

Executive Summary

Women's economic, social and cultural rights

This report is presented by Venezuelan human rights organizations to the Monitoring Committee of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its 55th Session. It contains relevant information regarding the Venezuelan State's compliance with its obligations to protect substantive equality between women and men and the elimination of gender discrimination in the enjoyment and exercise of economic, social and cultural rights. This alternative report is the result of a process of articulation and coordination by the following Venezuelan civil society organizations: CEPAZ, GENDHU, Freya and AVESA. The rights that are addressed in this report are: Article 3, non-discrimination and equal rights for men and women; Articles 6, 7, 8 and 9, the rights to work, to just and favorable conditions of work, to freedom of association and to social security; Article 10, the right to protection and assistance to the family, motherhood and childhood; Article 11, the right to an adequate standard of living or housing or food or access to land or water; and Article 12, the right to health.

On non-discrimination and equal rights, we note that there is no significant and systematic initiative of the Venezuelan State to inform the people about their human rights. Most State programs in ESCR do not consider the specific needs of women, especially those relating to the work of women caring for other family members. There is no comprehensive law prohibiting all forms of discrimination. Regarding the right to work, the "Organic Law on Labor and working men and women", contains several articles that broadly protect motherhood but, beyond this, there is no focus on gender equality. The average wage gap between women and men is 14.2%; 4% in university population, and 60% in illiterate population. Venezuela has an overwhelming growth of informal laborers in the past two years, with a structural trend in the case of women, evidencing that there has been no implementation of coherent, sustainable and efficient policies to reduce it.

Regarding the right to protection and assistance to family, motherhood and the child, it is important to note that the so-called "social missions", aimed at supporting disadvantaged individuals and families and marginalized groups, have suffered significant budget cuts in recent years. On the implementation of the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a life free of violence (recently modified), we can report that progress has been made in the creation of specialized courts; however, the programs provided for in terms of prevention, awareness-raising, assistance to victims and communications, as well as support and guidance to offenders, have not received equal attention. Institutions of the judicial system are still incurring in institutional violence, indicating marked deficiencies in the implementation of the Law and in the existing gender institutions, since in reality women's access to justice or the prevention of violence have not been achieved.

On the Right to an adequate standard of living or shelter or food or access to land and water, INE (National Statistics Institute) estimates consistently show that women are the most affected by poverty and that there is little impact of the Missions or ad-hoc social programs in reducing female poverty. The increase in poverty from 2013 to the present, linked to the impact of the economic crisis, inflation, food shortages and social unrest, have seriously affected households' incomes, especially among those that were already close to the poverty level, within which are those headed by women. Food shortages, personal hygiene goods, medicines and the like, have strongly and directly affected women, especially in the last two years. Regarding the right to health, we must emphasize the seriousness of the situation of maternal mortality in Venezuela. In 2013, there were 370 maternal deaths (and this number had increased 4% by October 2014, according to the latest published official estimates) and 7,304 infant deaths, all of which confirms that Venezuela will not reach goal No. 5 of the Millennium Development Goals. The measures taken to prevent teenage pregnancies have been ineffective: Venezuela has had the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in South America and the third highest in Latin America in the last four years.

Recommendations submitted to the Committee for their adoption in the Concluding Observations Report:

- Organizations submitting this report ask the Committee to urge the Venezuelan Government to take progressive measures that would allow it to comply with its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, taking into account human rights when designing, implementing and evaluating strategies aimed at economic recovery, which would prevent them from having a direct impact and increasing gender-based gaps and inequalities.
- We also ask the Committee to require the Venezuelan Government to provide detailed information, disaggregated by sex, as well as to account for the impacts on human rights provoked by resource-allocation measures, since none of them may eliminate or undermine the enjoyment of rights without consequences.
- While we acknowledge legislative progress in combating violence against women, we ask the Committee to urge the Venezuelan Government to develop effective programs that provide real responses to this serious problem, as Venezuela continues to have a high rate of violence against women.
- We also ask the Committee to urge the Venezuelan State to ensure full access to education and sexual and reproductive health services, especially to adolescents and paying particular attention to rural areas and indigenous communities, allocating adequate resources for such purposes.