. However, the failure to respond to the demands and state repression, have led to [allegations of violation of labor rights at the International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#).



Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict

Thus was mentioned in paragraph 36 of the report of the tripartite mission of high level of the ILO which visited Venezuela from



Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict

January 27 to January 31 of 2014, presented at the 320 meeting of the Board of Directors, held in Geneva in March.

The report contains allegations of the Confederation of Venezuela workers, The National Union of workers in Venezuela, the Confederation of autonomous trade unions, General Confederation of workers, independent trade union Alliance, international civil servants - chapter Venezuela, National Federation of pensioners and retirees of Venezuela, Federation of university professors of Venezuela, medical Federation of Venezuela, front self-employed in defense of employment and wage Union, and the trade union movement's Base.

In this regard, the meeting of the highest body of the ILO decided: a) To take note of the contents of the report GB.320/INS/8; and (b) urge the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in consultation with the national social partners, to

develop and implement the Plan of action recommended by the high-level tripartite mission.

However, spokesmen of the official trade union movement, maintain their disagreement with this recommendation. On the other hand, national parliamentary identified as opposition groups and not pro-government trade union movement demanded the Government meet the call of the ILO.

The main trade union demands contained in the report of the Mission of the ILO, are: 1) overcome the political polarization; (2) install the dialogue between workers, employers and Government; (3) that the Government meets commitment to adapt labour law to Convention 87; (4) abolition of the national register of trade union organizations; (5) cease the criminalization of trade union protest; (6) cancel the prosecution of trade union officials for exercising their legitimate right to strike; (7) cease the unjust and arbitrary dismissal of trade union officials by questioning the Government. (8) cease hostility towards trade unionism which criticizes Labor Government actions and to restore trade union premises converted into government offices; (9) discuss the contract framework that protects employees in the public sector, paralyzed since 2004; and 10) abide by the recommendations of the ILO, recognizing trade union organizations not pro-Government which are representative.

PROVEA advocates the political dialogue installed in Venezuela with mediation from the Vatican, also the demand for a trade union movement fighting for years to recover the purchasing power of wages and decent conditions for the work. So far the high-level dialogues have not included the Trade Union agenda, as neither the meetings between the trade union movement and the delegation of the UNASUR has provided such dialogues.

> ISSUES ON NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The dialogue between hope and frustration

Dialogue is the only solution to the political and social crisis affecting Venezuela. A dialogue involving the key actors in the conflict today but also to other sectors that can contribute to search and find solutions to structural and short-term factors that feed the crisis. Government, opposition and student movement are now major players. But in a country where those who have more protested in the past five years are the workers, is essential to incorporate the trade union movement. We have insisted that everyone in the country should and can contribute to this necessary and urgent process of dialogue. But the responsibilities are not equal.

The primary responsibility rests in the Government. In this regard, it should be noted that the Government has not been consistent. First summoned the National Peace Conference. The first meeting was very positive because of the presence of entrepreneurs and the churches, but mainly because of the conciliatory and ecotone of the Government and the participants. Not even 48 hours had passed since the end of the meeting when members of the National Executive branded as fascists to the leaders of the opposition.

Days later, President Nicolas Maduro called the student sector amid countless insults, but especially within the framework of a

sprawling crackdown. In the context of the call for dialogue, the President also urged using the expression "tealight that lights up, tealight which shuts" to confrontate citizens and promoting in this way the violence. And finally the President encouraged repression endorsing the actions of the Bolivarian National Guard, which is responsible for numerous human rights violations, at the time that highlighted the work of paramilitary groups that have been the cause of many aggressions against demonstrators, homes and properties.

Efforts to find a political solution to the conflict through dialogue have been advanced in this context of intolerance, repression and prominence of paramilitary groups and outbreaks of violence by radical sectors of the opposition, which until April 3 had left 39 people dead.

The Government, which initially had rejected any international mediation, accepted the presence of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR by its acronym in Spanish) who have met with various sectors of Venezuelan society informing of the situation and helping to create conditions for the opposition and the government to dialogue. The Foreign Ministers played a key role

to encourage and facilitate the meeting held between opposition and Government in 10.04.14. A dialog that opens hopes to pave the way for a peaceful solution to the crisis.

However, frustrations could be generated if there is no progress in the solution of problems affecting the population such as insecurity, high inflation, shortages and unemployment. If in addition the Affairs of human rights do not constitute an essential aspect of the agenda, as it should be to reach a commitment to solve, investigate and punish violations of human Rights, as well of killings and personal injury perpetrated by individuals. But above all, this dialogue could generate great frustration if it is not extended to social sectors such as trade unions, student movements, and peasants. A dialogue that also leave as a result better conditions for the realization of peaceful protest without risk to loss life or freedom.

What is demonstrated in this process is that peace and human rights are not an “internal affair” of the States, and the accompaniment of other States and multilateral agencies results in our days one of the cornerstones for disarming the social and political violence in Venezuela. This should be the logic for the presence and the accompaniment of Unasur and eventually the United Nations or the Organization of American States.

We are committed to dialogue as the only reasonable and democratic alternative to overcome the political and social crisis that exists in the country. The Government and other public authorities,



Meeting of dialogue between government and opposition / Photo: AVN

as well as the opposition and the other forces of the nation, have a great commitment to the population. The price in lives and in violations of human rights could not continue rising.

Supporting human rights defenders

It is available the 2012 Annual Report on the situation of Human Rights in Venezuela, may be consulted on the website of PROVEA: www.derechos.org.ve.



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