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Independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Civilian armed groups known as colectivos and their links with the State. Report dated 15 September 2026.

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September 15, 2026

Spanish only

Human Rights Council
63rd session

The armed civilian groups called “colectivos” and their links with the State

Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Summary

In its resolution 57/36, the Human Rights Council expressed its concern about the worsening of human rights violations and abuses and the increasing restrictions on civic and democratic space.
In the context of the 2024 post-election crisis, including the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement agents and armed groups known as “colectivos,” the Council expressly requested the Mission to pay particular attention in its investigations to the violence perpetrated by these groups.

This report examines the role played by collectives in the repressive apparatus of the Venezuelan State since 2014. Based on interviews with victims, witnesses, former and current members of collectives and former state officials, as well as the analysis of documentation and various sources, the Mission investigated their characteristics, modes of action and relationships with state authorities and institutions.

The term “collectives” encompasses diverse organizations in terms of their origins, composition, structure, and methods of operation. The report focuses specifically on pro-government armed civilian groups that maintain direct links with state authorities or leaders of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. As a former leader interviewed by the Mission stated, the difference between a collective and a criminal group lies in the fact that “the collective has a relationship with the State.” These links constitute a defining characteristic of the groups examined.

The report analyzes the role of these groups as a de facto part of the state's repressive apparatus and examines how certain functions traditionally reserved for the state were exercised, partially or complementarily, by armed civilian actors operating with varying degrees of coordination, support, or acquiescence from state institutions and authorities. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that there was a strategic delegation of repressive functions and logistical coordination between these groups and the security forces, in a context of impunity.

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The Mission found that this relationship is not a recent phenomenon nor is it solely the result of occasional collaborations. For more than a decade, these groups have progressively integrated themselves into institutional and community structures, security plans, and political mobilization mechanisms. They received material and logistical resources, including weapons, motorcycles, and communications equipment; incorporated current and former security officials into their ranks; and maintained channels of coordination with political authorities, police forces, the military, and intelligence agencies. This integration blurred the line between state agents and armed civilian actors.

These groups carried out surveillance, neighborhood intelligence gathering, intimidation, and repression. They acted as shock troops during demonstrations, identified and harassed individuals perceived as opponents, and, in some cases, participated in arrests and other repressive actions alongside or under the protection of security forces. Their involvement expanded the state's coercive capacity and allowed for the use of forms of violence that were less readily attributable to the police or military. In the post-election context of 2024, they constituted a significant component of the repressive response and participated in the arrest of individuals who were later handed over to state authorities.

These repressive functions were integrated with everyday mechanisms of social control. Through their integration into community structures and their participation in the distribution of food, benefits, and public services, these groups gained privileged access to information about the population and the ability to condition access to essential goods according to criteria of political loyalty.

The actions of these groups unfolded in a context of persistent impunity. The State knew, or could not reasonably have been unaware, of their recurring participation in acts of violence, extensively documented for over a decade. However, the Mission did not identify effective measures to disarm or disband these groups, restrict their deployment in public order operations, or investigate and punish their members. On the contrary, public support, material assistance, and institutional integration contributed to preserving and strengthening their capabilities.

The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that certain actions by these groups are attributable to the Venezuelan State, particularly those carried out in the exercise of public powers transferred by the legislation of the People's Power and those committed in the execution of operations designed and directed by the State. Regardless of attribution, the State is responsible for failing to fulfill its obligations to prevent, protect, investigate, and punish.

The Mission also has reasonable grounds to believe that the documented violations were committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the civilian population, in accordance with a state policy aimed at silencing, discouraging and repressing opposition to the Government, which provides grounds for investigating the individual criminal responsibility of members of collectives and state officials.

The Mission emphasizes that this report constitutes an initial analysis of a broad and complex phenomenon. Several aspects require further investigation, including funding mechanisms and internal composition.

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of the groups, their relations with other levels of the State and with the private sector, and the individual criminal responsibility of their members and of state officials.

The Mission concluded that the actions of these groups cannot be understood as a series of isolated excesses committed by autonomous actors. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that they constituted a functional and deliberately informal component of a broader strategy for population control and repression of dissent. This network allowed the State to expand its coercive capacity, fragment the attribution of responsibility, and maintain spaces for denial regarding the violations committed.

The effective dismantling of these groups requires ending all forms of state support and coordination, disarming the groups, investigating their members and the responsible authorities, and guaranteeing truth, justice, and reparation for the victims.

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I. Introduction

A. Background

1. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela ("the Mission") was established in 2019 pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 42/25. The Mission has a mandate to investigate gross human rights violations since 2014, with a view to combating impunity and ensuring full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims . This report is submitted pursuant to Council resolution 57/36.

2. Since its first report, submitted to the Human Rights Council in 2020, the mission observed the role played by armed citizen groups known as "colectivos" in the human rights violations and crimes documented in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela2 . The involvement of collectives in state repression was particularly evident during the main cycles of citizen protests within the timeframe of the mission's mandate, such as the mass protests of 2014, 2017 and 2019, in which collectives were deployed as shock troops in coordination with the security forces.

3. In 2024, the mission observed a new surge in abuses by collectives in the context of the protests that arose following the official declaration of the results of the July 28 presidential elections, which gave Nicolás Maduro the victory for a new term, despite evidence to the contrary3 .

In October of that year, the Human Rights Council expressed its concern about the "worsening of human rights violations and transgressions and an increase in restrictions on civic and democratic space", including "the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement agents and armed individuals called 'collectives'" [4] . In this context, the Council requested the Mission to pay special attention to the violence perpetrated by these groups during the course of its investigations.5

B. Objective and scope of the research

4. The mandate of the Human Rights Council is especially relevant given the historical role of collectives in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. As paramilitary structures operating with the acquiescence and collusion of state entities, collectives have played a central role in the use of coercion and political violence against opposition members or those perceived as such, with near-total impunity. The decentralization of the use of force by the state to collectives has made them an essential component of the state's repressive apparatus. Given the new political situation arising from this...

[1] A/HRC/RES/45/20, paragraph 15.
2 See A/45/33, para. 128; A/45/CRP.12, paragraphs 216-224, 2074-2077, 2099.
[3] According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS), a non-governmental organization, 915 protests took place across the country between July 29 and 30, 2024. The OVCS observed the presence of "colectivos" (armed pro-government groups) in 119 of these protests. See OVCS, "OVCS and CDJ denounce increased repression by armed civilians and security forces in Venezuela," August 3, 2024. Available at: https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/comunicados-2/comunicado-915-protestas-postelectorales-138-reprimidas-durante-29-y-30-de-julio.
[4] A/HRC/RES/57/36, preamble para. 10.
[5] *Ibid.,* para. 16.

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Following the arrest of President Maduro on January 3, 2026, the role played by these groups has once again become especially relevant.

5. Based on information gathered by the Mission since the beginning of its mandate and the special investigation conducted during this period, this report examines the characteristics of these groups, their internal organizational structures, and the State's support for and involvement with them. Furthermore, the report examines in greater detail a phenomenon of particular concern from the perspective of the rule of law and the unrestricted respect for human rights: the process by which certain State functions related to security, social control, and the implementation of public policies—among others—have been gradually transferred, formally or informally, to these groups, with varying levels of State coordination, support, or acquiescence.

6. From this perspective, the report analyzes how this transfer has influenced the commission of human rights violations and abuses, as well as conduct potentially constituting crimes under international law, in various repressive contexts. These include security operations, responses to demonstrations, arbitrary detentions, and other forms of persecution against opposition members or those perceived as such, journalists, human rights defenders, and other civil society actors. The report also examines the role played by collectives as instruments of social control and their impact on civic and democratic space.

7. Due to the diversity, volume, and availability of information, this report—which should be the first of several—focused the Mission's research on the collectives present in the Caracas metropolitan area, considered a historical stronghold for these groups—especially the parishes of Catia and 23 de Enero in the Capital District, and Petare, the capital of the Sucre municipality—and in the states of Táchira and Lara, where the presence of these collectives is particularly significant. However, the Mission was able to confirm that these groups are active, sometimes under different names, throughout virtually all of Venezuelan territory.

8. This report deepens the line of investigation undertaken by the Mission since the beginning of its work on the institutional structures involved, to varying degrees, in the commission of human rights violations and international crimes, with the ultimate goal of contributing to the determination of individual responsibility and accountability.6

9. In this regard, the report analyzes the role of these groups as a *de facto* structure of the state's repressive apparatus and examines how certain functions traditionally reserved for the state were exercised, partially or complementarily, by armed civilian actors with varying levels of coordination, support, or acquiescence from state institutions and authorities. The information gathered by the Mission reveals a strategic delegation of functions and logistical coordination between these groups and state security forces, in a context of deliberate impunity.

C. Methodology

10. As in previous reports, the Mission adopted the methodology and good practices developed by the United Nations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), for the

[6] See, in particular, A/HRC/48/CRP.5 (on the justice system); A/HRC/51/CRP.3 (regarding the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence [DGCIM] and the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service [SEBIN]); A/HRC/54/CRP.9 (regarding the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions [DAET] of the Bolivarian National Police Force [CPNB] and its predecessor, the Special Action Forces [FAES]) and A/HRC/61/CRP.4 (regarding the Bolivarian National Guard [GNB]).

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The Mission conducted fact-finding and legal determinations in investigations concerning human rights. It applied the principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity, transparency, and integrity.

11. To prepare this document, the mission conducted 62 interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, including local and international civil society organizations, academics, public officials, members of collectives, and victims, to gather relevant information. The mission also carried out open-source documentary research, including a review of academic and professional literature, websites and social media (profiles, posts, images, and videos), publicly available records, and newspaper, magazine, radio, and television broadcasts.

12. The Mission considered the following as direct, reliable and credible sources of information:

a) Interviews with victims, their families, and witnesses with direct knowledge of the incidents;

b) Interviews with members of collectives;

c) Interviews with former government and military officials and other people with direct knowledge of specific cases or the internal workings of certain institutions *(insiders);*

d) Verified digital information (in particular videos, satellite images) or social media content) that contains direct information about an incident;

e) Direct digital information from the active accounts of some groups in Venezuela;

f) Public statements or information about the groups issued by government representatives (including televised statements or statements published on social media) and

g) Laws, policies and directives of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

13. The Mission integrated a systemic and cross-cutting gender approach into this analysis by using methodologies and tools that made it possible to identify the differentiated impacts of the documented violations, abuses and crimes.

14. The Mission ensured that it obtained the informed and explicit consent of each person interviewed before using the information provided. Strict measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and protect personal data. The identities of sources, witnesses, and victims were anonymized when their disclosure could pose a risk of retaliation or harm to their safety or that of their families. Interactions with victims and witnesses remain confidential; however, the Mission maintains a secure and comprehensive database containing the information, testimonies, and evidentiary materials used to support the analyses and findings in this report.

15. All information is stored on secure digital platforms with restricted and controlled access, in accordance with best practices in information security and confidential information management. Access to the Mission's records is granted only when interviewees have given their informed consent and when sufficient security and protection guarantees are in place.

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D. Test standard

16. The Mission uses the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard of proof to reach its conclusions. This standard is met when the Mission has gathered a set of reliable and consistent evidence, along with other material, on the basis of which a reasonable and diligent person would have reason to believe that the incident or pattern of conduct occurred.10 When this standard of proof cannot be met, the Mission refers to the facts and incidents as recorded or documented.

17. The Mission applied the standard of proof to determine whether: (i) the violation or crime occurred and (ii) the identified person was responsible. This standard is lower than that required by national or international criminal proceedings to render a conviction (“beyond a reasonable doubt”), as well as that required to support an indictment. It is also lower than the preponderance of likelihood standard in civil matters (meaning that something is more likely to have happened than not). Nevertheless, the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard requires a level of reliability and corroboration sufficient to justify the opening or continuation of further criminal or disciplinary investigations.7

E. International legal framework

18. Given the hybrid nature of the armed civilian groups that are the focus of this document and their collaboration with the state apparatus, the legal approach requires the integration of the framework of international human rights law (IHRL)8 , public international law (PIL), and international criminal law (ICL). This normative triad allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, structuring a legal framework capable of imputing both the international responsibility of the Venezuelan State and the individual criminal responsibility of potential perpetrators.

II. Characteristics, historical evolution and legal-institutional framework

A. Definition and characteristics of collectives

1. Definition

19. In the Venezuelan context, the term “collective” can refer to a wide variety of grassroots community groups, frequently linked to the government's ideology, including organizations involved in social, cultural, or sports programs. In the context of the political repression of recent decades, however, the term has come to encompass the various armed civilian groups aligned with the government that use violence to achieve their political and other objectives.

[9] A/HRC/45/CRP.11, paragraphs 11, 1977.

8 This report addresses the notions of human rights violations and abuses
Human rights violations are understood as the transgression, by action or omission attributable to a State, of the rights recognized by national, regional, or international human rights law. Human rights abuses, on the other hand, are acts committed by non-State actors that violate or undermine the enjoyment of human rights. OHCHR, *Manual on Human Rights Monitoring,* Chapter 1: “Definitions and the Human Rights Monitoring Cycle”, Section K, “Human rights violations, human rights abuses, violations of international humanitarian law and international crimes”. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/hr-monitoring-chapter-01-definitions-en.pdf

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regardless of the name they call themselves. It is in this sense that the term is used in this report.

20. The groups that are investigated and analyzed here are those that can be characterize in the category of pro-government armed groups9 (PGAGs) that act as para-state structures and operate under the acquiescence, coordination or direct direction of the State and exercise elements of governmental authority, mostly related to the exercise of social control, internal security and the repression of political dissent10 .

21. A pro-government armed civilian group is defined as an organized armed faction that, without being an official part of the armed or police forces of a State, acts in alliance, support or with the complicity and tolerance of the central government, focusing its efforts on defending the government in power11 .

22. International regulations do not provide a specific definition of a pro-government armed civilian group. However, based on specialized literature,12 a pro-government armed group is defined by the four cumulative elements that characterize it: a) it identifies itself as a pro-government organization
government or is evidently sponsored by national or subnational authorities; b) is not a formal part of the State security forces; c) is armed and equipped to exercise violence; d) responds to a form of organization (name, identifiable leadership, internal structure or a geographical, ethnic, religious or political base).

23. These types of groups typically operate under a cloak of informal legality or legal permissiveness granted by official authorities, as their objectives align with preserving the *status quo.* Thus, their actions are characterized by a symbiotic relationship with formal security forces, involving intelligence sharing, logistical support, and a state-sanctioned policy of impunity for the use of armed force.

24. In the context of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, colectivos have historically been configured as pro-government armed groups, composed mainly—though not exclusively—of civilians who have been instrumentalized by the State for the maintenance of social control and the repression of dissent. The incorporation of colectivos into the State's repressive apparatus is a deliberate State policy promoted by the Government of President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) and intensified during the Government of President Nicolás Maduro (2014-2026).

25. The way these groups operate has direct implications for the enjoyment and protection of a wide range of human rights. The exercise of the

9 Interviews YYIV009, HHIV198 and CFyPS3.

10 Sabine C Carey *et* al., “Pro-Government Militias and Conflict”, Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics, October 26, 2016. Available at: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1524197/1/Pro%20Government%20Militias%20and%20Conflict-web-version.pdf; German Development Institute, “Pro-Government Militias, Human Rights Abuses and the Ambiguous Role of Foreign Aid” (April 2016). Available at: https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/BP_4.2016.pdf

11 UN Center of Policy Report, “Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-Conflict Transitions,” April 14, 2020. Available at: https://unu.edu/publication/hybrid-conflict-hybrid-peace-how-militias-and-paramilitary-groups-shape-post-conflict

12 Sabine C. Carey, *et al.,* “States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence: A New Database on Pro-Government Militias,” *Journal of Peace Research,* vol. 50, no. 2, 2013, pp. 249-258. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/jpr/article/50/2/249/8365713; and Andrew Thomson, “Negotiating Peace with Pro-Government Militias?: Human Rights Violations, International Pressure, and the Case of the Self-Defense Forces of Colombia,” *Negotiation Journal,* vol. 42, 2026.

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Violence and functions related to security, surveillance, maintaining public order, and social control compromise the rights to life, personal integrity, and liberty, as well as the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, political rights, and the right to privacy. Their involvement in the management and distribution of food, services, and public benefits also affects the rights to adequate food and social security, and the prohibition of discrimination on political grounds.

2. General characteristics

26. Based on the quantitative and qualitative systematization of information received from various sources, as well as the detailed study of the historical and institutional legal framework, the Mission was able to identify several characteristics common to the armed civilian groups called collectives, which are summarized below and will be developed later throughout this report:

a) *Armed character:* one of the main characteristics of the collectives They are heavily armed. The weapons used by these groups come from various sources, including equipment supplied by the state (see Chapter III, Section A *below).* The collectives differ from other armed actors operating in the territory of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (for example, criminal macro-gangs or guerrilla groups of foreign origin) by maintaining a close political and ideological link with the Government, and by performing para-state functions.

b) *Direct links with the authorities:* all the collectives under investigation in this report obey and are linked to some authority of the Government or the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)13. As a former leader of a collective interviewed by the Mission graphically pointed out, *"[t]he difference between a collective and a criminal group is that the collective has a relationship with the State"* [14].

c) *Operational coordination with the security forces:* many of the actions of the collectives, particularly those related to repression, They are carried out following directives or in coordination with the security forces or intelligence agencies of the State15, including illegal actions or violations of human rights16. Some officials or former officials of these bodies are even active members of collectives17 .

d) *Direct or indirect state funding:* collectives receive, to a greater or lesser extent, formal and informal funding from public institutions. This funding has been channeled through different methods, although it has tended to decrease over time (see Chapter 3, Section A, *below).* Among the most common forms of financial support for collectives are the inclusion of their members on the payrolls of official institutions, including law enforcement agencies, as well as subsidies to foundations controlled by these groups.18

e) *State logistical support and training:* there is ample *evidence* that armed civilian groups have been supplied with weapons by security forces and other State authorities at all levels, as well as other operational equipment necessary for their functions of repression and social control, such as motorcycles and other devices.

13 Interview YYIV009; YYIV015 and CFyPS3.
14 Interview YYIV030.
15 Interview CF and PS3, HHIV009, HHIV197 and ABIV005.
16 Interviews YYIV 013y CF and PS3.
17 Interviews YYIV001, YYIV007, YYIV008, YYIV009, YYIV013, YYIV015 and YYIV026.
18. YouTube publication, NTN24, "Is Nicolás Maduro the one ordering armed groups to intimidate the people?", March 12, 2019. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_FkSF-HA7w&t=29s.

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radiocommunication19. Likewise, the members of these groups have received tactical-military training, through specific training programs promoted by the security forces, the periodic training of the Bolivarian Militia or training in third countries20 .

f) *Social control:* The collectives exercise para-state functions in the sectors under their control, assuming the maintenance of security and public order, as well as informal mechanisms of justice administration – including the imposition of sanctions and the resolution of conflicts—excluding state security agencies and state justice bodies21 .
Furthermore, these groups have assumed, by state delegation, a significant degree of control over the management and distribution of public services, goods and subsidies, including basic services such as gasoline and the administration of local health centers.22 This has allowed them to weave networks of intelligence and political clientelism, which have been instrumental in the exercise of state repression (see chap. III, secs. B and C, *below).*

(g) *Control of local economies:* Thanks to the control and influence exerted over the communities where they operate, these groups have intervened in key sectors of local economies, including food markets, transportation, and informal trade, resorting to extortion and coercive control of economic activity. At the same time, these groups have become key players in the management of illicit economies, including human trafficking, drug trafficking, and the smuggling of weapons, fuel, and medicines. In certain states, they are also part of the illegal gold mining chain. ²³ Control of local economies, both legal and illegal, constitutes a significant independent source of income for these groups and has progressively replaced state financial support.

h) *State acquiescence and impunity:* The groups engage in public displays of weaponry and participate in various criminal activities, including acts constituting human rights violations and abuses, both in coordination with state agents and independently. The information gathered indicates that such acts are rarely investigated or punished, contributing to a pattern of impunity reinforced by public expressions of support for the groups from political representatives and state authorities. [24] This situation is seen

27. All these characteristics are fundamental to understanding and grasping the nature of collectives, the role they play today and the scope of the functions they perform or can perform, particularly in critical contexts of social transformation, political change or electoral processes.

19 Interviews ABIV010, ABIV005, and ZZIV005. YouTube post, La República, "Venezuela will give weapons to civilians on the border to 'defend the territory,'" November 14, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eloWWomdZsM; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Her3bVhGuXE; https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/detras-entrega-armas-empleados-publicos-venezuela/; Facebook post, Mario Vallejo, October 18, 2025. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/MVallejoTV/posts/-denuncian-entrega-de-armas-a-colectivos-en-t%C3%A1chira-fuentes-locales-reportan-que/1380892493408199/

20 Interview ABIV004. Instagram post, @Elirreverente "Nellyver Lugo hands over weapons to collectives", November 1, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQhCHmGDS_w/

21 Interviews YYIV021 and YYIV030.

22 Interviews ABIV010, ABIV004 ABIV005, YYIV007, YYIV009, YYIV021 and YYIV026.

23 Interviews ABIV010, YYIV025, YYIV027, NNIV032 and HHIV035.

24 Interview YYIV009 and YYIV030.

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3. Typology

28. The investigations carried out by the Mission made it possible to conclude that, despite having a series of common characteristics, the groups differ from each other due to their historical origin, internal organization and the specific functions they perform.

29. Taking these elements into account, the Mission classified three main types:

a) Historical groups,
b) Shock force collectives, and c)
Mixed collectives, made up of members or former members of state security agencies.

Table 1

Types of groups

	Ideologization	Financing	Inputs of the State	Social control	Illicit economies	Impunity
Historical groups	Yeah	Salaries (part of the public system) Formation of Foundations and management of public programs (CLAP) Management of deliveries of gasoline, gas, water, currency exchange system, health centers, schools, food collection centers and markets	Motorcycles Arms Radios Cell phones Cameras Training Military Credentials	Administration of justice Security Rules of life Access control and Departures Areas assigned for legal businesses Social programs	Yeah	Yeah
Buses – impact force	Yeah	Salaries (part of the public system)	Motorcycles Radios Cell phones Arms Credentials	No	No	Yeah
Mixed groups	No	Salaries (part of the public system) Money for foundations Management of social public policies (CLAP, gasoline, gas, exchange rate, water, system administration of health centers, schools, food collection centers and markets)	Motorcycles Radios Cell phones Cameras Arms Credentials Military training	Administration of justice Security Rules of life Control of entries and exits Areas designated for legal businesses	Yeah	Yeah

Source: Prepared by the Mission

a) Historical groups

30. This category includes armed civilian groups from the working-class neighborhoods of western Caracas – especially the 23 de Enero Parish25 – which are the result of transformation processes of old

25 Interviews YYIV009, YYIV007, YYIV015, YYIV013 and CFyPS3. YouTube publication, “Valentín Santana greets Érika Farías, Ernesto Villegas and the head of the Capital ZODI”, February 28, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0grAfb730k; Publication

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guerrillas , dating mostly from the 1960s and 1970s.26
Among these historical groups, the following stand out: Tupamaro27 collectives (which currently operates outside the 23 de Enero Parish); La Piedrita28; the Simón Bolívar Coordinator29; Alexis Vive30 and the Sergio Rodríguez Collective Front31 .

31. Unlike other groups, due to their historical origins, these types of collectives are strongly ideologized, with a grassroots social project that finds a new accommodation within the "Bolivarian Revolution" project originally promoted by President Hugo Chávez. These historical groups still retain part of their ideological discourse and have publicly expressed their support for the "revolution."32 As the founder of one of these early groups described to the Mission:

> *The collectives were formed [after 2002] as a shock force to halt the advance of the opposition sector… the collectives were used as a shock force and were given some incentives (motorcycles and other things). But the ideological conviction that most of us had—most of us came from being militants on the left for many years before Chávez, from the guerrillas—that gave us the elements that allowed us to be in confrontations during the coup and to defend the revolution.33*

32. The historical leadership of these groups is widely known and is frequently recognized by high-level representatives of the Government and of

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On YouTube, @Lubrio, "Diosdado Cabello in a meeting with collectives, January 7, 2025", January 7, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gs1jtiWSoC8; Univision, "The Chavista paramilitary gangs that sow terror in Venezuela: the colectivos," April 30, 2017. Available at: https://www.univision.com/noticias/america-latina/las-bandas-paramilitares-chavistas-que-siembran-el-terror-en-venezuela-los-colectivos;

26 Other parishes with a significant presence of historical groups are Sucre, San Juan and La Pastora all parts of the Libertador Municipality of Caracas.

27 Interviews YYIV007 and YYIV009.

28 The "La Piedrita" Collective was founded in 1985 by Valentín Santana, with the objective of "To combat drug trafficking and crime." It is one of the oldest and most influential community organizations in the 23 de Enero parish. It has strong Marxist-Leninist ideological foundations and joined the Chavista project in the early 2000s through the Bolivarian Circles. INFOBAE, "Who leads the armed group that received a replica of the sword of the Liberator Simón Bolívar," July 25, 2023. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2023/07/25/quienes-lideran-el-colectivo-armado-que-recibio-una-replica-de-la-espada-del-libertador-simon-bolivar/

29The Simón Bolívar Coordinating Committee was founded in 1993 in the La Cañada sector, originally conceived by social leader Juan Contreras as a cultural platform to unify the neighborhood, sports, and popular resistance movements of the 23 de Enero district. This collective focuses on the development of the alternative popular economy and communication, operating the community radio station Al Son del 23, as well as various direct social assistance programs. Aporrea.org, "Historical Review of the Simón Bolívar Cultural Coordinating Committee of 23 de Enero," October 7, 2004. Available at: https://www.aporrea.org/cultura/a10000.html

30 Armando Info, "Alexis Lives Better Than He Seems", October 9, 2016. Available at: https://armando.info/alexis-vive-mejor-de-lo-que-parece/

31 The Sergio Rodríguez Collective Front functions as a coalition or platform The "umbrella" front emerged to unify diverse collectives, student movements, and grassroots micro-organizations in the 23 de Enero neighborhood and western Caracas. It takes its name from a young sociologist and community activist killed by police forces during the 1993 Caracas protests. This front has served for the joint political and logistical coordination of the revolutionary base against the ruling party and the State, actively participating in the parish's internal security, territorial defense, and the coordination of national community and productive plans.

32 Interviews YY030, YYIV007 and ABIV005. BBC Mundo, "What are collectives and how They operate to "defend the Bolivarian revolution" in Venezuela," July 7, 2017. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40527998, see video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCJmr-Zr25E

33 Interview with a mission source. See YYDOC002. YouTube post. #SebastianaBarraez, "The Colectivos in Venezuela: guardians or threats to Democracy", June 9, 2024. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCJmr-Zr25E .

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PSUV34 . Some of the leaders with the greatest public profile today are Valentín Santana, from the La Piedrita collective, and Oswaldo Reyes, from the Tres Raíces collective. Historical groups often maintain links with public figures. These links were corroborated by members of collectives interviewed by the Mission, and involve the leadership of the Government and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)35 . These relationships are public and notorious, and have therefore also been corroborated by other documentary and audiovisual sources (see Chapter III, Modalities of State Support)36 .

33. Another defining characteristic of historical collectives is their tradition of community work, which they maintain to this day. Through various platforms, such as private foundations, these groups are often involved in the implementation of community development projects, social enterprises, and other types of cultural, educational, or health initiatives.37 However, the involvement of these groups in philanthropic activities does not preclude their armed nature and the social control they exert over the communities in which they operate, including through violence.

b) Collectives – shock forces

34. The Mission identified another type of armed civilian groups that act as shock troops for the Government, and that are summoned ad *hoc* by the authorities to participate in actions of political repression, depending on the operational or control needs identified in each context.38 Historical collectives often operate together with these groups in specific situations.

35. Shock troops gained strength following the 2007 political crisis and, especially, the 2019 crisis, when they spread throughout much of the country. They generally support security forces in controlling protests, although they have also been incorporated by the authorities into joint security operations against organized crime or "social cleansing," such as the People's Liberation Operations and subsequent operations required by the authorities to carry out intelligence work, surveillance, and intimidation against opposition members or those perceived as such, 40 and "social cleansing" actions.41 [39] Along with these top-tier performances, these groups are
They are characterized by the extreme use of violence.42

36. These groups, which constitute a tool of control and pressure against opposition members, they respond to calls from authorities

34. YouTube post, "Valentín Santana greets Érika Farías, Ernesto Villegas and the head of the "Zodi Capital", February 28, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0grAfb730k

35 Interviews YYIV030, ABIV005, ABIV007, AB009 and ABIV003.

36. YouTube post, Runrunestudio, "Valentín Santana greets Érika Farías, Ernesto Villegas and the head of the Capital ZODI", February 28, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0grAfb730k ; TikTok post, "Valentin Santana and Diosdado Cabello, for the homeland we will prevail", November 30, 2024. Available at: 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@court23e/video/7443077100984126727.

37 Interviews ABIV005 and ABIV010.

38 These types of groups do not usually have a name or a public structure consolidated. It is frequently organized around a local authority, such as a mayor or governor, and is mobilized on a situational basis, particularly during periods of protest, to participate in acts of intimidation and repression.

39 Document YYDC001. Interviews CFyPS3, JJIV006, YYIV030, YYIV026 and ABIV005.

[40] InSight Crime, "Border collective threatens entry of humanitarian aid into Venezuela," February 5, 2019. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/noticias-del-dia/colectivo-fronterizo-ayuda-humanitaria-venezuela/; BBC Mundo, "Crisis in Venezuela: how the day of terror and repression unfolded on the Venezuelan side of the border," February 24, 2019. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47351324 .

41 Interviews YYIV031, ABIV004 and YYIV026.

42 Interview CF and PS2 and DP AK GP.

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At various levels, generally high-profile political figures in the government, including local administrations or the PSUV43 . As detailed in later chapters of this report (see Chapter III below), these same authorities provide them with logistical and material support for carrying out their functions, including weapons, motorcycles, and radio equipment. For example, according to a witness interviewed by the Mission, in the state of Táchira, several armed groups coexist that may answer to different local authorities, including the Governor, mayors, and state deputies, from whom they receive direct orders44 . Another witness, who held positions of responsibility in President Maduro's government, stated that the Governors of La Guaira, Miranda, and Zulia also controlled their own groups45 .

37. Unlike other types of groups, shock groups are not usually associated with specific urban sectors46 .

c) Mixed collectives: instruments of repression

38. Under this designation, the Joint Mission focuses on pro-government armed groups established after the 2014 political, economic, and security crisis, due to their hybrid composition of civilians and state security officials. These groups were formed for control and repression. Unlike other groups, these collectives were formed with the support of state authorities to exercise territorial control under their directives, thus receiving greater support from state security agencies. These types of collectives are characterized by being heavily armed and by the use of extreme violence, generating widespread fear among the population.

39. Unlike other historical groups, these groups have lost many of their social functions and their structure resembles the criminal groups that formed them47 .

40. The emergence of mixed collectives is closely linked to the People's Liberation Operations (OLP, later called People's Humanist Liberation Operations, OLHP), a security strategy implemented by the Nicolás Maduro government in July 2015 with the purpose of confronting organized crime in high-risk neighborhoods through coordinated operations between police and military forces.48 In these operations, the Special Action Forces (FAES), an elite PNB unit dedicated to fighting crime, play a key role.

As analyzed by the Mission, these operations resulted in serious human rights violations and international crimes, involving the FAES and other security agencies49 .

43 Interviews CFYPS3, YYIV016 and HHIV197. YouTube video, NTN24, "Is it Nicholas Maduro, who orders armed groups to intimidate the people?", March 12, 2019. Available at: 44 Interview YYIV031.

45 CFyPS3 Interview.
46 Interviews YYIV031 and YYIV026
47 Interviews ABIV003, ABIV005, ABIV010 and YYIV030.
48 HRW and PROVEA Report “Unlimited Power: Police and Military Raids in “Popular and immigrant communities in Venezuela.” HRW and Provea, IACHR, Public Hearing: Venezuela: Operation Liberation of the People, 157th Session, April 4, 2016. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqpVj76C4c0&t=145s; see also PROVEA, “Five years ago, the 'Operation Liberation of the People' paved the way for total repression in Venezuela,” July 12, 2020. Available at: https://provea.org/actualidad/hace-cinco-anos-el-operativo-de-liberacion-del-pueblo-abrio-el-camino-para-la-represion-total-en-venezuela/

49 A/HRC/45/33, paras. 1018, 1020, 1022.

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41. To implement the OLP/OLPH, the government forged alliances between criminal groups and members of criminal groups within prisons, known as “pranes”50, on the one hand, and active and former police officers, on the other, to create armed civilian groups. This led to the development of a new model of collectives whose priority was to control local criminal gangs and mafias, seize their territories in different parts of the country, and take over both the legal and, especially, the illegal economies.51 To strengthen and consolidate these groups , the authorities incorporated current and former members of security and intelligence agencies into their ranks.52

42. The Mission was able to corroborate that the then Minister of the Interior, Justice and Peace, Néstor Reverol, and Freddy Bernal, the historical leader of the PSUV and current Governor of the state of Táchira, played a key role in the structuring of these groups53. Bernal, who had served as head of the special forces of the now-defunct Metropolitan Police of Caracas (the so-called Group Z), already controlled by that time a network of collectives in Caracas operating directly under his orders, which he mobilized to integrate the new mixed groups54 .

43. Iris Varela, a historical leader of the PSUV and then Minister of Penitentiary Affairs, participated directly in the creation and formation of these groups, releasing and arming inmates who were serving prison sentences, including members of the “pranes” 55. A former high-ranking official of the intelligence agencies told the Mission that he witnessed a meeting in which Varela and the then Minister of Defense discussed the delivery of 30,000 rifles to arm “a command of prisoners as soldiers”56 .

44. Progressively, the members of these new groups joined the ranks of intelligence and security agencies such as the PNB (including the FAES), the SEBIN and the DGCIM, occupying leadership and coordination positions57 .
As discussed below, the integration of members of collectives into the security forces became a mechanism to finance these groups, while providing them with weapons, motorcycles, training and institutional legitimacy (see Chapter III, *below).*

45. A notable case of the incorporation of members of collectives into security forces is the case of Andrium Domingo Ugarte Ferrera, alias “Heiker Vázquez”, who, in addition to being the head of the Tres Raíces collective, also held the position of chief supervisor within the FAES of the PNB58; Ugarte was found dead in the military-police operation ordered for the capture and execution of the former policeman Óscar

[50] A/HRC/51/CRP.2, paras. 169, 209, 211, 565 and 571. “Pran” is a Venezuelan word that originated in the prison system and is apparently derived from an acronym for *“Preso Rematado, Asesino Nato” (a Venezuelan slang term for a prisoner who is finished, a born killer).* “Pranato” refers to a highly organized criminal structure with an established hierarchy. See Voice of America, “What are pranes and how have they negatively impacted Venezuela’s prison system?”, December 27, 2023. Available at: https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/que-son-los-pranes-y-su-impacto-negativo-prisiones-venezuela/7414683.html ; Venezuela Investigative Unit, “The Delegation of State Power: The 'pranes'”, InSight Crime, May 21, 2018 (originally published in September 2017). Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/investigaciones/la-delegacion-del-poder-estatal-los-pranes/ 51 Interviews ABIV010, HHIV197, CPyPS3, YYIV026, YYIV021, YYIV009 and DP AK GP.

52 Interviews HHIV191, CPyPS3, ABIV005 and HHIV197. Document YY20180119_ COLOSI-MED_Oscar-P; Oscar Perez Prosecutor.

53 Interviews YYIV025, DP AK GP and CFyPS2.

54 Interview DP AK GP.

55 Interviews HHIV198, CFyPS3, ABIV005 and YYIV007.

56 CFyPS2 Interview.

57 Interviews DP AK GP and CFyPS3.

58 Interviews ABIV010, HHIV197 and YYIV013. Document YY_20180118_COL_OSI-MED_Oscar-P, Prosecutor's Statement. Vanessa Moreno Losada, “Heyker Vásquez or Andriun Ugarte, a face with two identities”, January 17, 2018. Available at: https://efectococuyo.com/sucesos/heyker-vasquez-o-andriun-ugarte-un-rostro-con-dos-identidades/

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Pérez and others (see Chapter III *below)* 59. The case of José Miguel Domínguez Ramírez, alias Miguelito, is widely known. He was the leader of the "revolutionary" collective Continente, a faction of Tres Raíces. In 2014, Domínguez joined the FAES, eventually becoming its Director General, a position he retained in the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions (DAET), the successor entity to the FAES. Currently, Domínguez serves as deputy director of SEBIN.60 The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that Fredy Bernal was key in the incorporation of these members of collectives into the security forces.61

46. A former member of the Metropolitan Police explained the integration of the new collective groups in the following terms:

> *Starting in 2015, with the improvised OLP operations, the Ministers of the Interior and Justice, especially under Néstor Reverol, began to consider some alternatives. The government needed people who were more determined to kill outright. Since they couldn't find that entirely within the police force, they opened up opportunities for people with criminal records or simply began using these collectives that received direct orders…* They *also reintegrated officers from the Metropolitan Police… who hadn't been able to join the National Police because they had very dirty records, problems with homicide, extortion, among other things; they had simply been rejected in the National Police selection process.*
> [62].

47. "Mixed" collectives were instrumental in the implementation of the OLP/OLHP operations in marginalized neighborhoods between 2015 and 2017,63 and in the creation of the FAES as a specialized force of the PNB in 2016.64 Various sources indicated to the Mission that, in the context of cooperation between collectives and security forces, these armed groups strengthened their presence and territorial control in the areas targeted by the operations, displacing the criminal structures that were dismantled, and even pre-existing historical collectives. With this, the new collectives also assumed control of local economies, including illicit economies, as well as social control over the population.65

48. During this process, some of the historical collectives gradually mutated into mixed collectives, generating decentralized cells in the new sectors under their control. An emblematic example of this dynamic is the Tres Raíces collective, originally established in the Redoma del 37 (Zone F) of the 23 de Enero Parish in Caracas, which, thanks to its involvement in the OLP/OHLP, expanded its territory into other sectors of the parish and in other

59 Resumen Latinoamericano, "Venezuela: FOR THE HOMELAND! He died in combat on "Revolutionary Heiker Vásquez of the 23 de Enero collective died during an operation against the group of terrorist Óscar Pérez," January 15, 2018. Available at: https://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2018/01/15/venezuela-por-la-patria-murio-en-combate-el-revolucionario-heiker-vasquez-del-colectivo-23-de-enero-durante-operativo-contra-el-grupo-del-terrorista-oscar-perez/; Carabobo News Agency, "Freddy Bernal confirmed the death of a member of the collective who participated in the capture of Óscar Pérez," January 15, 2018. Available at: https://acn.com.ve/freddy-bernal-confirmo-muerte-miembro-colectivo-participo-captura-oscar-perez/; Crónica Uno, "Heyker Vásquez also participated in the OLP in the 23 January 23rd," January 17, 2018. Available at: https://cronica.uno/heyker-vasquez-tambien-participaba-en-las-olp-en-el-23-de-enero/ ; Maduradas, "Heiker Vásquez was honored as a police officer and member of a colectivo," January 18, 2018. Available at: https://maduradas.com/enterese-a-heiker-vasquez-le-rindieron-honores-de-funcionario-policial-y-de-colectivo/

60 Interview YYIV013. See A/HRC/54/CRP.9, paragraphs 95-100.

61 Interviews YYIV030, ABIV005, ABIV003, CFyPS3 and YYIV025.

62 Interview YYIV025.

63 See A/HRC/CRP.45/11, paragraphs 1019-1057 and 2013-2025.

64 A/HRC/54/57, paragraphs 22 to 31.

65 Interview YYIV030.

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areas of Caracas, and even of the country, forming, according to members of other collectives who spoke to the Mission, the most powerful and dangerous group in the country. Similar groups [66]. continue to operate in neighborhoods of Petare and Catia in Caracas, on the border of Táchira and in areas of the Orinoco Mining Arc67 .

4. Internal organization

49. The groups studied by the Mission function as decentralized cells with leadership located in sectors over which they have historically exercised control. Despite their decentralized nature, they maintain a hierarchical command structure of a military type. This structure allows them to efficiently carry out their various functions, from the exercise of political violence, when required by the State, to the management of social programs at the community level.

50. The collectives operate within a dynamic of territorial competition, especially in large, working-class neighborhoods, with several frequently operating in the same sector or parish.68 For example, a member of a collective interviewed by the Mission estimated that in the 23 de Enero parish of Caracas alone , around 40 collectives coexist. Territorial control over certain sectors has been a source of armed clashes between these groups.69

51. In a statement on social media addressed to the residents of the 23 de Enero Parish, Valentín Santana, a long-time leader of the La Piedrita collective, explained the relationship between these groups in the following terms:

> *I am the leader of the La Piedrita Collective and as such I assume responsibility for my collective…You must understand that each organization, collective or foundation in this parish has its different leaders and they are responsible for their actions, successes and failures…It is important to know that historically each organization, collective or foundation has its autonomy in its territories70 .*

52. As they accumulated power and political influence, some of the main collectives in Caracas, such as Alexis Vive, La Piedrita, and particularly Tres Raíces, established cells in other areas outside their historical sphere of control, and even in other states of the country. While the collectives

They act independently; the Mission received information about the existence of at least one group that brings together several collectives from the 23 de Enero Parish, the Sergio Rodríguez National Front of Revolutionary Collectives, from where some actions are coordinated.
[71] According to sources, there was an effort

66 Interviews ABIV010, YYIV030, ABIV003 and YYIV026. Instagram profile fundacion3raices: https://www.instagram.com/fundacion3raices?igsh=OTAwdzVueWJ3Mng4; 67 Interviews DP AK GP, CFyPS3, HHIV198, ABIV010 and YYIV013. See A/HRC/CRP.45/11, paragraphs 1019-1057 and 2013-2025.

67 A/HRC/54/57, paragraphs 22 to 31.

67 Interview YYIV030.

67 Interviews ABIV010, YYIV030, ABIV003 and YYIV026. Instagram profile fundacion3raices: https://www.instagram.com/fundacion3raices?igsh=OTAwdzVueWJ3Mng4;

67 Interviews DP AK GP, CFyPS3, HHIV198, ABIV010 and YYIV013.

68 A parish in Venezuela is the smallest political-administrative territorial division in which a municipality is organized. Available at https://docs.venezuela.justia.com/federales/leyes-organicas/ley-organica-del-poder-publico-municipal.pdf

69 Interviews YYIV030, YYIV026 and ABIV004.

70 *Ibid.* See also Insurgente.org, “La Piedrita Collective: «We are a nuisance to the “Counterrevolution,” 2019. Available at: https://insurgente.org/colectivo-la-piedrita-somos-una-molestia-para-la-contrarrevolución/

71. Sergio Rodríguez Front Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/frentesergiorodriguez/?hl=fr; Include as an example that they follow

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to establish a kind of “secretariat” among the groups, but according to a source with direct knowledge, the coordination efforts did not last, due to the divergent agendas of the different groups.72 .

53. Due to the great heterogeneity that exists among these armed civilian groups, the Mission was unable to identify a common chain of command model.
All of them. However, the Mission was able to confirm that all of these groups obey a higher command structure that maintains direct contact with state and PSUV authorities and receives operational orders, frequently through closed groups on instant messaging applications. In turn, there are middle and lower-level commanders responsible for coordinating and executing the corresponding actions.

54. Based on the information available to the Mission, it has not been possible to determine the exact number of collectives existing in the country; this would require registration efforts that could be part of the next investigation. Similarly, it has not been possible to precisely establish the number of members in each collective, from small groups to organizations composed of
hundreds of people73 .

5. Geographic distribution

55. The collectives in Venezuela have their largest concentration, still considered a historical stronghold, in the west of the Capital District of the country, although they operate in key regions of the center, west and borders of the country74. The mission has been informed by various sources that in Caracas alone, there would be more than 100 groups that would be categorized as collectives75 .

56. Caracas is considered the operational hub of the colectivos, most of which are historical colectivos. In August 2025, there were 299 Peace Brigades (CUPAZ) in the Capital District, which provide institutional cover for these groups (see
Chapter II, Section B, *below)* [76] As noted earlier, within Caracas, the
The 23 de Enero Parish is the sector where the main collectives historically emerged, which have generated autonomous cells in other parts of the capital and the country.

57. In the Central Region of the country, in the states of Aragua and Carabobo, the presence of San Vicente shock collectives stands out, with influence in the popular sectors of both capitals, Maracay and Valencia; the [77] Also in Valencia, the
Ricardo Urriera shock collective dominates the neighborhoods of the south of the capital (Plaza de Toros, Ciudad Plaza and Tocuyito).

58. As regards the Western and Andean Regions, in Barquisimeto, the capital of Lara state, the collectives act primarily as forces of

Working in coordination, the May 2026 statement on the possible mobilization against the new planning system. Statement by Jorge Navas, leader of the Resistance and Rebellion collective, available at: https://www.abc.es/internacional/jorge-navas-maria-corina-regresa-venezuela-detenida-20260312041137-nt.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.abc.es%2Finternacional%2Fjorge-navas-maria-corina-regresa-venezuela-detenida-20260312041137-nt.html

72 Interview HHIV187.

73 Interview ABIV005.

[74] Infobae, “The 5 Chavista collectives most feared by the civilian population of Venezuela”, April 29, 2017. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2017/04/29/los-5-Chavista groups most feared by the civilian population of Venezuela/

75 Interviews ABIV003, ABIV005, IVYY00 and YYIV030.

76 Instagram post from alcaldiadeccs, “The 299 peace quadrants will be connected with the self-governance rooms,” August 19, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNjBIclPas5/

[77] Olga Ávila, “The 'Colectivos': the enforcement arm of the Bolivarian government in Venezuela.” *Open Space - Venezuelan Notebook of Sociology,* 32(2), pp. 153-168 (2023). University of Zulia.

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clash and concentrate in the Ana Soto Warrior Parish (formerly called Juan de Villegas), especially in the Ataroa Commune and in the Socialist Commune Ciudad Bendita.

[78] The mission received information about at least 15 violent incidents. by groups entering university spaces between 2014 and 202679 . In In Mérida, the capital of the state of the same name, the Mission received information about various episodes according to which the cells of collectives as shock forces acted repeatedly in the surroundings and within the University of Los Andes (ULA) in order to intimidate and frighten the student movement80 .

59. In border states such as Apure, Bolívar, Táchira, and Zulia, mixed collectives like the Francisco de Miranda Front have been identified,81 as well as some collectives better known in these areas as "syndicates." In these states, the collectives share territory with armed groups of Colombian origin, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), and organized crime groups, such as the Tren de Aragua, which exert control over illegal mining, fuel smuggling, and various illicit trafficking routes, including those for weapons, people, and drugs. In its report on the Orinoco Mining Arc, the Mission described the complex interaction between these groups and their impacts on the human rights of the population in Bolívar state.82 The Mission has not been able

to confirm a coordinated effort between these groups.

60. The annex to this session document includes a map that reflects the geographical presence of the main collectives in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (see Annex).

B. Historical evolution and legal-institutional framework

61. The evolution and consolidation of these groups over the last few decades is largely due to a deliberate state policy characterized by the progressive transfer of state functions, including in the area of security, to these paramilitary civilian structures. During this time, the state undertook a series of modifications to the legal and security framework, responding to the government's immediate needs to provide institutional legitimacy to the actions of armed civilian groups, including their role in the repression of opponents or those perceived as such.

62. To a large extent, the institutional legitimacy of the collectives was supported by the concept of the "civic-military union" (currently known as the "civic-military-police union"), an essential component of the security doctrine of President Hugo Chávez and later of President Nicolás Maduro.83 The implementation of the "civic-military union" resulted in a network of security institutions, including the Bolivarian Militia and the Peace Brigades.

78 Interview ABIV017. Infobae, "Chavista groups attacked a rally called "By Juan Guaidó in Barquisimeto." February 29, 2020. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/02/29/colectivos-chavistas-atacaron-una-concentracion-convocada-por-juan-guaido-en-barquisimeto/; Insight Crime, "Colectivos: The New Masters of Public Services in Lara, Venezuela" (April 2023). Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/colectivos-nuevos-amos-servicios-publicos-lara-venezuela/

79 Aula Abierta, "Aula Abierta documents at least 35 attacks carried out by collectives against university students in Venezuela between 2014 and 2026", May 4, 2026. Available at: https://aulaabiertalatinoamerica.org/2026/05/04/aula-abierta-documenta-al-menos-35-attacks-carried out-by-groups-against-university-students-in-venezuela-between-2014-and-2026/;

80 El Economista, "Armed groups end student protests in Venezuela," March 26, 2024. Available at: https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/internacionales/Grupos-armados-terminan-con-protestas-estudiantiles-en-Venezuela-20140328-0100.html. https://www.facebook.com/GobiernoDeLara/posts/el-frente-

[81] francisco-de-miranda-naci%C3%B3-el-29-de-junio-del-a%C3%B1o-2003-y-fue-fundado-e/1128494212639650/

82 A/HRC/51/CRP.2. paras 7, 177-182.

[83] A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 167.

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(CUPAZ), which contributed to blurring the legal boundary between civil society and the military establishment, legitimizing the participation of non-state actors in tasks of internal defense and control of dissent.

63. Simultaneously, during this period, the State promoted various organizational forms under the umbrella of what was known as “People’s Power,” such as Bolivarian Circles, communal councils and communes, and the Bolívar-Chávez Battle Units (UBCh). Although collectives are not formally part of these structures, they have maintained cooperative and co-opted relationships with them, which has allowed them to strengthen their territorial presence, mobilization capacity, and access to local information. This convergence between state institutions, community organizations, and collectives has fostered the consolidation of mechanisms for oversight, political mobilization, and social control through the management of public services and government policies.

1. Historical collectives and Bolivarian circles: 1960 – 2001

64. As noted above, the term “collective” predates Hugo Chávez’s rise to the presidency in 1999. These groups initially emerged in popular sectors of western Caracas, especially in the 23 de Enero parish, located in the Libertador municipality, inspired by the urban left-wing popular guerrillas of the 1960s and 1970s .

In their origins, these collectives were established as community organizations with cultural and political functions, in opposition to the civilian governments of the time. During their early years, they operated clandestinely and were subject to persecution by the state.

65. Within the 23 de Enero parish, comprised of large blocks of social housing, the various groups divided the territory—and, with it, control of the local economies—into distinct zones of influence. Some of the armed groups that emerged during these early years were the Tupamaru and Alexis Vive collectives. In the 1980s, other groups began to appear, such as the La Piedrita collective.

66. With Hugo Chávez's rise to power in 1999, the established collectives in working-class neighborhoods found common ground with Chavista ideology, while the new government capitalized on these groups' experience in community organizing, cultural processes, economic development, and crime control. Thus, President Chávez's first administration promoted the regrouping and strengthening of these "established" collectives as instruments for its political project. During those years, several figures within the PSUV, such as Diosdado Cabello and the mayors of Caracas, Juan Barreto and Freddy Bernal, began interacting with these groups . ⁸⁵

67. A historical community leader interviewed by the Mission described the process of transformation of these historical groups into collectives in the following terms

84 Interviews YYIV009, YYIV007, YYIV030, YYIV013, HHIV197, ABIV005, ABIV003 and ABIV010.

85 Interview YYIV009; Insight Crime, “Leftist Collectives in Venezuela: Criminals or Revolutionaries?”, November 24, 2014. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/analisis/colectivos-izquierda-venezuela-criminales-revolucionarios/; University of Zulia, “The 'Colectivos': Enforcement Arm of the Bolivarian Government in Venezuela”, Espacio Abierto, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 153-168, 2023. Available in: https://www.redalyc.org/journal/122/12277961008/html/#:~:text=En%20concordancia%20con%20el%20prop%C3%B3sito,como%20del%20partido%20de%20gobierno ; Moya Sánchez, T. (2018), ”Armed civilian groups in Venezuela: Actors of an 'organized apparatus of power'?” ANIDIP, 6, 110-144. Doi, September 6, 2018. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.12804/revistas.urosario.edu.co/anidip/a.7160;

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> *January 23rd was always taken over… by the Venezuelan left, by the Venezuelan guerrillas in the 1960s, with leaders who worked for political recruitment, under Cuban and* Russian influence… [They] were *social groups, condominium boards, civil associations, that formed over time, but that, at the beginning, well, we were going to fight to improve the quality of life, for social issues. [But] in the end these groups became radicalized under Cuban influence. This, added to the fact that there were many problems with democracy, with acts of corruption and so many other things, prompted people to experience a change, which was Chávez .*

68. During this period, collectives began to receive institutional recognition as part of the social and community structures promoted by the State. Thus, starting in 2001, the government of President Chávez promoted the "Bolivarian Circles," grassroots organizational structures that assimilated the old urban collectives along with members of other neighborhood groups. Announcing their creation, President Chávez defined the Bolivarian Circles as the *"cellular nucleus of the basic organization of the Bolivarian people to activate and direct the participation of individuals and communities in the revolutionary process,"* 88 and urged the creation of these groups in all areas of society:[87] To the

> *I invite all patriots, of whom there are millions, to organize themselves there among their neighbors, on the corner, in the neighborhood, at the high school, at the university, in the classroom, in the factories, in the countryside, at the sea, on the rivers, on the lakes, in the lagoons, on the roads, in the inns, in the hospitals, in the clinics, in the Bolivarian schools and beyond; let Bolivarian circles spring up everywhere, and the command post is where it needs to be. Where is it? In Miraflores, that is the command post and the direct link to begin organizing all of this.<sup>89</ sup>*
>
> .

69. The Bolivarian Circles operated in the cultural, educational, and sports spheres, in healthcare, and in the management and administration of certain social programs, including the distribution of food and gasoline. 90. At the same time, the Bolivarian Circles fulfilled the function of generating a network of influence and collaborative work with state agencies, particularly with the security forces. Thus, like the historical collectives, the Bolivarian Circles assumed security and crime-fighting functions in the country's neighborhoods, consolidating what an observer interviewed by the Mission called the *"civilian armed wing of the revolution."* 91

· The Government counted approximately 200,000 Bolivarian Circles throughout the national territory, integrating more than two million people92 .

70. On April 11, 2002, a coup d'état temporarily removed President Chávez from power. During these events, the Bolivarian Circles demonstrated a high capacity for urban mobilization by activating community communication networks and coordinating protests in support of the government.

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86 Interview YYIV026.

87 BBC News, "Chavez Accused of Fostering Militia", June 12, 2002. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2038827.stm

88 Aló Presidente Program No. 72, June 17, 2001. Available at: http://www.todochavezenlaweb.gob.ve/todochavez/3944-alo-presidente-n-72

89 Aló Presidente Program No. 71, June 10, 2001. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yROYGSnwBic&t=19s.

90 Venezuelanalysis, "Bolivarian Circles: A Grassroots Movement", October 1, 2003. Available at: https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/131/ ; NACLA, "Crisis in Venezuela: The Remarkable Fall and Rise of Hugo Chávez", August 25, 2002. Available at: https://nacla.org/crisis-venezuela-remarkable-fall-and-rise-hugo-ch%c3%a1vez/;

91 Interview YYIV002.

92 Latinno, Bolivarian Circles, 2005. Available https://www.latinno.net/en/case/19003/

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These actions included demonstrations that were concentrated around strategic military installations, with the aim of supporting President Chávez's return to power.

2. People's Power and the "civic-popular union": 2002-2013

a) The Bolivarian Militia

71. The experience of the attempted coup d'état provided a boost to the consolidation of the doctrine of the "civic-military union" 93, which went from rhetoric to becoming an operational doctrine that would govern the State's security policy.
The implementation of the civic-military union progressively weakened the Bolivarian Circles, giving way to the Bolivarian Militia as an openly armed component and other subsequent institutional structures. With the creation of the Militia, processes of military training, weapons distribution, and the incorporation of many members of collectives into the payroll began in Caracas and, later, throughout the country . ⁹⁴

72. In November 2002, the new Organic Law of National Security was adopted, which explicitly affirms the principle of co-responsibility between the State and society in matters of "comprehensive security and defense of the Nation"95. In 2005, the Bolivarian Militia (initially known as the Military Reserve and National Mobilization96) was instituted, made up of volunteer civilians, and which, after the reform of the Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) in 2014, would become an independent component of it97 .

b) The 2007 protests

73. In 2007, the "White Hands" movement—the cycle of student social protests following the non-renewal of Radio Caracas Televisión's (RCTV) broadcasting license—and the government's push for the failed constitutional reform to formally transition to a socialist state, began a period of reconfiguration and territorial expansion of the collectives. While many of these groups had autonomous historical roots in the working-class neighborhoods of Caracas, during this political cycle their presence strengthened in the interior of the country, operating under the protection of PSUV leaders and local authorities, particularly in strategic states such as Aragua, Carabobo, Lara, and Táchira.98

c) The laws of People's Power

74. The Government's response to the failure of the 2007 constitutional reform was the implementation of the so-called People's Power, a grassroots organizational model – while also vertically integrating with President Chávez's political project – centered on a network of participatory structures and decentralized management of local affairs, parallel to the constitutional regime of territorial distribution of power.

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93 Combating Terrorism Center, "Maduro's Revolutionary Guards: The Rise of Paramilitarism in Venezuela", August 2019. Available at: https://ctc.westpoint.edu/maduros-revolutionary-guards-rise-paramilitarism-venezuela/

94 Interviews DP AK GP and CFyPS3.

95 Organic Law of National Security, November 28, 2002, *Official Gazette* No. 37,594, art. 5.

96 Bolivarian Militia, "Legal Basis". Available at: https://www.milicia.mil.ve/?page_id=962

97 Constitutional Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, *Official Gazette* No. 6,508, January 30, 2020.

98 Interview YYIV009.

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75. This model was developed in the legislative package composed of the Organic Law of Popular Power and the Organic Law of Communes, both adopted in 2010. Through this legal framework, the Executive formally transferred exclusive powers from the states and municipalities to the new communal bodies, the communal councils (at the level of communities or specific sectors101) and the communes (higher instance of territorial and political aggregation made up of several communal councils) with broad functions in the management and distribution of public goods, services and subsidies at the grassroots level, including the [99] [100] [102] These organs gradually assumed ambitious system of the Local Committees for Supply and Production (CLAP) (see Chapter III, Section B, *below).*

76. The collectives gradually infiltrated the de facto leadership of the new People's Power bodies, which provided them with new opportunities to expand their power and capacity to control the communities where they operated. The leadership of the communal councils and other grassroots organizations granted the collectives significant financial autonomy, supported directly or indirectly by public funds. The collectives' integration into community structures also strengthened their ability to politically mobilize the population and coerce its adherence to the government's political project. Their capacity to carry out surveillance and intelligence work for the benefit of the authorities was bolstered, allowing them to assume social control over the communities (see Chapter III, Section B).
item 3, *below).*

d) The anti-collision controls

77. As part of the government's efforts to strengthen political and security control mechanisms, President Nicolás Maduro announced the creation of the Special Anti-Coup Command in January 2017. Coordinated by then Executive Vice President Tareck El Aissami, this structure permanently integrated military, intelligence, police, militia, civilian, and high-ranking leaders of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) actors within a nationwide framework designed to monitor and counter perceived threats against the government.

78. Anti-coup commands were established throughout the country, including in the areas corresponding to the Strategic Regions of Integral Defense (REDI). The creation of this command reflected the growing institutionalization of civilian-military structures tasked with identifying, preventing, and responding to alleged coup plots and other forms of opposition considered by the government as a threat to its hold on power.103

[99] Organic Law of Popular Power, December 21, 2010. Gazette No. 6,011 Extraordinary. Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/ley-organi-20220118145225.pdf

[100] Organic Law of the Communes. December 21, 2010. Official Gazette No. 6,011 Extraordinary. Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/ley-organi-20220118145225.pdf

[101] Organic Law of the Communes. December 21, 2010. Official Gazette No. 6,011 Extraordinary, art. 15(1). Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/ley-organi-20220118145225.pdf.

[102] Organic Law of the Communes. December 21, 2010. Official Gazette No. 6,011 Extraordinary, art. 15(2). Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/ley-organi-20220118145225.pdf.

103 A/HRC/45/CRP.11. Paragraph 67. With the Sledgehammer, Get to Know Who Makes Up the Special Anti-Coup Command, January 8, 2017. Available at: https://mazo4f.com/conozca-quienes-integran-el-comando-especial-antigolpe-nombres.

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3. The consolidation of collectives: 2014 to 2025

79. While the security model and territorial power organization reforms undertaken by President Chávez laid the groundwork for the strengthening of armed civilian groups and their integration with the state, it was not until Nicolás Maduro's presidency that the colectivos became an increasingly visible mechanism for intimidation, coercion, and violent repression of dissent. As a community leader interviewed by the Mission recounted, *"[a]s soon as Chávez died, internal fractures began within the government, and violence became part of the administration, and the colectivos began to infiltrate the state ."* 104

a) The Bolívar – Chávez battle units (UBCH)

80. Following the death of President Chávez, and in preparation for the presidential elections held in April 2013, the PSUV promoted a new communal structure, the Bolívar-Chávez Battle Units (UBCH). Unlike the Bolivarian Circles or communal councils, the UBCH were explicitly structured around the ideological principles and organizational structures of the ruling party, with the explicit objective of "[d]effending the achievements of the revolution and *fighting the enemies of the homeland on any terrain."* [105]. Their Functions, regulated by the party statutes, focused primarily on electoral mobilization and on articulation between the PSUV, state institutions and communities106 .

81. Although the UBCH and the collectives operate under different organizational structures and lack a formal relationship of subordination, in practice they have functioned in a coordinated manner. Overlapping memberships, informal channels of coordination, and shared political objectives have facilitated their convergence in tasks such as political mobilization, community oversight, territorial control, and support for government initiatives.

82. An example of the link between collectives and UBCH occurred within the framework of Plan República107, according to a source who spoke to the Mission. This plan, whose objective was "to ensure the security of the electoral process," provided for the deployment of Hugo Chávez Battle Units (UBCH) at each polling station. The source told the Mission that, *"in political scenarios, collectives are also mobilized to be present at polling stations, with the aim of intimidating or disrupting the electoral process."* [108].

83. The structure of grassroots organizations is composed of three spheres that converge on a common territorial dimension (see Fig. 1). Each structure originates from a different branch of central power. The UBCh answers to the national leadership of a political party (PSUV); the Communal Councils and CLAP answer to ministries of the Executive branch; the Militia answers to the military's Strategic Operational Command. As the structures descend to the local level, the boundaries between the spheres disappear. The three spheres operate and interact within the same geographic space (a neighborhood, a housing development, a parish). The base of the figure demonstrates the coexistence of the different organizational forms within the system, as well as its complexity.

104 Interview ABIV004.

105 PSUV, "Decalogue of the tasks of the UBCH", point 5 (emphasis added); "The UBCH", November 13, 2013. Available at: http://www.psuv.org.ve/temas/noticias/ubch/.

106 TikTok post, @PartidoPUSV, "What are the UBCH", October 12, 2019. Available at: https://x.com/PartidoPSUV/status/1183086178280427520.

107 Presidential Press, "Plan República activated throughout the country to guarantee security this #May25." Available at: https://mppre.gob.ve/publicacion/4933-0

108 Interview HHIV197.

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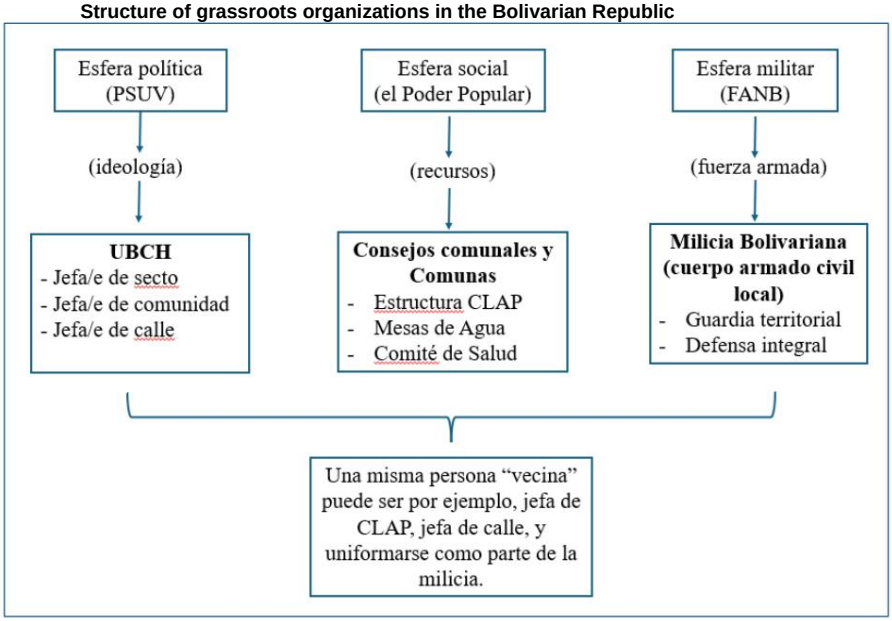
Figure 1
Structure of grassroots organizations in the Bolivarian Republic



Source: Prepared by the Mission itself.

b) Collectives and the repression of protests

84. Since its first report, published in 2020, the Mission has documented the role played by armed groups in the violent repression of various cycles of mass anti-government protests, which peaked in 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2024. The participation of pro-government armed civilian groups in the repression of protests consolidated their political and operational ties with government authorities and security forces, while strengthening state support and coordination mechanisms with these groups. Some groups of armed groups even formed *specifically* as shock troops to be deployed during protests (see Chapter II, Section A, *above).*

85. The 2014 protests constituted a turning point in this regard.
During that year, as the Mission had already established, the colectivos acted in the vicinity of opposition demonstrations, deployed alongside the Bolivarian National Guard and other security forces, or directly attacked demonstrators without state forces intervening to prevent their actions.109 The Mission concluded that the actions of armed civilians significantly contributed to the repression of protests and to the creation of a climate of fear and intimidation among the population.110 At the same time, statements of support from high-ranking public officials legitimized the participation of armed civilians in the repression of protests and contributed to normalizing the role of these actors within the security system.111 As a source interviewed by the Mission pointed out, it was from 2014 onward that the colectivos ceased to be primarily ideological groups and became paramilitary forces of social control.112

109 See A/HRC/45/CRP.11, paras. 2061, 2074-77. See also Case 35: Marches, collectives armed and torture (February 12, 2014), *ibid.,* paras. 1608-1644.
110 *Ibid.*
111 *Ibid.*
112 Interview YYIV009.

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86. The activation of Plan Zamora in April 2017113 constituted another significant moment in the process of coordination between military and police structures and armed civilian actors, conceiving of protests and other forms of political mobilization as threats to internal order that required coordinated defense responses (see Chapter II, Section B, *below).* Under the auspices of Plan Zamora, state authorities at all levels began to publicly identify with the collectives, providing them with weapons, vehicles, and logistical resources114 .

87. During the 2019 political crisis, the state again mobilized the colectivos to repress the protests called by the opposition. The Humanitarian Aid Crisis—the attempt to bring humanitarian aid into San Cristóbal de Táchira on February 23, 2019, on the Colombian-Venezuelan border—once again highlighted the role of the colectivos in state repression. The operation, known by the government as the "Battle of the Bridges," involved both security forces and armed civilian groups, who violently dispersed people in the area using firearms.116 The government called this operation the "victory of the civic-military union."117 The year 2019 marked a record number of protests, which were brutally repressed with the participation of armed colectivos.[115]

88. The 2024 political crisis marked the last cycle of mass protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to date. The Mission's report that year documented further involvement of colectivos in the repression of the protests, concluding that these groups operated freely and fired shots without interference from security forces, even when they were only meters away.118 Of the 25 people who died during the protests, the Mission determined that at least one was killed by gunfire from armed civilians.119

c) The collectives and the People's Liberation Operations (OLP and OLHP)

89. In parallel, independent investigations indicated that a direct effect of the People's Liberation[120] Operations (see Chapter II,

113 The Zamora Plan was a civic-military strategy by President Nicolás Maduro, to to guarantee internal order and respond to potential threats to national security. The plan was activated in the context of significant social protests taking place in the country. The economist, "What is Plan Zamora, the 'anti-coup operation' decreed by Nicolás Maduro," April 19, 2017. Available at: https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2017-04-19/plan-zamora-venezuela-nicolas-maduro-operativo-contra-supuesto-golpe-estado_1369023/; Provea, "Plan Zamora: The "War of the Entire People" Against the "Scum" of the Opposition," April 19, 2017. Available at: https://provea.org/actualidad/plan-zamora-la-guerra-de-todo-el-pueblo-contra-las-lacras-de-la-oposicion/

114 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, paras. 1557-1558.

115 The New York Times, "Crisis in Venezuela: How the day of terror and repression unfolded on the Venezuelan side of the border," February 24, 2019. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/02/23/espanol/america-latina/ayuda-humanitaria-venezuela.html; https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47351324; El País, "The attempt to bring humanitarian aid into Venezuela," February 24, 2019. Available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/02/23/album/1550927700_341055.html

116 Interviews YYIV032, YYIV011 and YYIV016.

117 Facebook post, Nicolas Maduro, "VICTORY OF THE CIVIC-MILITARY-POLICE UNION: Today marks 4 years since one of the most significant moments in our history," February 23, 2023. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=521385756735505

118 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, for 563.

119 A/HRC/60/CRP.4, paras. 210-211.

120 Venezuelan Observatory of Conflict, Report: Protesters in the sights of collectives paramilitaries, 2015. Available at: https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/tendencias-de-la-conflictividad/informe-manifestantes-en-la-mira-de-colectivos-paramilitares. University of Zulia, Olga Avila, "The 'Colectivos': enforcement arm of the Bolivarian government

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section A,3, *above)* was the significant expansion of the territorial influence of many groups, particularly mixed ones, during the period 2015-2017. These
They filled spaces left by institutional weakness and developed quasi-state functions in certain urban sectors. These functions included the
informal conflict resolution, community policing, enforcement of local rules, and control of economic activities.

90. Simultaneously, the economic crisis and high levels of crime prompted a shift: alliances were formed between current and former members of security agencies and leaders of armed groups to carry out joint operations in vulnerable areas. The stated objective was to combat organized crime, but in practice it became about gaining territorial control of illicit economies.

91. As the State's capacity to directly finance these structures through public payrolls or allocations to foundations and missions (such as the Great Mission Quadrants of Peace or Barrio Adentro) diminished, the administration of Nicolás Maduro opted to delegate control of large territories to armed civilian groups.

d) The incorporation of civilians into the security system and plans

92. Since 2014, the Venezuelan State has structured its security operations through various legislative reforms, high-level security plans and the implementation of states of exception and emergency that expanded presidential powers to adopt measures aimed at confronting alleged threats to internal order, within the framework of the doctrine of the “civic-military union”.

A common element in several of these plans is the conception that the country faces “internal enemies ,” a category that includes opposition political actors and other groups perceived as threats to internal order and government stability.121

i) The reform of the Organic Law on National Security (2014)

93. The 2014 reform of the Organic Law on National Security introduced mechanisms aimed at incorporating community organizations and grassroots power structures into the national security system. In particular, Article 59 created a “Protection System for Peace” based on what was termed “popular intelligence,” through which state bodies, organized communities, and local government entities were to coordinate actions regarding criminal policy and citizen security in the face of internal and external threats.

94. This reform reinforced a security model based on the joint participation of civilian and military actors in the protection of internal order, expanding the role of community organizations in functions related to security and the identification of “threats to the Nation” [122].

ii) The reforms of the Organic Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (2014 and 2020) and *creation of the Popular System for the Protection of Peace (SP3)*

95. For its part, the 2014 reform to the Organic Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (LOFANB) mentions the importance of the militias as

in Venezuela”, Espacio Abierto, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 153-168, 2023. Available at: https://www.redalyc.org/journal/122/12277961008/html/#:~:text=En%20concordancia%20co in the purpose, as of the governing party; PROVEA, “Groups are strengthened with the consent of the State”, April 2, 2019. Available at: https://provea.org/paramilitarismo/colectivos-se-fortalecen-con-la-ausencia-del-estado/

[121] A/HRC/45/33CRP.11, paras. 226-231.

[122] Law on the Reform of the Organic Law of National Security in Venezuela, Decree No. 1,473, November 19, 2014, Official Gazette No. 6,156 Extraordinary, art. 59.

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part of the State security apparatus123 and subsequently the reform to the law made in 2020, gave the Bolivarian Militia a status of "special component"124 of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces125 .

96. Although the collectives and the Militia are formally independent bodies, In practice, the boundary between the two can be blurred. This occurs, firstly, when members of collectives formally join the Militia without relinquishing their roles within those groups; and, secondly, when both structures participate in a coordinated manner in security and defense activities, including comprehensive defense exercises carried out in the communities where they operate.

97. The reform also expanded the role of the Militia as a mechanism for incorporating civilians into tasks related to national defense. Through this mechanism, civilians were able to legally access military training programs, weapons handling training, participation in comprehensive defense exercises, and training in territorial defense doctrines and asymmetric warfare,126 within the framework of the Nation's comprehensive defense.127

98. These reforms complement the Popular System for Peace Protection (SP3)128, a mechanism designed to integrate state institutions, grassroots organizations, and community government bodies in the prevention of and response to threats to national security. According to government officials, the system incorporated “popular intelligence” networks, enabling organized communities to assume surveillance, early warning, and coordination functions with civil, police, and military authorities, thus strengthening the participation of civilian actors, including collectives, in the area of security and defense.

99. The incorporation of a structure comprised mainly of civilian personnel into the national defense system contributed to blurring the lines between civilian and military functions in security matters. According to information gathered by the Mission, this situation has allowed some members of armed groups to act in certain contexts as armed civilians without visible official identification, particularly during control operations.

123 Reform of the Organic Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, by Decree with Rank, Value and Force of Law of the President of the Republic, No. 1,439, November 17, 2014, *Official Gazette* No. 6,156 Extraordinary, November 19, 2014. Available at: https://controlciudadano.org/web/wp-content/uploads/LOFANB-2014.pdf.

124 Constitutional Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, 30 of 2020, *Official Gazette* No. 6508 Extraordinary, art. 59. Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/ley-constitucional-de-la-fuerza-armada-nacional-bolivariana-20211019170208.pdf

125 Reuters, “Venezuelan Government Incorporates Militia as a Component of the Armed Forces,” February 10, 2020. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/world/americas/gobierno-de-venezuela-incorpora-a-la-milicia-como-componente-de-la-fuerza-armada-idUSKBN20529P/; Infodefensa.com, “Maduro Incorporates the Bolivarian Militia into the Armed Forces,” February 10, 2020. Available at: https://www.infodefensa.com/texto-diario/mostrar/3127881/maduro-incorpora-milicia-bolivariana-fuerza-armada

126 Document “Strategic Operational Concept for the Defense of the Nation”. Available at: https://www.studocu.com/latam/document/universidad-bolivariana-de-venezuela/seguridad-soberania-y-defensa/lineamientos-estrategicos-para-el-pensamiento-militar-bolivariano/137708581?sid=c93ab0be-c0f5-409f-a09e-323019a68d941789168273

127 Although Article 322 of the Constitution explicitly states that “the security of the Nation is an essential competence and responsibility of the State” and Article 324 limits that only “the National Armed Forces will be the competent institution to regulate and control, in accordance with the respective law, the manufacture, import, export, storage, transit, registration, control, inspection, trade, possession and use of other weapons, ammunition and explosives”, the reform expanded the legal mechanisms for access to military training and the handling of weapons under state supervision.

128 Presidential Decree No. 1,471, January 16, 2015, *Official Gazette* No. 40,582.

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demonstrations or community security, while in other contexts they may act in a coordinated manner with state security agencies or military structures within the framework of official operations.

iii) The Decree of State of Exception and Economic Emergency (2016)

100. In 2016, Venezuela faced a deep economic and supply crisis, aggravated by the fall in international oil prices and by a growing institutional confrontation between the Executive Branch and a National Assembly with an opposition majority.

101. In this context, the Executive enacted Decree No. 2,323 of State of Exception and Economic Emergency, through which it assumed extraordinary powers to respond to the economic, political and security threats that, according to the authorities, affected the stability of the country.

102. The decree strengthened the participation of grassroots organizations in tasks related to security and the maintenance of internal order. In particular, Article 2, paragraph 9, assigned oversight and organizational functions to the Local Committees for Supply and Production (CLAP), communal councils, and other grassroots organizations, to act jointly with the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, the Bolivarian National Police, and state and municipal police forces in maintaining public order and guaranteeing national security and sovereignty.

iv) The Zamora Plan (2017)

103. The Zamora Plan, developed by the Strategic Operational Command of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (CEOFANB) and reactivated during the 2017 protests, aimed to guarantee internal order through the coordinated participation of military, police, and intelligence forces. The plan identified various categories of “enemies” and “threats,” including opposition political activities, media campaigns critical of the government, and demonstrations considered destabilizing.129 President Maduro described the plan as a “joint civil-military” operation, involving military, police, and civilian forces, to “defeat the coup d’état .” 130

v) The Safe Homeland Plan (2017)

104. In 2017, the Government relaunched the Safe Homeland Plan, based on coordination between military forces, security agencies, and community structures. Its components included the deployment of patrols in “Peace Quadrants,” the strengthening of the Peace Protection System, and the transformation of the People’s Liberation Operations (OLP) into People’s Humanist Liberation Operations (OLHP) .131

105. Although the authorities presented this change as a reorientation of security policy, the OLHP continued to prioritize joint deployments of police and military forces in areas identified by the State as priorities for maintaining internal order.

106. The articulation between state agencies, territorial defense structures and community organizations favored greater participation of organized civil actors in surveillance, territorial control and social mobilization tasks, including some collectives in certain communities.

[129] *Ibid.,* para. 1551.

[130] YouTube videos, Panorama newspaper, Maduro announces the activation of the Zamora plan for the National security, April 18, 2017. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4IQsMO9BqI.

[131] A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 234.

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vi) The Great Mission Quadrants of Peace (2018)

107. In July 2018, the Government of President Maduro again reformed the national security system with the establishment by decree of the Great Mission Quadrants of Peace132. The new plan established an ambitious program of coordinated actions between the State authorities and the People's Power to address the structural, institutional and situational causes of insecurity and violence.
At the strategic level, the CUPAZs are coordinated by a collegial body headed by the Presidency, with the participation of the Vice Presidency and other ministers. The Secretariat corresponds to the Ministry of Popular Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, responsible for managing citizen security policy and transmitting strategic guidelines. At the tactical level, military structures operate through the CEOFANB and a national commissioner for the peace quadrants; and at the operational level, State Commands are established in the 23 states and the Capital District, each coordinated by a state commissioner appointed by the Ministry of Popular Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace. The plan was structured around different “vertices” or areas of action; the fourth of these vertices was the existing Popular System of Protection for Peace (SP3) .

108. The plan's main innovation was the territorialization of security policy through the definition of basic geographic units or “micro-territories”134 (the “peace quadrants”) that delimited the scope of application of the various actions foreseen in the plan. To delimit these quadrants, topographic and demographic factors, crime rates, and political dynamics (such as the calling of protests), among others, were taken into account.135 The Government has attributed the decrease in crime and violent deaths in the country in recent years to the success of the initiative.136

109. There is no conclusive data on the number of existing peace quadrants in the country. In December 2025, the Minister of the Interior, Diosdado Cabello, stated that “a little over 30% of the Peace Quadrants [had been] established throughout the country.”137 In early 2026, however, the Minister of the Interior indicated that 70 percent of the national territory had peace quadrants (without specifying the number of existing quadrants).138 The Minister also announced the goal of having the country’s 5,336 communes with their own quadrant.139

132 Decree No. 4078, Official Gazette No. 41786, December 20, 2019.
133 *Ibid.,* art. 4.
134 *Ibid.,* art. 1.
135 Ministry of Popular Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, *Great Mission Quadrants of Peace,* n.d. Available at: https://www.mpprijp.gob.ve/biblioteca/informacion, pp. 12-13.
136 Alexis Sanabria, “Bolivarian Government Projects to Reach 6,000 Peace Quadrants for "Strengthening Citizen Security," February 3, 2026. Available at: https://www.mpprijp.gob.ve/prensa/reporte/gobierno-bolivariano-proyecta-alcanzar-los-6-a thousand quadrants of peace to strengthen citizen security.
137 Ministry of Popular Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace (MPPRIJP), “More than 30% of the Peace Quadrants established in the country guarantee healthy coexistence among communities”, December 9, 2025. Available at: https://www.mpprijp.gob.ve/prensa/reporte/mas-del-30-de-los-cuadrantes-de-paz-establecidos-en-el-pais-garantiza-la-sana-convivencia-entre-las-comunidades.
138 Yaina Osorio, “70% of Venezuelan territory has Peace Quadrants”, Ministry of Popular Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace (MPPRIJP), March 17, 2026. Available at: https://www.mpprijp.gob.ve/prensa/reporte/el-70-del-territorio-venezolano-cuenta-con-cuadrantes-de-paz.
139 Alexis Sanabria, “Comprehensive Peace Quadrant Plan will be extended to the 5,336 communes of the national territory”, Ministry of Popular Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace (MPPRIJP), April 9, 2026. Available at: https://www.mpprijp.gob.ve/prensa/reporte/plan-integral-de-cuadrantes-de-paz-se-extendera-a-las-5336-comunas-del-territorio-nacional.

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110. According to various sources consulted by the Mission, the creation of the CUPAZ represented a response to the growing autonomy of the collectives' actions with respect to state institutions, as well as to the fragmentation of these groups resulting from the deterioration of socio-economic conditions and their greater dependence on illicit activities. 140 In this sense, the CUPAZ would have represented an effort to provide armed civilian groups with greater institutionalization and coordination with both national and local authorities, through the structures of the PSUV.141

111. The CUPAZ were formed by integrating members of existing armed civilian groups called collectives, along with members of community structures, members of local administrations, and members of the security forces.142 According to information received, CUPAZ members have performed functions related to social monitoring and control in communities, territorial political mobilization, the collection of information on opposition actors, and activities supporting state security and intelligence agencies.143 Currently, especially in the interior regions of the country, they control informal markets, gasoline distribution, gas distribution, and carry out neighborhood watch activities.144

112. The Mission notes that there is no official information that allows for a precise determination of the total number of CUPAZs operating in the country, their exact composition, or their formal oversight and accountability mechanisms. In 2023, President Maduro spoke of “4 million CUPAZ leaders.” [145].
This warrants a specific study, which could be done with the support of experts and the international community in the upcoming research.

140 Interviews YYIV007 and YYIV009.

141 Transparency Venezuela, "Peace Squads, ELCO Network and New Homeland Civic-Military Special Forces" (Chapter 3, *Illicit Economies under the Protection of Corruption),* June 2022. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/cuadrillas-de-paz-red-elco-y-fuerzas-especiales-civico-militares-patria-nueva/ ; Diario de Los Andes, "Founder of Insight Crime: The Cupaz women's collective movement organizes to carry out government orders," July 26, 2023. Available at: https://diariodelosandes.com/fundador-de-insight-crime-las-cupaz-organizan-el-movimiento-de-colectivos-para-cumplir-ordenes-del-gobierno/#:~:text=Igualmente%2C%20prestan%20servicios%20de%20seguridad%20a%20actors, of%20opponent%20Juan%20Guaid%C3%B3%20as%20%E2%80%9Cpresident%20interino%E2%80%9D; Ignacio Abasolo, "Lara: Collectives went from the Community Councils to the Universities", PROVEA, June 23, 2017. Available at: https://provea.org/paramilitarismo/colectivos-lara-especial-para-provea/; https://insightcrime.org/es/investigaciones/colectivos-cupaz-hibrido-perfecto/

142 Interview ABIV004. Insight Crime, “The rise of the hybrid criminal state in Venezuela”, Page 17, July 2023. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/El-ascenso-del-Estado-criminal-hibrido-en-Venezuela-InSight-Crime-1.pdf

143 *Ibid.;* Transparency Venezuela, "Peace Squads, ELCO Network and New Homeland Civic-Military Special Forces"; Insight Crime, "The collectives, the Cupaz and the search for the perfect hybrid", July 12, 2023. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/investigaciones/colectivos-cupaz-hibrido-perfecto/ ;

144 Interviews: ABIV004, YYIV003, YYIV021, YYIV026 and HHIV187.

145 YouTube video, Televen TV, “Maduro ordered the deployment of the peace brigades”, August 22, 2023. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqD5xyfnQN4; https://runrunes.org/noticias/391954/que-son-las-cuadrillas-de-paz-que-promueve-el-gobierno/

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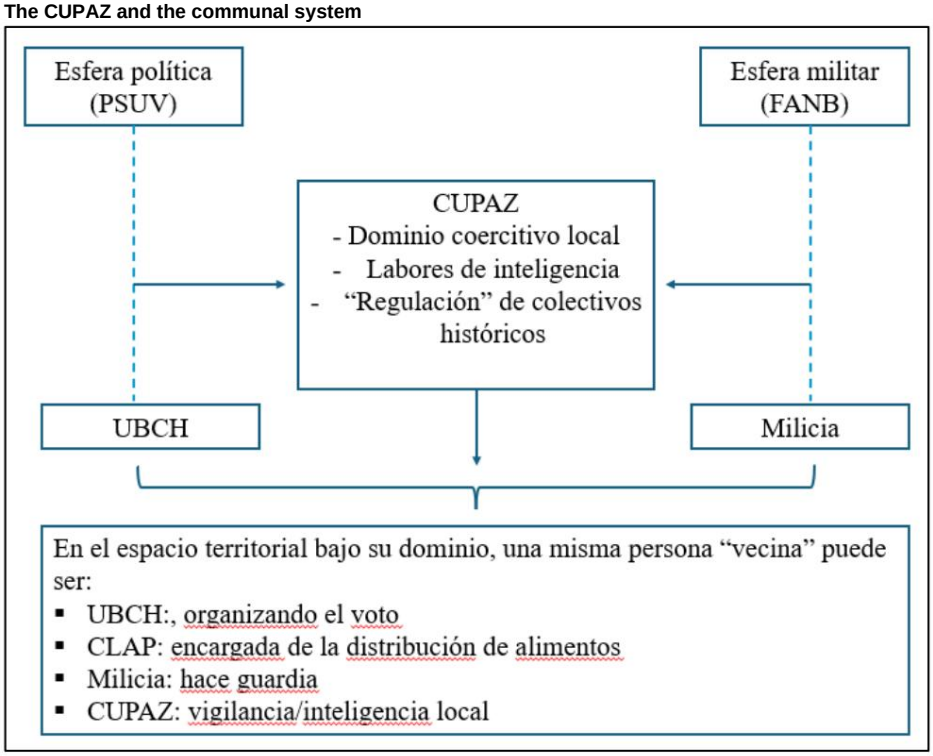
Figure 2
The CUPAZ and the communal system



Source: Mission report

e) The Governing Bodies for Comprehensive Defense (ODDI)

113. In January 2025, President Maduro established by decree a new entity within the national security system, the Directorate Bodies for Integral Defense (ODDI). The ODDI were structured as organized at the national, state, [146] "functional organic elements of the Territorial Defense System municipal, community, and parish levels147," with general functions of providing logistical support to national defense efforts. These functions include intelligence148 and public order149 operations .

114. Based on an explicit model of "popular-military-police fusion"150, the decree provides for the incorporation into the subnational level ODDIs of "members of grassroots community associations, social movements *and other instances of organized popular power"* [151].

115. In September 2025, in the context of the United States military deployment in the Caribbean Sea, President Maduro announced the implementation of Plan Independence 200. The plan consisted of activating 284 "battle fronts" along the coast and other strategic points in the country.152 According to what he stated

146 Decree No. 5,078, which activates the Governing Bodies for Comprehensive Defense, *Official Gazette* No. 6,876 Extraordinary, January 8, 2025.

147 *Ibid.,* art. 4.

148 *Ibid.,* art 5(12) ("[m]etain the national information system updated…to counter any threat, whether in times of peace or when extraordinary conditions exist").

149 *Ibid.,* art. 18 (The internal structure of the ODDI includes "internal order committees", with public order functions).

150 *Ibid.*

151 *Ibid.,* arts. 7(3), 8(3), 9(4) and 10(3) (emphasis added).

152 YouTube video from Canal Caribe [@CanalCaribeCuba], "President of Venezuela activates Independence Plan 200", September 11, 2025. Available at:

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Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello said the plan deployed all components of the FANB, including the Bolivarian Militia, and "the people in arms"153 .

116. Within the framework of the implementation of the Independence 200 Plan, in November 2025 the National Assembly approved the Law of the Command for the Comprehensive Defense of the Nation154. The Law establishes this new body, dependent on the CEOFANB, with responsibility to coordinate the ODDI155, and provides new legal coverage to these bodies, reaffirming the incorporation into them "of the different levels of Public Power and *organizations and instances of Popular Power*"156. The Law also specifies that, in the event of a state of exception being declared, these bodies will comply with the orders issued by the CEOFANB157 .

117. On January 3, 2026, immediately after the armed intervention by the United States and the arrest of President Maduro, the Decree of a State of External Commotion was issued. One of the objectives of the decree was precisely the deployment158 of the Command for the Integral Defense of the Nation and the ODDI "in all states and municipalities of the country"159 .

118. Despite this legal framework and the formal activation of the ODDI under the External Commotion Decree, the Mission was unable to gather evidence confirming that these bodies were in fact operational after 3 January 2026, or that they served as a basis for providing legal cover for the deployment of armed civilians after that date.

4. Collectives after January 3, 2026

119. During the days following President Maduro's arrest, the last mass mobilizations of collectives reported to date took place. In early January, the Mission obtained information showing collectives holding caravans and mass rallies to protest the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and demand his return to the country.160

Under the cover of the state of external commotion, the collectives deployed in Caracas and in the main cities of the country161 .

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXKAkSOzhCk; YouTube video by Luigino Bracci Roa from Venezuela [@lubrio], "Vladimir Padrino López on Exercises of the Independence Plan 200, October 8, 2025", October 8, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDfs6JdSDbM.

153 YouTube video, World Management, "News October 8: Maduro activates plan "Independence 200 to defend ourselves against the US | News Report", October 8, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkV2boAoNWs.

154 Law of the Command for the Integral Defense of the Nation, Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela No. 6,937 Extraord., November 11, 2025.

155 *Ibid. Art.* 6.

156 *Art.* 8 (emphasis added).

157 *Ibid.,* art. 14

158 Decree of State of External Commotion, January 3, 2026, Extraordinary Official Gazette No. 6.954.

159 Decree *of* State of External Commotion, January 3, 2026, Extraordinary Official Gazette No. 6.954, article 2.

160 Meganoticias, "Massive protest by pro-Chávez groups in Venezuela", January 14, 2026. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khShWUV5hi0; Regional News (Landázuri, Colombia), "Chavista Collectives Take Over Large Parts of Caracas and Other Regions of the Country," January 7, 2026. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/Informativoregionalcolombia/posts/-colectivos-chavistas-se-toman-gran-parte-de-caracas-y-otras-regiones-del-pa%C3%ADsve/864236426200971/; Instagram Reel, Polianalítica. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DTDi2t2iIvE/?hl=es;

161 Instagram post by @alvaroalvaradoc, January 5, 2026, available on: Instagram; YouTube video from France 24 in Spanish, "Venezuela: Armed groups seek those responsible for the 'betrayal' that led to Maduro's capture", January 10, 2026, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBdEJYaZREc, YouTube publication, News report

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120. After the deployment in early January, and far from the rhetoric of armed resistance that they maintained for years, the collectives opted for a relative retreat. However, according to information received by the Mission, the groups have maintained their urban patrols and neighborhood intelligence operations in key areas, as well as their control over licit and illicit economies.162 The Mission also documented new acts of harassment and threats perpetrated by collectives against relatives of people deprived of their liberty for political reasons, including outside the Rodeo I maximum security prison in Miranda state.163 , on the outskirts of El Helicoide164 and in Plaza Venezuela165, both in Caracas.

121. A family member described one of the attacks as follows:

> *We held a rally in Plaza Venezuela, where* the colectivos *were mostly embedded* [infiltrated], *as in one of the*
> My colleagues *here with me, who are always like the voices and we approached them to ask if they were relatives and what they did was hit the person who approached, who was a journalism student.*
> *And they beat him. It turned into a complete disaster. The police were defending the collectives, they attacked us, they threw punches at us, there were more women than men. There were maybe four men and the rest of us were just women and children* (...)166 .

122. Several experts consulted by the Mission indicated that the collectives were undergoing a period of reconfiguration in the face of potential political and institutional changes in the interim administration of Delcy Rodríguez167 in sectors traditionally controlled by the historical groups. This development is especially notable in the 23 de Enero parish in Caracas and in those states where illegal economies[168] operate, such as gold mining areas, drug trafficking routes, border smuggling, and human trafficking networks.

123. The reform measures introduced by the government of interim President Delcy Rodríguez have generated tensions between state authorities and the collectives. In February 2026, Rodríguez adopted a decree ordering the suppression and liquidation of foundations attached to the Presidency.169 This affected some key entities for certain collectives, such as the Propatria 2000 Foundation and the Robert Serra Foundation, limiting their funding channels and legal legitimacy. Furthermore, breaking with the traditional alignment of the collectives with government authorities, some groups have issued statements openly criticizing the policies of the interim government.170 In June 2026, the historic Simón Bolívar Coordinating Committee denounced an alleged plan by the security forces to carry out *"a large-scale repressive operation against Parish* 23."

Toro TV News, January 26, 2026, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfF5LGvMvN

162 Interviews ABIV005, ABIV010 and YYIV036.

163 Interviews YYIV045 and YYIV044.

164 Interview ABIV010. Instagram post by Clippve [@clippve], February 1, 2026. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DUPa6EAjAg9/?img_index=4,

165 Interviews YYIV045 and YYIV044.

166 Interview YYIV044.

167 Interviews YYIV008, YYIV009, YYIV002, ABIV005 and ABIV018.

168 Interviews YYIV026, YYIV030, ABIV003, ABIV005 and ABIV010.

169 Decree No. 5,248, which reorganizes the operation of the Ministry of Popular Power for the Office of the Presidency and Monitoring of Government Management, Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela No. 6,985 extraord., February 9, 2026.169

170 Instagram post, ElPiloncitoficial, "Valentín Santana Collective accuses the government "Interim president, a traitor to the revolution," March 8, 2026. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DVn4Pb8jl96/ ; Instagram post, Venezolanos.x.elmundo, "Mario Silva denounces that the Delcy Rodríguez regime persecutes and censors," September 7, 2026. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/Dc-aEsDOW8p/.

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noting that, if they materialize, *"they will encounter a wall of popular steel forged in decades of resistance,* awareness and original dignity"171 .

124. After January 3, 2026, the Mission received information indicating that certain historical collectives maintained communication channels with authorities of the interim government. A source with direct knowledge stated that leaders of La Piedrita maintained communication with Delcy Rodríguez and Diosdado Cabello and that they had performed mediation functions aimed at preventing clashes between collectives.172 The Mission also received information about the incorporation of individuals linked to criminal structures into security details related to the then Vice Presidency. The Mission was unable to independently verify all elements of this information or to determine the extent of the relationship between the interim government and the collectives.[173] .

III. Links with the State: modalities of involvement and support

125. As described in the preceding sections, collectives have ceased to be community organizations and play an increasingly important role within the security, local governance, and social control structures promoted by the State. This process has given rise to multiple forms of interaction between state agents and collectives, sometimes through formal coordination mechanisms and at other times through informal cooperative ties, generating a progressive overlap between functions traditionally reserved for public institutions and activities carried out by these groups.

126. Since its first report in 2020, the Mission has received and analyzed information pointing to links between the State and armed civilian groups known as collectives. Analyzing this information, along with the wealth of sources gathered specifically during this investigation period, the Mission has concluded that these links manifest themselves through different forms of State support and involvement. These include: A. forms of State support; B. the delegation of State functions; and C. social control and cooperation in repression.

127. The following sections examine each of these modalities in their various aspects.

A. Types of State support

128. The existence, maintenance and operational strengthening of collectives cannot be explained without the political and material support of State institutions. Several studies have previously documented this form of state sponsorship174 .

171 Resumen Latinoamericano, "Venezuela. Serious allegations from Chavista organizations: 'They intend to prepare a large-scale repressive operation' against the emblematic and combative 23 de Enero Parish," June 4, 2026. Available at: https://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2026/06/04/venezuela-grave-denuncia-de-organizaciones-chavistas-pretenden-preparar-un-operativo-represivo-a-gran-escala-contra-la-emblematica-y-luchadora-parroquia-23-de-enero-advierten-tambien-que-la-de/

172 Interview YYIV030, ABIV005.

173 Interviews YYIV021, YYIV030 and HHIV188

174 Interview YYIV030, ABIV003 and YYIV026. See: Insight Crime, "State Delegation in Collectives", May 18, 2018. Available at https://insightcrime.org/es/investigations/la-

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129. The information gathered by the Mission demonstrates that such support has been manifested through various forms of public, material and financial support, including the provision of resources, equipment, weapons and training, as well as through the acquiescence of state authorities to the illicit economies that finance part of the activities of the collectives.

1. Instigation and public support

130. Public statements by the highest state authorities demonstrate a sustained pattern of political and discursive support for the collectives. In January 2024, for example, President Maduro publicly stated: “I am one of you, and if one day the fascists should harm me or attempt to harm me, I leave it in your hands to do whatever you have to do to restore justice and peace in Venezuela. Unleash the Bolivarian fury.” This statement is part of a series of pronouncements in which high-ranking officials presented the collectives as key actors in the defense of the government and its political project.175

131. The information gathered by the Mission shows that this public support is neither an isolated nor a recent phenomenon. From the early years of Hugo Chávez’s government, especially after the events of 2002, presidents, ministers, territorial authorities, and leaders of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) made public statements recognizing, legitimizing, or promoting the organization and mobilization of the collectives. The Mission analyzed hundreds of open sources, including official speeches, videos, social media posts, and press materials, which document these expressions of support in different political contexts.176

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delegation-of-state-power-the-collectives/X, University of Zulia, “The Legitimacy of the 'Colectivos' and the Police in Venezuela: A Comparative Public Opinion Study”, *Espacio Abierto,* vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 55-79, 2023; Available at: https://www.redalyc.org/journal/122/12277961004/html/, University of Zulia, “The governance of the 'Colectivos' of Caracas and the State in Venezuela”, Espacio Abierto, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 122-133, 2023. Available at: https://www.redalyc.org/journal/122/12277961007/html/

175 Táchira news, Nicolás Maduro spoke about the colectivos and said the following: "They are people "Good, hardworking," April 3, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/tachiranoticias/videos/lo-%C3%BAltimo-nicol%C3%A1s-maduro-hablo-sobre-los-colectivos-y-dijo-lo-siguiente-son-gent/842632902744591/ ; YouTube post, Andreina Flores, "Maduro: A little candle that catches fire, a little candle that goes out," March 5, 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZzfVjoVDEc ; YouTube post, NTN24, "Maduro: I call on the collectives, it's time for active resistance," March 12, 2019. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tba5YEGwo1A.

176 Instagram post, Diecpnb, Swearing-in Ceremony of the combatant corps, January 7, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DEiDP-XRvZk/?img_index=11 Táchira news, Nicolás Maduro spoke about the colectivos and said the following: "They are good, hardworking people," April 3, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/tachiranoticias/videos/lo-%C3%BAltimo-nicol%C3%A1s-maduro-hablo-sobre-los-colectivos-y-dijo-lo-siguiente-son-gent/842632902744591/ VTVCanal8, In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Delcy Rodríguez leads a massive demonstration with motorcyclists, May 28, 2026. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/VTVtuCanal/videos/envideo-presidenta-e-de-la-rep%C3%BAblica-bolivariana-de-venezuela-delcy-rodr%C3%ADguez-en/1004145068676630/ ; RTVE, Delcy Rodríguez asks the leaders of the United States and Europe to end the sanctions, April 20, 2026. Available at: https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20260420/delcy-rodriguez-lideres-estados-unidos-europa-fin-sanciones/17031499.shtml ; TVFAN_VE, Maduro's Parade with Colectivos, January 11, 2025. Available at https://www.instagram.com/reel/DEsI-HLhOsk/ ; Venezolanos.x.elmundo, What Maduro said about Colectivos in 2014, February 18, 2026. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DU7pI49DvM8/ ; YouTube post, CUBA Today, “Venezuela: Popular Commands are activated against the fascist coup and

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132. Documented examples include statements by Nicolás Maduro recognizing the importance of the colectivos, participating in activities alongside their members, and promoting structures of popular organization and mobilization associated with them, including the CUPAZ and the so-called “popular anti-coup commandos.” These pronouncements included calls to activate mobilization and control mechanisms against individuals labeled as “fascists” or responsible for destabilization attempts. 177

133. Diosdado Cabello and Fredy Bernal made numerous public statements of support for the colectivos throughout the period under investigation. The information examined includes statements by Cabello defending these groups against criticism, promoting their organization, and participating in activities alongside their members. It also includes public appearances and statements by Bernal with colectivo leaders in political and security contexts, including events related to the entry of humanitarian aid in 2019.178

134. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that these statements, public appearances, and repeated expressions of recognition, taken together, demonstrate discursive support for the groups that constituted a continuous, public, and notorious policy, sustained by authorities at various levels throughout the period under investigation. This support contributed to legitimizing their actions in the eyes of the population and reinforcing the perception that they acted with the support and protection of state institutions. 179

“They reclaim public spaces,” February 21, 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLnuhRXTSEc ; Panorama Newspaper, Cabello: Terrorists asked for Heyker Vásquez to negotiate his surrender, January 18, 2018. Available at: YouTube post, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLGoE7hgl3Q TikTok post, ElvigilantexVenezuela, Maduro decides to activate the Cupaz network, March 3, 2024. Available at:

https://www.tiktok.com/@elvigilantexvenezuela/video/7342092922554240262; Facebook post, VPITV, Diosdado Cabello, stated that the Popular Units for the Defense of Peace are currently in training, March 29, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/vpitv/videos/1281187742058193/ ; YouTube post, Andreina Flores, Maduro: "A little candle that catches fire, a little candle that goes out," March 5, 2014.
Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZzfVjoVDEc ; YouTube publication, VTV.GOB.VE, “Diosdado in meeting with collectives”, January 7, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gs1jtiWSoC8 Facebook post, Sergio Noveli, Fredy Bernal appears with collectives in Tachira, April 14, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SergioNovelliPage/videos/y-este-personaje-qué-freddy-bernal-desde-el-puenteinternacionalsimónbolivar-junt/551630305244431/ ; YouTube post, AnónimaVenezuela, Chavez-Bernal gives orders to collectives, December 7, 2007.

Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4j_pdrtQEk ; Internet publication, Audio of Fredy Bernal, defending Heiker Vásquez, January 18, 2018. Available at: https://soundcloud.com/ultimo-momento-ve/freddy-bernal-confirma-la-muerte-de-heiker-vazquez-el-de-la-foto.

177 *Ibid.*

178 VPITV, Diosdado Cabello, stated that the Popular Units for the Defense of Peace are currently undergoing training, March 29, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/vpitv/videos/1281187742058193/ ; YouTube post, VTV.GOB.VE, “Diosdado in a meeting with collectives”, January 7, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gs1jtiWSoC8 ; Facebook post, Sergio Noveli, Fredy Bernal appears with collectives in Táchira, April 14, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SergioNovelliPage/videos/y-este-personaje-qué-freddy-bernal-desde-el-puenteinternacionalsimónbolivar-junt/551630305244431/ ; Youtube post, AnonymousVenezuela, Chavez-Bernal gives orders to Collectives, December 7, 2007.

Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4j_pdrtQEk Online publication, audio of Fredy Bernal defending Heiker Vásquez, January 18, 2018. Available at: https://soundcloud.com/ultimo-momento-ve/freddy-bernal-confirma-la-muerte-de-heiker-vazquez-el-de-la-foto

179 Instagram post, Diecpnb, Swearing-in Ceremony of the combatant corps, January 7, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DEiDP-XRvZk/?img_index=11; Táchira news,

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135. The information examined by the Mission shows that the promotion, organization, and use of the collectives did not depend on a single authority or institution. Throughout the period under investigation, various figures who successively held high political, partisan, police, military, and territorial administration positions played relevant roles in their organization, strengthening, mobilization, or coordination.180

136. Fredy Bernal's career illustrates this institutional continuity. Formerly in charge of a tactical unit of the Metropolitan Police and mayor of the Libertador municipality between 2000 and 2008, Bernal subsequently held positions related to police reform, the distribution of subsidized food, security and territorial administration, including those of National Coordinator of the CLAP (see Chapter III, Management of public services and social programs, *below),* "Protector" and later Governor of the state of Táchira181 .

137. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that Fredy Bernal played a significant role in the formation, consolidation, and coordination of pro-government armed civilian groups, including collectives made up of current and former security officials. The Mission also received information about direct channels of coordination between Bernal, leaders of collectives, and state agencies in Caracas and Táchira.182

138. The Mission also collected information on the support given to the collectives by Carmen Meléndez from various national and subnational positions, including those of Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, Governor of Lara State and Mayor of the Libertador Municipality of Caracas.
Sources examined by the Mission described their participation in initiatives to strengthen and support these groups and their links with leaders of historical collectives, including Valentín Santana, leader of La Piedrita183 .

Nicolás Maduro spoke about the colectivos and said the following: "They are good, hardworking people," April 3, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/tachiranoticias/videos/lo-%C3%BAltimo-nicol%C3%A1s-maduro-hablo-sobre-los-colectivos-y-dijo-lo-siguiente-son-gent/842632902744591/ VTVCanal8, In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Delcy Rodríguez leads a massive demonstration with motorcyclists, May 28, 2026.
Available at: https://www.facebook.com/VTVtuCanal/videos/envideo-presidenta-e-de-la-rep%C3%BAblica-bolivariana-de-venezuela-delcy-rodr%C3%ADguez-en/1004145068676630/ ; RTVE, Delcy Rodríguez asks the leaders of the United States and Europe to end the sanctions, April 20, 2026. Available at: https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20260420/delcy-rodriguez-lideres-estados-unidos-europa-fin-sanciones/17031499.shtml ; TVFAN_VE, Maduro's Parade with Colectivos, January 11, 2025. Available at https://www.instagram.com/reel/DEsI-HLhOsk/.

180 Interviews YYIV030, YYIV021, YYIV007, YYIV009, YYIV002; HHIV198 and ABIV003.

181 Laopinion.com, "Freddy Bernal was re-elected as governor of Táchira state," May 26, 2025. Available at: https://laopinion.co/frontera/freddy-bernal-fue-reelegido-como-gobernador-del-estado-tachira ; Runrun, "Freddy Bernal adds General Commissioner of the SEBIN to his list of positions," November 28, 2017.
Available at: https://runrun.es/nacional/332894/freddy-bernal-anade-comisario-general-del-sebin-a-su-lista-de-cargos/ ; YouTube publication, Venevisión News, Venevisión Interview: Freddy Bernal, head of the National Center for Supply and Production (CLAP), November 1, 2016. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mvvdrxe6KXY ;
Post on X, @FreddyBernal, I became a police officer 33 years ago. Available at: https://x.com/FreddyBernal/status/886560172176551936 ;
Post on YouTube, Venevisión News, "Venevisión Interview: Freddy Bernal, President of the Presidential Commission for Police Reform," March 13, 2015. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ASU0Hw_EW0

182 Interviews CFyPS3, HHIV197, YYIV030, ABIV005, ABIV003, ABIV010 and HHIV013.

183 Interviews YYIV021, HHIV197 and ABIV005. Instagram post, @alcaldiasdeccs, "The 299 peace quadrants will be connected to the self-governance rooms," August 19, 2025. Available at https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNjBIclPas5/

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2. Material support and financing

139. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives have sustained themselves, at least in part, through various forms of material, financial and institutional support provided or facilitated by the State, as well as through mechanisms that have allowed them to progressively develop their own sources of financing.

140. The economic support of these groups has shifted from direct state subsidies (through foundations and social programs) to an illicit hybrid economy. This financial autonomy has been a cornerstone for sustaining their operations without relying on direct state budget allocations and, therefore, without being subject to financial traceability.

141. The financing scheme of the collectives is structured through different sources, which include: (a) the allocation of official State resources; (b) the inclusion of collective members on the payroll of Government institutions; (c) the transfer of public resources to foundations and other types of organizations under the control of the collectives; (d) the delegation of the administration of food subsidies and (e) other public services; (f) the transfer by the authorities of expropriated property; and (e) the income obtained from illicit economies.

a) Public resources

142. The State delegates the management of essential public resources to collectives, which then monetize and exploit them. In this sense, the Government ceded control of basic services to collectives in various regions of the country, including the administration of subsidized fuel service stations and the distribution of domestic gas, charging citizens surcharges and illegal fees for accessing them. In turn, these groups profit by charging arbitrary delivery fees, diverting products to the black market, or using food and services as a tool for political extortion.184

c) Inclusion on the payroll of government institutions

143. To ensure a fixed income for their members, the leaders of these foundations coordinate the insertion of their members into state payrolls185. Information obtained by the Mission reveals that members of the collectives simultaneously contribute as “security personnel”, “cultural promoters” or “supervisors” in pro-government municipalities, ministries, and, above all, within the State security bodies such as SEBIN, DGCIM or the Police186, and are accredited as such187 .

184 Interviews YYIV007, YYIV009, ABIV001 and ABIV003; Insight Crime, “New Collectives “Masters of Public Services in Lara,” April 25, 2023, available at https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/colectivos-nuevos-amos-servicios-publicos-lara-venezuela/

185 Interview SP and DF 3 and YYIV009. INFOBAE, “X-ray of the Chavista collectives: which armed gangs control each area of Venezuela and who are their leaders”, January 11, 2020. Available at https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/01/11/radiografia-de-los-colectivos-chavistas-que-bandas-armadas-controlan-cada-zona-de-venezuela-y-quienes-son-sus-lideres/

186 Heiker Velázquez, leader of the 3 Raíces Collective and a police officer, is an illustrative example of the overlap between members of collectives and agents of the security forces. Velázquez was one of the two officers who died during the operation in El Junquito (see Chapter IV, Section C *below)*. His funeral was accompanied by honors from both the police and the armed collectives.

187 Interview ZZ_2026070_TNR_L1; Insight Crime, The delegation of state power: The “collectives”, May 18, 2018. Available at: The delegation of state power: The “collectives”. NTN24, a news program that refers to "the death of 5 people who were registered by

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144. An example repeatedly cited by sources linked to collectives, as well as by former security officials and victims, indicates that the Tres Raíces Collective significantly expanded its territorial presence and operational capacity from 2014 onwards.

145. The trajectory of Miguel Domínguez constitutes an example of the circulation of members between collectives and the State security forces.
Domínguez, a former member of the Continente collective —a faction linked to Tres Raíces— and previously a driver and member of Fredy Bernal's security team, later joined the Bolivarian National Police and held leadership positions in the Special Action Forces and its successor structure188 .

146. The information gathered by the Mission indicates that, from these positions, he contributed to the incorporation of members of collectives into security forces and to the strengthening of groups with a presence in Caracas and the border of Táchira state.189 This trajectory illustrates how the reciprocal integration of security officials and members of collectives blurred the boundaries between both types of structures.

147. The movement of members between Tres Raíces and state security agencies would have strengthened its capacity to displace other collectives, control new territories, and expand its participation in licit and illicit economies. Members of different collectives described Tres Raíces as one of the groups with the greatest operational power in the country.190

148. According to findings of the Mission reported in 2022, individuals linked to collectives were part of operational structures associated with the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) from 2017 onwards. In particular, it documented the existence of the so-called “Delta Group”, a team of approximately 300 military counterintelligence officers who, at some point, worked directly under the orders of the Director of the Directorate of Special Affairs (DAE).

149. According to information received by the Mission, this unit was trained at the National Guard's Commando Action Group Training Center, was deployed in different parts of the country, and operated under conditions of confidentiality regarding its exact location. In this case, the Mission received information that its members did not have formal employment with the DGCIM, but had access to money and property stolen from detainees.

Of particular relevance, the Mission received information that many of the
Members of the Delta Group also belonged to colectivos, demonstrating the presence of members of these groups within a structure that operated under the direct authority of the DAE. A former high-ranking DGCIM officer also referred to the DAE as a special detachment composed of officers whom he considered criminals.191

a) *Foundations*

150. The formalization of collectives under the legal structure of “foundations”, cooperatives or community cultural or productive organizations, is one of the mechanisms that allowed the direct transfer of public resources.192. Under the

The confrontation between members of the Venezuelan scientific police and pro-government groups in Caracas, October 8, 2014. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51W5GCZle_g&t=29s

188 Interviews YYIV013, CFyPS3, HHIV197 and YYIV026.
189 Interviews YYIV026, YYIV013, YYIV030, ABIV003, JJIV012, HHIV186 and OOIV071.
190 Interviews YYIV030, ABIV005, ABIV003, CFyPS3 and YYIV025
191 A/HRC/51/CRP.3 para. 52.
192 Interviews ABIV004, ABIV010, YYIV026 and YYDOC003. BBC World, “What are the collectives and how they operate to "defend the Bolivarian revolution" in Venezuela, July 7

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Regulations promoted by the Ministry of Communes are additionally registered in special State registers for Social Organizations, which empowers them to manage public resources and execute “socio-productive projects” in the areas under their control193 .

151. The process of transferring resources to collectives involves an administrative triangulation through the Ministry of Popular Power for Communes, Social Movements, and Urban Agriculture (MINCOMUNAS).194 Collectives must first register as a Grassroots Organization of Popular Power (OBPP) or a Socio-Productive Organization (OSP)195 in the Communal Integration System (SINCO), which is managed by MINCOMUNAS. Through this mechanism, the law allows the State to transfer resources directly to the “sovereign people,”196 generally for the financing of socio-productive projects, thus circumventing the controls that the Public Procurement Law would otherwise impose . The Organic Law of the Communal Economic System, for its part, allows collectives constituted as communal organizations to autonomously manage the transferred resources.198
197 .

152. Through these legal mechanisms, the Venezuelan State has channeled budgets allocated to ministries, municipalities and social programs directly to collectives, providing a formal financing flow that sustains their operational structures199 .

153. The Mission notes that, following the political changes after January 2026, the new Government has placed some entities created in previous periods under scrutiny and has announced measures aimed at their reform or elimination.
Thus, in early February, the Interim President issued Decree 200, which eliminated seven foundations and entities attached to the Ministry of Popular Power for the Office of the Presidency. According to information gathered

2017. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40527998 Tu Barco News, “What were the Chavista foundations hiding? Delcy Rodríguez raises NEW questions,” February 16, 2026. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_R5apdO0rg&t=47s;

193 Organic Law of the Communal Economic System, Official Gazette 6.011, December 21, 2010. Available at: https://www.comunas.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Ley-Organica-del-Sistema-Economico-Comunal.pdf

194 Interview HHIV185; DP AK GP and ABIV009. PROVEA,: “Collectives are strengthened by the “State acquiescence” April 2, 2019, Available at: https://provea.org/paramilitarismo/colectivos-se-fortalecen-con-la-ausencia-del-estado/

195 Forms of socio-productive organization provided for in the Organic Law of the system Economic and communal law, *Official Gazette* No. 6,011, December 21, 2010, available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/ley-organi-20220118143724.pdf

196 Decree with the rank, value and force of law reforming the Decree with the rank, value and force of organic law for the community management of powers, services and other attributions. *Official Gazette* No. 40,540, November 13, 2014. Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/decreto-n01389-mediante-el-cual-se-dicta-el-decreto-con-rango-valor-y-fuerza-de-ley-de-reforma-del-decreto-con-rango-valor-y-fuerza-de-ley-organica-para-la-gestion-comunitaria-de-competencias-servicios-y-otras-atribuciones-20211103165039.pdf; https://base.socioeco.org/docs/ley-gestion-comunitaria.pdf

Decree No. 1,399 , which enacts the Decree with the Rank, Value and Force of Law of Public Procurement. Official Gazette No. 154, of November 19, 2014.
Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/decreto-n0-1399-mediante-el-cual-se-dicta-el-decreto-con-rango-valor-y-fuerza-de-ley-de- contrataciones-publicas-20211026170100.pdf

198 Organic Law of the Communal Economic System, *Official Gazette* No. 6011, December 21, 2010. Available at: https://base.socioeco.org/docs/ley-gestion-comunitaria.pdfley-organi-20220118143724.pdf.

199 Interviews YYIV001, YYIV007 and YYIV021. PROVEA, Annual Report 2025. Situation of the Human rights in Venezuela. Available at: https://provea.org/destacados/informeprovea/

200 Decree No. 5,248, *Official Gazette* No. 6,985 Extraordinary, February 14, 2026.

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According to the Mission, these entities had been used for years as mechanisms for the allocation and administration of public resources intended for people, organizations and movements affiliated with the government." [201].

c) Transfer of expropriated assets

154. Another source of state funding for collectives is the transfer of expropriated assets, generally from private companies or individuals who are in the opposition or perceived as such. According to the information received, the government has given collectives control of expropriated buildings, warehouses, and other properties, allowing them to profit directly through the rental or commercial exploitation of these properties.202

155. The Mission received documented information from civil society organizations about cases in which State entities such as the Ministry of Housing and the National Institute of Urban Lands (INTU) and the Mayor's Office of Caracas have expropriated properties and lands that they subsequently transfer to collectives.
As relevant examples, the mission received information about the transfer of the "Tracabordo Parking" property to the Campamento de Pioneros collective, and the "Padrón Building" to the Ezequiel Zamora203 collective .

156. Likewise, under the pretext of reclaiming public spaces, the State grants them, through communal councils, legal administration of expropriated sports fields, plazas, parking lots, and buildings.204 The collectives' foundations commercially exploit these spaces by charging rental fees to formal and informal vendors, parking fees, or by establishing their own popular markets (such as those in Catia or Quinta Crespo, both in Caracas). This transfer of state assets generates regular income essential for financing their activities.205

3. Supply of equipment and training

157. The Mission gathered extensive evidence demonstrating that the collectives possess, carry, and use weapons, including long guns; ammunition; motorcycles (high-displacement motorcycles identical to those used by the security forces); radios; and communication equipment, including the radio frequencies of the security forces. The nature of this equipment, as well as the information gathered by the Mission on the links between the collectives and state agents, constitutes a relevant indication that these groups have had access to resources facilitated or supplied by state authorities.206

a) Armament

158. Although Venezuelan legislation is explicit regarding the prohibition of the commercial arms market and at the same time restricts its use to the armed forces

201 YouTube publication, Tu Barco News, "What were the Chavista foundations hiding?" "Delcy Rodríguez raises NEW questions," February 16, 2026, Media interview with investigative journalist Gustavo Azócar. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_R5apdO0rg&t=47s.

202 Interviews YYIV009, HHIV185, HHIV188 and YYIV012. Additional sources: Insight Crime, "Colectivos Ramp Up Property Seizures in Venezuela", March 2021. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/news/colectivos-ramp-up-property-seizures-in-venezuela/.

203 Northern Front Organization of Caracas. Report on property deprivations and other human rights violations caused by actions or omissions of state agents and private groups. Coordinated by Carlos Julio Rojas. Pages 27 and 28. Interview YYIV012.

204 Instagram post by @Virguezfranklin, "The unknown poet: the collectives of the 23 De Enero neighborhood", November 3, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DQmHJ9tDesx/.

205 Interviews: YYIV008, YYIV009, YYIV013, and YYIV027.

206 Interviews YYIV009, YYIV013, YYIV025, YYIV030, ABIV004 and ABIV010.

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State security forces207, except with express permission from the FANB208, evidence shows that state authorities have allowed collectives to possess, display, and even use weapons in public, in contravention of their responsibilities under the law. In accordance with applicable legislation, all firearms in the possession of private individuals must be duly authorized and registered with the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB). [209] .

Consequently, the possession and public display of weapons by members of collectives raises serious questions about compliance with the authorization, registration and control mechanisms provided for in Law [210] .

159. One of the factors explaining the high rate of gun ownership by the colectivos is that they were never disarmed. The main legal instrument prohibiting the sale of firearms and ammunition to private individuals, the Law for Disarmament and Control of Arms and Ammunition, came into force in 2013, and stipulated the seizure and destruction of weapons in the possession of private individuals.211 However, according to a former military officer interviewed by the Mission, high-ranking government and PSUV officials, who maintained collaborative relationships with colectivos, actively opposed the implementation of the law in relation to these groups.212

160. Based on the information available to the Mission, the collectives use an arsenal that combines state-issued weapons, commercially available handguns, and homemade weapons. According to the sources consulted, the collectives' arsenal includes at least the following types of weapons213:

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207 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, December 15, 1999. art. 324 “Only the State may possess and use weapons of war. All those that exist, are manufactured or are introduced into the country, will become the property of the Republic without compensation or process.
The National Armed Forces shall be the competent institution to regulate and control, in accordance with the respective law, the manufacture, import, export, storage, transit, registration, control, inspection, trade, possession, and use of other weapons, ammunition, and explosives.” Available at: https://venezuela.justia.com/federales/constitucion-de-la-republica-bolivariana-de-venezuela/titulo-vii/capitulo-i/. See also the Law for Disarmament and Control of Weapons and Ammunition, June 17, 2013, *Official Gazette* No. 40.190, which prohibits the sale and importation of firearms and ammunition to private individuals. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the sole supplier and importer The only authorized distributor in the country is the Venezuelan Military Industries Corporation (CAVIM), which is prohibited from selling to civilians and can only supply the police, the armed forces, and duly regulated private security companies. Available at : https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/leyes/sancionadas/ley-para-el-desarme-y-control-de-armas-y-municiones

208 Law for the Disarmament and Control of Weapons and Ammunition, June 17, 2013, *Official Gazette* Article 8 of Law No. 40,190 states: “The Bolivarian National Armed Forces, through the bodies designated by them, shall have exclusive competence to authorize the manufacture, import, export, and commercialization of weapons of all types, reserving the power to create manufacturing, technological, development, maintenance, and supply agreements with other national and international institutions or companies, by virtue of the conventions or agreements determined by the Venezuelan State; to grant, suspend, and revoke permits for carrying, possessing, transferring, transporting, depositing, storing, and supplying firearms and ammunition throughout the national territory, in accordance with the regulations established in this Law and its Regulations. Likewise, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces are responsible for the registration, control, inspection, confiscation, and destruction of firearms and ammunition found within the territory of the Republic.”

209 *Ibid.,* art. 19.

210 Interview ABIV005

211 Law for Disarmament and Control of Weapons and Ammunition, June 17, 2013, *Official Gazette* No. 40,190 arts. 81-88. ,

212 Interview HHIV198.

213 Defensa.com, “Infantry Weapons of the Venezuelan Armed Forces,” September 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.defensa.com/venezuela/armas-infanteria-fuerzas-armadas-venezuela; Anonymous, “Venezuelan Armament: Army” (no date), uploaded December 16, 2013. Available at: https://es.scribd.com/document/191905078/Armamento-Venezuela;

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- Short arms: 9x19 mm caliber pistols, mainly models from the Glock, Beretta and Browning brands.
- Assault rifles: FN FAL rifles (7.62x51 mm caliber) and AK- variants 47/AKM.
- Submachine guns: compact, high-rate-of-fire models like the Uzi or the HK MP5.
- Homemade weapons (modified revolvers) and shotguns (12 mm caliber).

161. According to information received by the Mission, part of the arsenal in the possession of the collectives coincides with the official weaponry of the security forces of the 214 State .

162. The supply of official weapons to collectives is greatly facilitated by the porous relationship between these groups and state institutions. In this regard, the Mission was able to confirm that the credentialing of individuals belonging to collectives as public officials in the security forces allows members of these groups to possess regulation weapons.215 The delivery of weapons to collectives has also been carried out through the Peace Brigades (CUPAZ) .216

b) Training

163. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives have periodically received tactical-military training from active or retired members of the security forces. The military training of civilians, including the collectives, has been an integral component of the "civic-military union" doctrine, and was summarized by President Chávez: *"This Revolution is peaceful, but armed."* 217

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164. The training of the collectives has taken place in various institutional contexts. For example, as noted above, many of the members of the collectives are also part of the Bolivian National Militia, whose members regularly receive military training, including in defense tactics and weapons handling.218 The training includes marksmanship and combat tactics, motorcycle handling, and even intelligence techniques.219 At times, the training cycles have coincided with recruitment phases, which, according to one witness, were specifically aimed at young men from marginalized neighborhoods.220

Transparency Venezuela. "Criminal Technology in Venezuela: How Do Criminal Groups Kill and What Weapons Do They Use?", 2024. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Tecnologia-criminal-en-Venezuela-%C2%BEComo-asesinan-y-que-armas-usan-los-grupos-delictivos.pdf; Image of weapons used by the colectivos at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/papel-colectivos-lucha-poder-venezuela-salida-maduro/

214 List of equipment of the Venezuelan Army, available at: https://military--history-fandom-com.translate.goog/wiki/List_of_equipment_of_the_Venezuelan_Army?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=es&_x_tr_hl=es&_x_tr_pto=sge; YouTube post "The longest rifle in the world". Available at: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/0KvboJhFQBo; Program "A Coffee with JJ" Jimmy Jairala https://www.facebook.com/jimmyjairala/videos/los-colectivos-chavistas-operan-como-estructuras-armadas-con-control-territorial/801845419580874/.

215 Interviews YYIV026, YYIV025 and ABIV003

216. YouTube publication by Venezolana de Televisión, Diosdado Cabello at the event for the adaptation of peace quadrants in Puerto La Cruz, September 29, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIh4llo2eZ8.

217 YouTube publication, NTN 24 News, "Collectives: origin and apparent fracture of the "Venezuela's largest armed popular force," Chavez's explanation about arming civilians, October 7, 2014. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVqhLdrFYBc&t=45s; Instagram post by @Elque se mete con Venezuela se Seca, November 15, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DRFuwxXEuaN/.

218 Interview DP AK GP, ABIV017 and ABIV011.

219 Interview ABIV004.

220 *Ibid.*

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165. The last cycle of mass enlistment and training of the Militia took place between August and September 2025, in the context of the United States military deployment in the Caribbean Sea. In October, Exercise Independence 200, a joint military exercise involving civilians and military personnel, was conducted in eight states.221

166. Military training of civilian groups, including collectives, has also been provided through other entities of the "civil-military" defense system, including the CUPAZ222. The Mission recorded information indicating that the CUPAZ also received specific training from security and intelligence agencies, including the DGCIM223 and the GNB224 .

4. Control of illicit economies

167. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that, in addition to the various forms of state support described above, the collectives have consolidated their own financing mechanisms by controlling illicit economies, including the exploitation of criminal activities in the areas where they maintain a presence and influence, all with the acquiescence of state authorities who, in different contexts, have tolerated, facilitated or failed to prevent such activities.

168. As the economic crisis emptied public coffers, institutional funding for collectives also declined. Faced with this situation, collectives have sought self-sustainability through control of these illicit economies, and inaction in the face of abuses by collectives has become, in practice, a form of quid pro quo from the authorities in exchange for the political support of these groups, guaranteeing them impunity through the non-intervention of law enforcement or the paralysis of judicial proceedings.225

169. A witness described the association of the collectives with illegal activities in the following terms:

> *They're carrying long guns, and the government isn't doing anything, right? To enter one of those neighborhoods, of course, you have to say where you're going, like it's a military base, but they're not military. So what happens? There, they finance themselves through extortion, kidnapping, smuggling, and drugs, and they are the ones who distribute the CLAP food bags, playing on people's hunger. So, they were allowed to do that as well, so they could finance themselves. The colectivos formed alliances with the prison gang leaders. And what happens? They work together, kidnapping people, extorting them, and often taking them to the same prisons until they pay the ransoms.226*

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170. State acquiescence to illicit activities in which collectives are involved, and which provide them with substantial profits.

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221 Infobae, "The Maduro regime ordered new military exercises in eight Venezuelan states amid tensions with the US," October 11, 2025. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2025/10/12/el-regimen-de-maduro-ordeno-nuevos-ejercicios-militares-en-ocho-estados-de-venezuela-en-medio-de-las-tensiones-con-eeuu/ ; YouTube publication, David Placer News, "Diosdado defies Trump with colectivos and his 'peace quadrants'," February 3, 2026. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jwK2hiLwE4.

222 YouTube publication, Venevisión News, "Diosdado Cabello at the Peace Quadrants Adjustment Ceremony in Puerto La Cruz", September 19, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIh4IIo2eZ8

223 Interview ZZIV015

224 Qué Pasa en Venezuela, "GNB trains pro-government groups to attack protesters," January 16, 2023. Available at: https://quepasaenvenezuela.org/gnb-entrena-a-colectivos-chavistas-para-que-arremetan-contra-manifestantes-fotos/

225 Interviews YYIV013, HHIV187, HHIV198 and YYIV030.

226 Interviews ABIV010 and ABIV004.

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economic, constitutes an indirect form of material support from the State to these groups.

a) Extortion (“vaccines”)

171. The information gathered by the Mission indicates that one of the main sources of autonomous financing for the collectives comes from extortion practices, commonly called “protection money”, directed mainly against merchants and small business owners at the local level [227].

172. According to information provided to the Mission by a former police official, extortion practices, protected by state institutions, represent a “share of power” granted by the State in exchange for political support.228 It is estimated that extortion, together with arms trafficking and trafficking in basic necessities, constitutes the primary source of income for these groups.229

173. According to information gathered by the mission, the extortion process begins with an inspection and registration phase. The groups approach new businesses, transporters, or street vendors under the guise of offering “protection” from common crime or managing “neighborhood development funds.” The collection of “protection money” often uses legal fronts such as community foundations, neighborhood defense associations, or security cooperatives, through which they impose mandatory fees on local businesses, transporters, and street vendors in low-income areas.230

174. Once the informal census, in which information about the business is requested,231 is carried out, fees are established that vary according to the geographical location and the profitability of the sector. In urban centers and popular sectors of the capital, payments are usually collected weekly or monthly in cash or with merchandise.232 According to reports, in border areas and binational trade hubs, collectives impose fees ranging from daily quotas to massive charges for large traders of high-value products.233 Failure to pay these fees can lead to armed attacks on commercial premises, kidnappings, or even executions.234

175. In some cases, extortion also becomes a mechanism of political persecution, as groups use the collection of payments to assess the ideological submission of business owners. Those establishments identified or suspected of collaborating with opposition forces, or that simply refuse to participate in the government's propaganda efforts, suffer an increase in...

227 Insight Crime, “Armed collectives increase criminal chaos in Venezuela’s mining state”, November 20, 2018. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/noticias-del-dia/colectivos-armados-aumentan-caos-criminal-en-estado-minero-de-venezuela/; 228 Interview HHIV190.

229 *Ibid.*

230 Transparency Venezuela, *Illicit Economies in Venezuela Sheltered by Corruption,* 2022. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Illicit-Economies.-June-2022.-Transparencia-Venezuela-ENG.pdf; Runrun.es,

231 October 26, 2025, “Like Vito Corleone: irregular groups charge for vaccines in exchange for “protection.” Available at: https://runrun.es/noticias/592112/como-vito-corleone-grupos-irregulares-cobran-vacunas-a-cambio-de-proteccion/

232 Reuters, “Extortion Surge, Another Blow to Businesses in Venezuela,” October 1, 2015. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/business/auge-de-extorsiones-otro-golpe-para-comerciantes-en-venezuela-idUSL1N1112LI/

233 Diario de los Andes, “Border | Merchants must pay up to $21,000 in protection money to irregular groups,” May 9, 2023. Available at: https://diariodelosandes.com/frontera-hasta-21mil-dolares-deben-pagar-de-vacuna-los-comerciantes-a-grupos-irregulares/

234 Infobae, “The 'vaccine' of the Chavista collectives, Vladimir Padrino's overacting, and Maduro's purgatory,” May 12, 2019. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/05/12/la-vacuna-de-los-colectivos-chavistas-la-sobreactuacion-de-vladimir-padrino-y-el-purgatorio-de-maduro/

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tariffs are either shut down or physically violently under the complacent gaze of official authorities235 .

b) Illicit economies

176. In the country's mining and border regions, these groups have ceased to be mere urban political actors and have become direct operators of illegal mining and drug trafficking.236 As the Mission's investigation of the Orinoco Mining Arc and other areas of Bolívar State revealed, the colectivos, along with other armed groups, including "pranes" and guerrillas, control the entire economic and operational chain of gold mining operations and dominate local drug distribution routes. Far from operating clandestinely, these operations are carried out through strategic alliances[237] with sectors of the military and, sometimes, under their direct supervision.238

177. The opening of legitimate businesses by members of these collectives represents one of the most sophisticated facets of their economic evolution. By establishing small grocery stores, transportation companies, food distributors, and service establishments within the communities they control, these groups manage to launder money from illicit economies and consolidate an absolute commercial monopoly in the neighborhoods.239 This shift toward the formal business sector gives them a facade of respectability and financial autonomy that makes them increasingly less dependent on direct state funding, thus securing their continued presence in the territory.

5. Impunity and lack of investigation and punishment

178. The environment of impunity, fostered by the State, in which these groups have operated has been the indispensable condition for their existence and the continuity of their activities over time. This impunity becomes structural because the institutions themselves act as a protective shield against the abuses of these groups.
The mobilization of hundreds of civilians armed with long guns, including assault rifles in cities, who set up checkpoints and extort money from the population in front of the police and military forces, without any process of due sanction, is the daily proof of the structural impunity with which these groups operate240 .

179. The information gathered by the Mission indicates that the lack of effective investigations and prosecutions regarding alleged crimes committed by members of armed groups cannot be attributed solely to institutional deficiencies or administrative negligence. Various sources described persistent obstacles to filing and processing complaints, particularly in cases involving members of these groups. For example, the Mission documented cases in which victims and human rights organizations

235 Infobae, "The 'vaccine' of the Chavista collectives, Vladimir Padrino's overacting, and Maduro's purgatory," May 12, 2019. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/05/12/la-vacuna-de-los-colectivos-chavistas-la-sobreactuacion-de-vladimir-padrino-y-el-purgatorio-de-maduro/

236 Interviews ABIV010 and ABIV018.

237 A/HRC/51/CRP.2, paras. 198-213; Insight Crime, "Armed collectives increase criminal chaos in Venezuela's mining state," November 20, 2018. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/noticias-del-dia/colectivos-armados-aumentan-caos-criminal-en-estado-minero-de-venezuela/ . Interview ABIV018.

238 A/HRC/51/CRP.2, para. 69.

239 Transparency Venezuela, Opacity and institutional weakness facilitate money laundering in Venezuela, 2015. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/project/la-opacidad-y-la-debilidad-institucional-facilitan-el-lavado-de-dinero-en-venezuela/; El Nacional, How to understand organized crime in Venezuela? Jeremy McDermott, director of InSight Crime, provides some key insights, November 7, 2025. Available at: https://www.elnacional.com/2025/11/como-entender-el-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela-jeremy-mcdermott-director-de-insight-crime-da-algunas-claves/

240 Interviews: YYIV030, YYIV025, HHIV198 and JJIV006.

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Humans attempted to file formal complaints with the competent authorities, but the files were archived, remained without substantive progress, or were dismissed for procedural reasons241 .

180. Likewise, according to the information received by the Mission, even in some In high-profile cases that led to investigations related to alleged abuses committed by groups, the legal proceedings were characterized by prolonged delays, lack of procedural impetus, and absence of concrete results.
In several of these cases, the investigations did not progress toward the identification and eventual prosecution of the alleged perpetrators, which contributed to the persistence of impunity.242

181. The Mission has also documented cases in which the National Police (PNB) and the Attorney General's Office received explicit orders from government authorities not to investigate specific cases related to [243] Various sources collectives. Sources interviewed by the Mission stated that investigations into alleged crimes committed by members of collectives faced systematic obstacles within the justice system. According to these sources, the lack of progress in high-impact cases, the absence of action to execute existing arrest warrants, and inaction regarding information that would allow for the identification of alleged perpetrators are indicative of a lack of institutional will to investigate these events. The same sources alleged that officials within the justice system had received instructions to refrain from pursuing investigations against members of collectives. [244].

B. Delegation of state functions

182. The State has delegated or de facto transferred certain functions of Public entities have delegated authority to *community groups,* including the management of public services and social programs, the maintenance of public order, and other functions related to local governance and territorial control. This delegation of authority has allowed these *groups* to act as key intermediaries between state institutions and the population, effectively exercising powers that normally belong exclusively to the authorities.

1. Management of public services and social programs

a) Allocation and implementation of social plans

183. As a result of their delegation to the communal councils, the collectives have assumed a leading role in the management of basic public services in their areas of influence, including the management of the CLAP food subsidy program, the distribution of water, fuel , and domestic gas. The control of public services by the collectives constitutes, in addition to being an important tool of social control, a source of supplementary financing for the subsistence of these groups.245

b) The CLAP feeding program

184. The food subsidy program called “Local Committees for Supply and Production” (CLAP) was established in 2016 by decree

241 Interviews: YYIV026, YYIV027 and YYIV023.
242 Interviews YYIV013 and HHIV198.
243 Interviews YYIV013 and YYIV033.
244 Interview YYIV013.
245 Interviews ABIV010, HHIV187 and YYIV030; Insight Crime, “Collectives: the new masters of Public services in Lara, Venezuela”, April 25, 2023. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/colectivos-nuevos-amos-servicios-publicos-lara-venezuela/

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Presidential declaration of “state of exception and economic emergency”246 . Since 2017, the program has become one of the main social policies of the Government and an essential support for the subsistence of large sectors of the population.

185. The CLAPs were integrated into the Great Mission of Sovereign and Secure Supply (GMAS), which was in charge of controlling the production, distribution and sale of food, medicines and hygiene products.247 The program responded to a logic of “civic-military union” 248: the GMAS was under the control of the Armed Forces and the supervision of the Minister of Defense, while the decree creating the CLAPs expressly provided for the intervention of the Armed Forces and security agencies in the distribution of food.249 At the territorial level, this structure was supported by communal organizations , community leaders and street leaders.250

186. In 2019, Diosdado Cabello referred to this supply policy as follows: “Today, the CLAP program, a socialist policy of our revolution, reaches the homes of Venezuelan men and women. (…) The awareness of our people is important. The awareness of our Bolivarian National Militia is important. The awareness of the civic-military union is important to defend at all costs the policy of delivering food to all Venezuelan families through the CLAP program .”

187. This civic-military and community architecture facilitated the insertion of the collectives into the program.252 In areas where they already controlled communal councils or other social programs—as was the case with collectives from 23 de Enero, including La Piedrita —these groups took over the administration and distribution of the

Decree No. 2,323 , declaring a State of Exception and Economic Emergency, given the extraordinary circumstances of a Social, Economic, Political, Natural and Ecological nature that seriously affect the National Economy, May 13, 2016, *Official Gazette* No. 6,227. Available at: https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/oc/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/312792311-Gazette-Official-Extraordinary-N%C2%BA-6-227-pdf.pdf Decree No. 2,367 , which enacts Decree No. 11 within the framework of the State of Exception and Economic Emergency, creating the Great Mission for Sovereign Supply, July 7, 2016, *Official Gazette* No. 40,941, July 11, 2016. Available at: https://pandectasdigital.blogspot.com/2016/07/decreto-n-11-en-el-marco-del-estado-de.html. Publication of the Ministry of Popular Power for Labor of Venezuela, “Learn in detail about the Great Mission for Sovereign and Secure Supply,” July 20, 2016. Available at: https://www.mpppst.gob.ve/mpppstweb/index.php/2016/07/20/conozca-en-detalle-la-gran-mision-abastecimiento-soberano-y-seguro/

248 The GMAS has a National Command that directs and supervises it under a civilian hierarchy-military.

249 The GMAS was a response to the government's narrative that the scarcity of these basic consumer goods was due to an *"unconventional war against the country."* Facebook post by @Nicolas Maduro, July 14, 2016, "Great Mission of Sovereign Supply." Available at: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1820780214819120&set=a.114866197730948&id=100076227030524&locale=es_LA

250 *Ibid.,* srt. 11 (2). Available at: https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/storage/documentos/leyes/ley-constitucional-del-comite-local-de-abastecimiento-y-produccion-20220214235829.pdf

251 Diosdado Cabello's speech at a large march in defense of the CLAP, June 8, 2019: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycr9GL37Rw8

252 YouTube post, NTN 24 News, “The CLAP, the Government's solution that "It would supposedly help to 'eliminate' the queues," June 8, 2016. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sPNuA_vUcs; Transparency Venezuela, Report 4 years of CLAP corruption, coercion and hunger, September 2016. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Informe-CLAP-2020.pdf ; University of Chile, “The Local Committees for Supply and Production (CLAP) under the Human Rights-Based Approach.” *Public Policy Studies Journal,* vol. 5, no. 1 (2019) (December 2018 - June 2019), Available at: https://revistaestudiospoliticaspublicas.uchile.cl/index.php/REPP/article/view/52575/69912

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CLAP [253] This connection was reinforced by the role of Freddy Bernal, National Coordinator and Chief of Staff of the CLAP between 2016 and 2020.
(a position he held concurrently, between 2017 and 2018, with that of Minister of Popular Power for Urban Agriculture254). When he assumed that position, Bernal already maintained close cooperative relationships with the collectives and had played a relevant role in strengthening them in Caracas and Táchira. Subsequent investigations by the Mission have confirmed his role in their coordination and equipping255 .

188. Control of such a large-scale social program allowed the groups to expand and consolidate their presence in the communities. Managing records, censuses, and lists of beneficiaries provided them with detailed information about who lived in the areas under their control and allowed them to identify opponents or those perceived as such, even sharing that information with the security forces.256 At the same time, control of access to subsidized food was useful for demanding participation in pro-government demonstrations, influencing votes, and threatening to suspend aid258 to those who protested or supported the opposition.259 [257]

189. This logic was even incorporated into internal regulations that stipulated the suspension of distribution to communities participating in protests. The Mission had access to a "Manual for CLAPs *[sic]"* prepared by the CLAP system in the State of Lara. According to this manual, "if a community, with or without support from the CLAP structure, takes street actions that impede the free movement of popular power without exhausting regular channels, it will be suspended from the periodic rotation of food distribution . "260

190. Various international mechanisms have echoed complaints regarding the political instrumentalization of the CLAP program and its impact on human rights. In 2018, the IACHR recorded "complaints indicating that the food bags distributed through the so-called [CLAP] are not being delivered to people opposed to the Government"261. For his part, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, who visited the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2015, echoed "the political structure and the participation of the military in the logistics [of the CLAP program], which contribute to the politicization of food distribution, in addition to the risk of linking it with collectives […] and other armed groups"262 .

253 Interview HHIV197

254 YouTube publication, Venvisión News, Venevisión Interview: "Freddy Bernal, National Head of the CLAP", February 22, 2017. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tYAj-KqFpg; Diario Versión Final, "Freddy Bernal Appointed Head of Control and Command of the National CLAP Program," May 12, 2016. Available at: https://diarioversionfinal.com/politica-dinero/designan-a-freddy-bernal-jefe-de-control-y-mando-de-los-clap-nacional

255 Interviews YYIV031, HHIV186, HHIV187, YYIV011 and YYIV009

256 Interview ABIV022.

257 Transparency Venezuela, Report "Behind the façade of the CLAP", September 2019. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Detr%C3%A1s-de-la-fachada-de-los-CLAP.pdf; PROVEA, "Special | The CLAP: 7 signs of political discrimination", November 4, 2016. Available at: https://provea.org/trabajos-especiales/especiales/los-clap-7-indicios-de-discriminacion-politica/

258 Interview YYIV26 and YYIV009

259 Interviews AAIV008, PPIV097, PPIV059 and YYIV001

260 *Ibid.;* Single food room of the state of Lara, System for the registration, monitoring and control of the CLAP in the State of Lara, *Manual for CLAP's* (February 2018), page 7. Available at: https://www.scribd.com/document/1020586649/MANUAL-CLAP

261 Press release IACHR, February 1, 2018. Available at: https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2018/016.asp

262 United Nations Press Release: "Visit to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri", 1 April 2025. Available at https://docs.un.org/es/A/HRC/58/48/Add.1, para. 57.

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191. The political instrumentalization of the CLAP program was accompanied by intelligence work carried out by community-level collectives using information from the program . As the groups that administered the distribution of CLAP food boxes, the collectives were able to monopolize the registration and local censuses, allowing them to identify opposition members or those perceived as such and share this information with the security forces.263

192. Community groups have also played a role in social control in response to increasing complaints about the poor quality of the food and numerous irregularities in its management. In this regard, the Mission gathered information on the alleged involvement of these groups in intimidating people who complained about the operation or quality of the CLAP boxes .

193. Control of the CLAP program management became an additional source of income for the collectives. According to information received by the Mission, the collectives obtained significant profits through the theft of products from the CLAP boxes and their resale ("bachaqueo"), at higher prices, on the black market or in informal businesses.265

194. From the end of 2025, the distribution of food through the CLAP began to be progressively reduced and ceased to be in charge of the Armed Forces, without the termination of the program being formally announced. At the same time, the interim government of Delcy Rodríguez began to promote other mechanisms for access to low-cost food, including establishments directly managed by the State.[266].

195. Although it is not yet possible to determine the scope or permanence of this transition, the decrease in CLAP deliveries represents a significant change for the community councils and collectives that participated in its management. In addition to constituting an important source of resources, the program had provided these actors with privileged access to communities, information about their residents, and the ability to influence food distribution. Its gradual dismantling could, therefore, weaken one of the mechanisms through which the collectives consolidated their territorial influence and exercised social control over the population.267

i) Drinking water service

196. The crisis surrounding water supply management, with the fall in the budget for infrastructure maintenance, as well as the growing

263 Interview YYIV002, HHIV190 and CFyPS3. Transparency Venezuela, Behind the Facade and the CLAP, February 2019. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Detr%C3%A1s-de-la-fachada-de-los-CLAP.pdf

264 Interview SSIV004, Transparency Venezuela, Behind the Facade of the CLAP, February 2019. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Detrás-de-la-fachada-de-los-CLAP.pdf.

265 Interviews: ABIV022, YYIV036, JJIV008 and HHIV188. BBC Mundo, " What are the controversial CLAP, the parallel food distribution system of the Venezuelan government," June 3, 2016. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/america_latina/2016/06/160603_venezuela_alimentos_clap_yv;

266 El Pitazo. Publication: "Did they eliminate the Communal Councils and the CLAP?: this is what is known", May 2026. Available at: https://elpitazo.net/politica/eliminaron-los-consejos-comunales-y-los-clap-esto-es-lo-que-se-sabe/

267 El Carabobeño, The end of CLAP left street leaders without the blackmail of food and with the Neighborhood rejection, June 5, 2026. Available at: https://www.el-carabobeno.com/fin-del-clap-dejo-a-jefes-de-calle-sin-el-chantaje-de-la-comida-y-con-el-rechazo-del-barrio/ ; Insight Crime, The end of the CLAP boxes? A decade of corruption and organized crime in Venezuela, September 9, 2026. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/fin-cajas-clap-una-decada-de-corrupcion-crimen-organizado-venezuela/; El Diario, Did the Ministry of Food ask street leaders to return money from CLAP bags?, June 12, 2026. Available at: https://eldiario.com/2026/06/12/rumores-sobre-clap/.

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Conflict surrounding access to this right has led to a gradual decentralization[268] of the management of this service through the various community bodies established under the Organic Law of Popular Power. Following the reform of the water sector and the implementation of the Organic Law for the Provision of Drinking Water and Sanitation Services,269 mechanisms of co-responsibility between the State and communities were promoted, facilitating the incorporation of collectives into decision-making spaces. Thus, community councils began to organize their respective Water Management Committees or Water Technical Committees (MTA), with the objective of identifying shortcomings in the drinking water or wastewater service and exercising social oversight of the service.270

197. The decentralization of the water service opened the door to the intervention of the colectivos. By requiring the infrastructure of tools, transport and armed security to protect the local pumping stations from possible sabotage or citizen protests271, the colectivos gradually assumed control of the public infrastructure of the State water companies, currently consolidated in the Venezuelan Hydrological Company (HIDROVEN)272 .

In practice, community groups have assumed the technical management of water at the community level. As one person interviewed by the Mission stated, “[i]f I don’t have water, I call a community group.”273 In the 23 de Enero Parish, people go to the person in charge of the community groups responsible for the services, but the function of service administration is one of the functions shared by the different groups for territorial control.274

198. The control of water resource management at the local level is also instrumentalized by collectives with objectives of social control. For example, by possessing copies of the keys to the main valves of the pumping stations, the collectives have the ability to manually open or close the flow of water to certain streets according to their own interests of territorial control and punishment of dissent.275

199. According to information gathered by the Mission, by controlling public water intakes, the groups have also gained control of a parallel market for unofficial tanker trucks, excluding others – sometimes by violent means – from other supply operators276 . The sale of water is done in cash at dollar-denominated rates, generating direct income for the groups. Direct sources

[268] PROVEA, Provea Report 2024: Water Crisis Compromises Public Health and the Country's Sustainable Development, June 8, 2025. Available at: https://provea.org/actualidad/informe-anual-crisis-del-agua-compromete-la-salud-de-la-poblacion-y-el-desarrollo-sostenible-del-pais/

[269] Organic Law for the Provision of Drinking Water and Sanitation Services, Official Gazette No. 5,568 Extraordinary, dated December 31, 2001. Available at: https://www.coursehero.com/file/226915201/Ley-Org%C3%A1nica-para-la-Prestaci%C3%B3n-de-los-Servicios-de-Agua-Potable-y-de-Saneamientopdf/

270 Ministry of People's Power for Water, GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION FOR WATER MANAGEMENT. Available at; https://minaguas.gob.ve/?page_id=239

271 Conflict Observatory, Annual Reports 2020, 2023 and 2025. P271. Available at: https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/informes-anuales

272 Facebook Post EVTV Miami, February 1, 2026. "Delcy Rodríguez centralizes the “Water at Hidroven under a new decree.” Available at: https://www.facebook.com/evtvmiami/posts/-delcy-rodr%C3%ADguez-centraliza-el-agua-en-hidroven-bajo-nuevo-decreto-delcy-rodr%C3%ADgu/933038085775548/; Insight Crime, “ The role of collectives in the struggle for power in Venezuela after Maduro’s departure,” January 9, 2026. Available at: https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/papel-colectivos-lucha-poder-venezuela-salida-maduro/

273 Interview ABIV013.

274 Interview YYIV026.

275

276 El Comercio, “Venezuelans without a drop of water in a country paralyzed by blackouts,” April 1, 2019. Available at: https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/mundo/venezolanos-agua-apagon-crisis-maduro/El

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These armed groups and former government officials confirm that control of this water supply is strategic in nature; beyond the revenue generated, it allows for precise and total territorial control over the community and daily life.277

ii) Fuel supply

200. Various sources have confirmed that, both in Caracas and in other regions, collectives control subsidized gas stations (or "pumps") that have been assigned to them by the state-owned Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVA) at the behest of various authorities (communal, municipal, regional or from the ruling party)278. These "pumps" not only meet the fuel demands of neighboring areas, but are also used for the illegal trade of fuel, territorial control and the supply of motorcycle collectives279. Likewise, the Mission has recorded allegations about the alleged irregular diversion of fuel by collectives to the informal market, particularly during periods of greater scarcity.

iii) Domestic gas supply280

201. As a result of the decline in domestic liquefied gas production, starting in 2010 the state-owned company PDVSA Gas Comunal (a subsidiary of PDVSA) decided to decentralize the traditional distribution system. This led to the awarding of government contracts and the management of key infrastructure to community councils through the so-called Community Property Enterprises (EPCs) . Once established by one or more community councils, the EPCs receive the cylinders, filling plants, and distribution truck fleets on loan.281

202. By operating in coordination with the community bodies involved in the local distribution of domestic gas, these collectives are able to charge prices higher than the official price regulated by the State for gas pumps. The excess revenue from sales above the reference price is collected in cash, generating a constant flow of liquidity, not subject to effective control or oversight mechanisms.282 According to the information received

According to the Mission, these revenues contribute to financing the activities of the collectives as an organized structure, to the economic support of some of their members, and possibly to the benefit of authorities who tolerate or facilitate these practices. Due to the informal and opaque nature of these transactions, it has not been possible to establish traceability mechanisms regarding the final destination of the resources.

203. Similar to what was observed with respect to other public services, the Mission received information that groups are rationing the delivery of gas to

277 Interviews YYIV021, YYIV026 and YYIV007

278 INFOBAE, Chavista collectives, military personnel, and guerrillas have taken over the fuel business in Venezuela: "Each group manages service stations on the border," October 23, 2020. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/10/23/colectivos-chavistas-militares-y-guerrilleros-se-apropiaron-del-negocio-del-combustible-en-venezuela-cada-uno-maneja-estaciones-de-servicio-en-la-frontera/

279Interviews YYIV002, JJIV011, DDIV044 and IIIV114

280 Transparency Venezuela, Corruption Report 2018, Chapter 3, March 2019. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Capi%CC%81tulo-3.-Rehenes-de-la-Gran-Corrupcio%CC%81n.-TV.pdf

281 Ministry of Popular Power for Communes, "Communal Social Property Enterprises: What are they, who manages them and what do they generate?", June 14, 2023. Available at: https://www.comunas.gob.ve/2023/06/14/empresas-propiedad-social-comunal-que-son-quienes-gestionan-que-generan/

282 Interviews ABIV004 and YYIV021.

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families or individuals who are considered to be in opposition to or perceived as critical of local or national management283 .

2. Maintenance of public order

204. As noted above, through various legal instruments and plans based on the doctrine of civil-military unity, the Government has involved civilians in security tasks, both internal (maintenance of public order) and external (national defense), in coordination with the State's military and police structures. The participation of civilians in these functions is mediated through the “grassroots organizations of People's Power”284 which, in their various forms, have provided legal and institutional cover for these collectives.

205. The work of community groups in maintaining public order has been reinforced by occasional delegations of authority from the State to civilian actors within the community organization system. Notably, Presidential Decree No. 2,323, of May 13, 2016, which declares a State of Exception and Economic Emergency, assigns “functions of surveillance and organization…to maintain public order and guarantee security” to the CLAP committees, the Community Councils, and “other grassroots organizations of People’s Power.” [285] This reference to community organizations can be broadly interpreted as providing legal cover for the activities of security maintenance collectives.286 The Mission also analyzed the Manual of Standards and Operational Procedures of the Special Administrative Police and Criminal Investigation Service in Support of Public Administration in Matters of Public Order, prepared by the GNB in 2015, which expressly states that “military officials in charge of enforcing the law take advantage of interaction with communities and collectives.” 287

206. Various legal instruments and public policies have institutionalized the involvement of civilians, including collectives, in intelligence work.
For example, the Manual of Standards and Operational Procedures of the Special Administrative Police Service and Criminal Investigation in Support of Public Administration in Matters of Public Order of the GNB (2014) expressly states that “military officials in charge of enforcing the law take advantage of the interaction with communities *and collectives…so* the operations of maintaining Public Order go beyond the simple fact of interacting with citizens, but rather go to the investigation of pertinent information about possible actions that cause social disorder”288 .

207. The Mission also examined information relating to the so-called "community and social intelligence" system. According to official documentation and other sources analyzed, this system promotes the participation of community organizations in the identification and reporting of unknown persons, situations considered unusual, and other events of interest to the authorities in their respective communities.289

283 Interviews: YYIV001, YYIV035 and JJIV011.

284 Presidential Decree No. 2323, *Official Gazette No.* 6227, May 13, 2016, arts. 2 and 9, available at: https://pandectasdigital.blogspot.com/2016/05/decreto-n-2323-de-fecha-13-demayo-de.html

285 Decree No. 2,323, by which the State of Exception and Emergency is declared Economic, May 13, 2016, *Official Gazette* No. 6,227 Extraordinary, art. 9. Available at: https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/sin-categoria/gaceta-oficial-extraordinaria-no-6-227

286 A/HRC/45/33CRP.11, para. 220.

287 *Ibid.,* para. 221.

288 Document TTDC029.

289 Ministry of Popular Power of the Office of the Presidency, “Peace Quadrants will strengthen the Communal System in Venezuela”, October 22, 2024. Available at: https://presidencia.gob.ve/Site/Web/Principal/paginas/classMostrarEvento3.php?id_evento=29002/

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C. Social control and cooperation in repression

208. As noted in the previous section, control of the community structures through which the state distributed food, vouchers, and public services transformed these collectives into a filter for the population's access to basic goods and rights. This position strengthened their capacity to monitor communities, identify individuals considered to be opponents, and exert various forms of pressure upon them. This infrastructure of social control also served as a basis for their mobilization and coordination with security forces during protests and other acts of political repression.

209. The Mission also concluded that the presence and actions of these groups in public spaces have been part of a deliberate State strategy. These groups have been used as shock troops to disperse demonstrations and to intimidate, within the community, political and social leaders and individuals who are in the opposition or perceived as such. Their deployment occurs particularly during periods of high political mobilization, in coordination with the security forces, and allows them to carry out coercive actions that the police or military do not publicly acknowledge. The information gathered by the Mission further indicates that this participation in political repression has been reinforced by the incorporation of current and former agents of State security agencies into these groups.

1. Social control, surveillance and intelligence work

210. As described above *(see* Chapter III, Section B, paragraph 1, *below),* one of the main ways in which collectives exercise social control in their respective sectors is through the instrumentalization of access to public resources and subsidies, which, in a context of extreme economic hardship, represents a powerful instrument to ensure loyalty to the Government at the community level, especially in electoral situations.

211. As previously noted in the section on care, the use of the community structure delegated by the State for the distribution of food, vouchers, or public services transformed them into the mandatory “filter” for the population to access their rights.290. Based on the information and censuses used to access all social benefits, the civilian intelligence network of these pro-government armed groups manages to profile the entire population, compel them to attend public events, foster neighborhood counterintelligence processes among residents, and control potential grassroots organizations or movements that could be in opposition.
or perceived as such291 .

212. The basis of the social control exercised by collectives through the management of public services and basic necessities is the system known as the Carnet de la Patria (Homeland Card). Launched in December 2016, shortly after the launch of the CLAP program (see Chapter III, Sections B and C, below), the Carnet de la Patria is based on a unified QR code that contains basic information about the user, and its possession is a condition for accessing food, medicine, subsidies, and social programs. The card, available in both physical and virtual formats, collects the holder's personal information and is linked to their bank account number for the payment of public services associated with the system.292

213. The Homeland Card system has been widely criticized for its use as an instrument of political and social control. Information gathered by the Mission indicates that the registration and use of the Homeland Card was...

290 Interviews YYIV021, YYIV008 and ABIV010.
291 Interviews YYIV026, YYIV021 and YYIV027.
292 La Iguana TV, “«The Homeland Card will solve everything»: Maduro explained how it will work”, December 18, 2016. Available at: https://www.laiguana.tv/articulos/43681-presidente-carne-patria-va-a-resolver-todo-video/

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It is closely linked to pro-government party structures. Furthermore, the Patria System has become a mechanism for the systematic collection of personal data, allowing authorities to access detailed information about beneficiaries of social programs and other state services.

214. This database allows for the comprehensive identification of users and the systematic collection of information on a large scale. The information examined by the Mission indicates that the Patria System domain is registered to the PSUV and not to a state institution.293 Discrimination in access to basic services has therefore been denounced for people who do not possess the card.294

215. The use of the Homeland Card for electoral purposes has been widely documented, through the so-called “red points”, PSUV tents located near the polling centers during the electoral processes, in which the Homeland Card of the neighbors is scanned to register the exercise of the vote295. Likewise, the Homeland Card was openly used in the political campaigns of President Maduro as an element of political mobilization296 .

216. Thanks to the Homeland Card system and other mechanisms for accessing public goods and services, the collectives act as implementers of the PSUV's political mobilization strategies at the community level, including electoral recruitment mechanisms such as the "1x10 Good Governance" program.297 At the same time, during election periods, the collectives carry out armed deployments in neighborhoods, forcing citizen participation under the implicit threat of physical violence or exclusion from community social assistance networks.

[298] The groups capitalize on their role in the chain of custody,

293 The Digital Forensic Research, *The Watchers in the Crosshairs: Surveillance Technologies for Political Control in Venezuela.* Available at: https://dfrlab.org/2026/03/30/los-vigilantes-en-la-mira-informe/

294 Aula Abierta, “Carnet de la Patria: Discrimination for political control”, August 30, 2018. Available at: https://aulaabiertalatinoamerica.org/2018/08/31/carne-de-la-patria-discriminacion-para-el-control-politico/ ; PROVEA, “The Homeland Card as a discriminatory instrument for access to goods and services”, June 26, 2016. Available at: https://provea.org/opinion/el-carnet-de-la-patria-como-instrumento-discriminatorio-para-el-acceso-de-bienes-y-servicios/.

295 European Union, Electoral Observation Mission, Venezuela 2021, Final Report. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_eom_ven_2021_fr_es.pdf; Voice of America, “Reward or Punishment: What are the Chavista Red Points?”, November 26, 2021. Available at: https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/premio-o-castigo-que-son-los-puntos-rojos-del-chavismo/6328970.html; Access to Justice, “Access to Justice Analyzes Fraudulent Practices to Win Elections in Venezuela Since 2017”, August 1, 2022. Available at: https://accesoalajusticia.org/acceso-a-la-justicia-analiza-practicas-fraudulentas-para-ganar-elecciones-venezuela-desde-2017/; https://efectococuyo.com/politica/oev-en-80-de-los-centros-de-votacion-instalaron-puntos-rojos-este-20mayo/

296 By way of example, in a speech given on April 24, 2018, prior to the elections Presidential address in May of that same year, President Maduro stated:

> *I'm calling on all those who have a Homeland Card—16.5 million of us—to protect you all, but I'm urging you to vote on May 20th. I'll be calling cardholders every day; this is a give and take. I support you, and you support the Constitution and democracy. I ask for your support for democracy and your participation.*

National Radio of Venezuela, Presidential Address, April 24, 2018. Available at: https://rnv.gob.ve/maduro-llamo-a-las-personas-con-carnet-de-la-patria-a-apoyar-la-democracia-el-20-m/

297 Diario de Guayana, “PSUV will carry out a simulation of the 1x10 electoral mobilization this Sunday”, June 8, 2024. Available at: https://eldiariodeguayana.com.ve/psuv-efectura-simulacro-de-movilizacion-electoral-del-1x10-este-domingo/.

298 Interviews JJIV008, YYIV009, PPIV066 and IIIV005.

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administration and rationing of essential public services to generate intelligence at the community level, which is then shared with state authorities.

217. The control of collectives over the management of public services at the community level, both in the formal and informal markets, is reinforced by the armed nature of these groups and their links with state agents. Thus, the collectives coordinate directly with police and military officials and with managers of water or gas companies to administer the rationing of services, using weapons to intimidate communities and ensure their monopoly over the local black market.299

218. The social control exercised by the colectivos is inextricably linked to their role as informants for the authorities. The surveillance activities carried out by the colectivos are instrumental to the actions of the state's repressive apparatus. As one person interviewed by the Mission stated, "[t]he *colectivos have served as loyal watchdogs for the regime, detecting social discontent and acting accordingly."*

[300] (see Chapter IV *below).*

2. Coordination in the repression of protests

219. The participation of colectivos in protest control can be traced back at least to 2002. Following the attempted coup in April of that year, the authorities promoted the mobilization of civilians who acted in support of state forces against the mass demonstrations in Caracas and other parts of the country. In this context, and in accordance with the doctrine of the so-called "civic-military union," various sectors of Caracas were assigned to colectivos to help maintain public order and limit the advance of opposition demonstrations. Gradually, state and municipal authorities began to implement forms of operational coordination, recurrently mobilizing armed colectivos during major cycles of mass citizen protests to replace or supplement the security forces with jurisdiction over maintaining public order, especially the PNB and the GNB .

220. Internal sources from collectives described to the Mission the various coordination mechanisms between officials from the main mayoral offices, state security forces, and the main leaders of these civilian armed groups, from 2002 to 2025. These mechanisms established direct communication and coordination for the containment and repression of protesters, especially in large cities. For example, in Caracas, from 2007 onward , these groups were assigned "city defense" territories coordinated by mayoral officials.302

221. The Mission has gathered substantial information confirming the State's use of collectives for the repression, intimidation, and containment of protests in Venezuela during the mass demonstrations of 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2024, as well as for other public order functions during this period. The Mission also has reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives have had the express or tacit authorization of the authorities to use lethal force against protesters.303

222. In its first report, published in 2020, the Mission indicated that between January 2014 and June 2020 "the security plans and policies applied to the

299 Interviews ABIV005 and ABIV010
300 Interview HHIV190
301 Interviews YYIV030 and WWIV006.
302 Interview YYIV030.
[303] A/HRC/45/CRP11, paras. 2074-2077, 2099; Interviews YYIV007, YYIV009, YYIV013, YYIV016, YYIV022, YYIV025, YYIV30, ABIV005, ABIV010, ABIV003, IIIV114 and CFyPS3.

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demonstrations offered ample scope for military and paramilitary intervention in the protests and, at times, for the participation of armed citizen collectives or groups in security tasks."304 Furthermore, it concluded that
"[t]he highest levels of government were aware that the colectivos were involved in security operations surrounding the demonstrations." For example, the former Director of SEBIN described to the Mission how he participated in meetings with President Maduro and some of his ministers and recounted to the Mission that he gathered firsthand information about meetings of President Maduro with the military and intelligence leadership in which representatives of the colectivos were present. Another former military officer confirmed to the Mission that spokespeople and coordinators of the colectivos were in regular communication with President Maduro.305

223. The Mission also found information indicating the participation of various components of the State security apparatus in mechanisms of repression against people perceived as opponents.

a) *The 2014 demonstrations*

224. Since the 2014 protests, orders to mobilize the collectives came from a variety of authorities, including the Presidency of the Republic itself—through a liaison from the Honor Guard at Miraflores Palace—the Executive Vice Presidency, as well as various ministries, state governments, municipalities, and state security forces. The Mission also documented that the collectives received direct operational orders from leaders of the PSUV.306

225. The Mission had access to some of these operational orders. This is the case of a 2014 communication sent by a senior military officer to his superiors, including the Minister of Defense and the CEOFANB, informing them of the collective participation in "internal order operations," which include protests. The communication confirmed that this participation was carried out with the "support and knowledge of the relevant State entities and institutions and authorities." 307

a) The 2017 protests

226. The activation of the Zamora Plan in April 2017 allowed for the formalization of a strategy to respond to the protests based on the coordination of civil authorities, military forces, police bodies and civil actors aligned with the Government.
Under this scheme308, the analyzed information shows that state authorities at different levels provided weapons, vehicles and logistical resources to armed groups, creating the material conditions for their participation in control and repression tasks.309 These measures reflect a significant degree of state involvement in the organization and mobilization of these groups.

227. The joint actions of collectives and security forces documented during the 2017 protests in several states of the country310 constitute further evidence of the existence of state-driven coordination mechanisms.311 The reiteration of common operational patterns, along with the support

304 A/HRC/45/33, paragraph 1507

305 See A/HRC/45/33, paragraph 2074.

306 Interviews YYIV030, ABIV004 and ABIV003. A/HRC/45/33, paras. 218, 222, 2075, 2076

307 A/HRC/45/33CRP.11, §2074 to §2076. Interviews: YYIV030, ABIV004 and DP AK GP.

308 Interview AK DP GP

309 Interviews ABIV005, YYIV030, YYIV013 and CFyPS3.

310 Interviews YYIV016, YYIV027, ABIV004 and HHIV188.

311 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 171 on the GNB's modus operandi: "These actions were carried out under operational structures such as Plan Zamora and the anti-coup commands, with the direct participation of high-ranking military officers and state officials, as well as of

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The logistical and political support provided to these groups suggests that the authorities did not merely allow their actions, but rather favored and guided their intervention in the context of the repression operations312 .

b) The 2019 humanitarian crisis

228. The situation on the Colombian-Venezuelan border in February 2019 constitutes a significant example of the role played by state authorities in mobilizing collectives to achieve security and political control objectives.313 During the attempt to bring in humanitarian aid on February 23, 2019, in the context of what the Government called the “Battle of the Bridges,” security forces and armed civilian groups acted concurrently to prevent the passage of aid and disperse the people gathered in the area.

[314] Various sources indicate that the groups participated alongside security agencies in repressive actions, including the use of firearms against protesters and other people present in the area315 .

229. The information examined suggests that the participation of the collectives was not perceived by the authorities as an autonomous action or one separate from the state response. On the contrary, high-ranking state officials publicly described the operation as an expression of the “civil-military union,” highlighting the joint action of state actors and civilians aligned with the government.
These statements, made before and after the events, constitute evidence of support, validation and official recognition of the participation of the groups in the operation316 .

230. Likewise, the participation of high-level authorities, including Freddy Bernal, in activities related to the management of the border crisis, along with the sustained public support of leaders such as Nicolás Maduro and Diosdado

pro-government armed *groups* . The practices included raids without a warrant, planting of evidence, prolonged incommunicado detention, inhumane detention conditions, and selective repression of opposition leaders.”

312 Interviews HHIV197, VVIV012 and JJIV008.

313 Interviews YYIV016, ABIV004, CFyPS3, YYIV025

314 Interviews YYIV016 and YYIV034. Facebook post, Sergio Noveli, Fredy Bernal appears with armed groups in Táchira, April 14, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SergioNovelliPage/videos/y-este-personaje-qué-freddy-bernal-desde-el-puenteinternacionalsimónbolivar-junt/551630305244431/ ; INFOBAE, “An official of the Nicolás Maduro regime arrived at the border with Colombia surrounded by armed Chavista groups,” February 24, 2019. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/02/24/iris-varela-llego-a-la-frontera-con-colombia-rodeada-por-colectivos-chavistas-armados/

315 Interview YYIV016 and HHIV189. Facebook publication, Cucuta Online, “Armed groups attack protesters in #Ureña, #Táchira state, who are demanding the passage of humanitarian aid”, February 24, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/cucutaonlineweb/videos/frontera-colectivos-armados-atacan-a-manifestantes-en-ureña-estado-táchira-quien/407576236660026/?locale=es_LA; Published in X, Reporte Ya, “Valentín Santana, leader of the La Piedrita collective, asserts that 'the time has come to defend the revolution with weapons,'” April 30, 2019. Available at: https://x.com/ReporteYa/status/1123205805514330113?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwee tembed%7Ctwterm%5E1123205805514330113%7Ctwgr%5E3998fd99b6d4c5f10f8d6ea2395d6de572e02702%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Ftalcualdigital.com%2Fvalentin-santana-assures-that-the-moment-has-armed-to-defend-the-revolution-with-weapons%2F

316 Facebook post, Sergio Noveli, Fredy Bernal appears with collectives in Táchira, April 14, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SergioNovelliPage/videos/y-este-personaje-qué-freddy-bernal-desde-el-puenteinternacionalsimónbolivar-junt/551630305244431/ ; INFOBAE, “An official of the Nicolás Maduro regime arrived at the border with Colombia surrounded by armed Chavista collectives,” February 24, 2019. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/02/24/iris-varela-llego-a-la-frontera-con-colombia-rodeada-por-colectivos-chavistas-armados/

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Cabello317 expressed toward the collectives, reinforcing the existence of a relationship of coordination and political support between these groups and the State. Considered together, these elements suggest that the authorities not only tolerated the actions of the collectives during the events of February 2019 , but also facilitated, encouraged, and publicly legitimized their participation in the implementation of the government's strategy to prevent the entry of humanitarian aid and control opposition-linked mobilizations.318

c) The *post-election repression of 2024*

231. Regarding the post-election repression of July 28, 2024, the Mission has firsthand information from members of collectives who were called upon by government authorities, both in Caracas and Táchira, to confront the repression of protesters and control the streets.319

232. A former member with a prominent role within pro-government armed groups described to the Mission the existence of coordination and support mechanisms between these groups and state authorities. According to his testimony, the groups received weapons from military installations and maintained direct communication channels with government authorities, including governors, ministers, and members of the Presidential Honor Guard. The source stated that the groups participated in operations aimed at restricting access by opposition sectors to downtown Caracas, in coordination with military personnel and under a pre-agreed territorial division.320

233. The same source indicated that each group had specific areas of operation assigned to them within the framework of government protection strategies, and that some of their activities included surveillance and intelligence gathering within their territories of influence. According to the testimony, these actions were carried out in coordination with state authorities and a military officer who acted as a liaison between the groups and public institutions.

234. Regarding coordination between collectives and state authorities, the source stated: “We made an agreement with the political and government leadership [...] and we had to fulfill that agreement with the military (...). It was coordinated directly with governors, ministers, and the Presidential Honor Guard. A colonel was in charge of working with us as a liaison and direct communication point (...). For government protection strategies, each collective had a zone (...) we did intelligence and shock work, coordinated with the authorities.”321

235. An example of the participation of collectives in the context of repression
One of the most significant events of the 2014 protests was the eviction of demonstrators' encampments set up in front of the United Nations headquarters in Caracas on May 8 of that year. According to information examined by the Mission, although the operation was allegedly directed by the then Minister of the Interior, Justice and Peace, it was primarily carried out by armed civilian groups known as colectivos. According to a source with direct knowledge of the events, the actions observed during the operation were fundamentally a response to the intervention

317 With the Sledgehammer, “Find out what Diosdado said about the collectives”, November 25 2019. Available at: https://www.mazo4f.com/sepa-que-dijo-diosdado-cabello-sobre-los-colectivos ; Crónica Uno, “Armed collectives lead unchecked repression with death squads,” May 12, 2019. Available at: https://www.cronica.uno/colectivos-armados-lideran-represion-a-rienda-suelta-con-cuerpos-de-exterminio/ ; Facebook post, Sergio Noveli, Fredy Bernal appears with collectives in Táchira, April 14, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SergioNovelliPage/videos/y-este-personaje-qué-freddy-bernal-desde-el-puenteinternacionalsimónbolivar-junt/551630305244431/

318 Interview HHIV197.

319 Interviews ABIV004 and YYIV031. Document YYDC001.

320 Interview YYIV030 and AK DP GP.

321 Interview YYIV030.

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of these groups, which suggests their direct involvement in the execution of measures to control and disperse demonstrators322 .

2. Coordination in security operations

236. At the operational level, the Mission's investigations revealed a profound functional and membership overlap between the *collectives* and the formal security forces, allowing the State to employ these groups to replace or supplement professional officials as it saw fit.323 This civilian-military fusion was evident in raids and arrests where members of collectives were actively involved with elite state forces.

237. The Mission documented cases in which members of colectivos acted alongside officials of the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), under the authority of local officials of that agency and in support of specific operations (see Chapter IV, Modus Operandi, below). The Mission also reported that the colectivos allegedly carried out preparatory activities prior to raids and arrests conducted by the DGCIM . Similarly, the Mission noted that the colectivos were sometimes used by the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) as a "shock force," providing security perimeters during operations in which confrontations were anticipated.324

238. During the OLP operations, collectives were used as armed containment lines at the exits of targeted working-class neighborhoods. Specifically, in the 23 de Enero parish in Caracas, the "La Piedrita" collective ensured the retreat and escape routes in direct coordination with state agencies.
Likewise, members of armed groups dressed in civilian clothes and with their faces covered operated on the ground under the guise of "Cooperating Patriots," guiding police officers directly to the homes of individuals to be arrested. This combined pattern of denunciation and community-based arrest was also documented in El Tocuyo (Lara) and other regions. The denunciations made by these "Cooperating Patriots," whose identities were concealed, were validated on the state television program *Con el Mazo Dando*, leading to the arrest and formal indictment of citizens for terrorism or criminal conspiracy.325

IV. *Modus operandi* and human rights violations

239. The Mission has established that pro-government armed civilian groups, known as colectivos, operate as a fully integrated component of the Venezuelan state's apparatus of repression and social control. Under the doctrinal concept of the "civic-military union" and the principle of "co-responsibility" for national security, these non-professional actors have been de facto validated by the authorities to carry out community policing, intelligence gathering, and internal order control. Far from acting as anarchic or disorganized groups, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that they operate within a coordinated structure in which their leaders receive political directives and operational instructions from high-ranking officials in the Executive branch and intelligence agencies, serving to replace or supplement regular state security forces when convenient for the purposes of political persecution.

240. At a tactical level, the *modus operandi* of these groups unfolds across a spectrum that combines "soft" coercive mechanisms of social control with serious "hard" physical violations, all under an environment of systematic impunity supported by the State. This dynamic ranges from the

322 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, Annex I, para. 24.
323 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 2099
324 A/HRC/51/CRP.3 paras. 60, 80, 290
325 Interview YYIV026.

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community denunciation activities and intimidating harassment of real or perceived opponents—including marking homes and stigmatization campaigns in working-class neighborhoods—to irregular arrests and the use of potentially lethal force with firearms against unarmed protesters, operating with the acquiescence or deliberate omission of the police and military components of the State.

241. The following sections examine the *modus operandi* of the collectives in each of the four operational contexts identified by the Mission: surveillance and social control, repression of protests, joint security operations, and selective political repression. State responsibility for these actions is examined in section V.

A. Social surveillance and control

1. Surveillance, social control and intelligence work

242. In the areas under their control, the collectives exercise, *de facto,* a security system, which combines concomitant functions of public order and administration of justice for the containment of common crime and the maintenance of social peace326. This system operates in parallel to the competent State bodies and with their apparent acquiescence.

243. The information examined by the Mission indicates that collectives play a significant role in collecting and transmitting information about the population to state agencies. The Mission received information indicating that this information is obtained through community surveillance and intelligence networks developed and maintained through mechanisms of social control exercised over local communities.327

244. Sources interviewed by the Mission described the existence of local surveillance and information exchange networks in popular sectors where pro-government civilian armed groups exert varying degrees of territorial influence.
According to these sources, these networks would operate through communal structures and would be fed, among other mechanisms, by information collected through community censuses linked to access to social programs and public services, including the Local Committees for Supply and Production (CLAP), domestic supply services and other benefits administered at the community level328 .

245. Several sources indicated that these informant networks are closely linked to the figure of the so-called "Patriotic Cooperators," individuals who provide information to state intelligence and security agencies. The sources described this figure as one of the mechanisms through which information obtained at the community level is channeled to state authorities.329

246. The information analyzed by the Mission indicates that community information networks have been used by State security and intelligence agencies in different operational contexts330 .
The Mission previously documented the use of community information mechanisms within the framework of operations such as the People's Liberation Operations (OLP), Plan Zamora, and the so-called Operation Tun Tun. According to a source with direct knowledge of these aspects of collaboration between collectives and security agencies, “the collectives act as informants and coordinate with the police authority for the identification and detention of individuals. This coordination can occur orally;

326 Interview HHIV188.

327 Interviews YYIV030, YYIV009, YYIV026, YYIV025, YYIV021, YYIV017, YYIV016, ABIV003 and HHIV187.

328 Interviews YYIV036 and YYIV021.

329 Interviews YYIV026 and YYIV007.

330 A/HRC/45/33, para. 221.

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However, when it is articulated with the military component, it is presented as if the collectives were part of the militia”331 .

247. Taken together, the information examined allows us to conclude with reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives perform functions complementary to those of state security and intelligence agencies, particularly in matters of community surveillance, identification of persons considered to be of interest and transmission of information to the authorities332 .

248. A key component of the intelligence work carried out by collectives is the prior identification of potential targets for state repression. This concept refers to a premeditated strategy, where the collectives perform these tasks.
of prior identification, designation and registration of specific persons or addresses, prior to the execution of raids by the security forces
and arrests of people who are opponents or perceived as such. A known pattern of action is the marking of doors (with an “X”) in the neighborhoods of opposition families so that they are identifiable and to facilitate subsequent raids or as a means of intimidation333 .

249. This process requires the individualization of profiles, for which the collectives collect data at the community level on elements of people's private lives related to their political preferences, monitor community meetings, and record residents' comments on social media, including any critical or dissenting expressions (e.g., neighborhood WhatsApp groups). The collectives also carry out physical surveillance, such as recording routines, schedules, and movements related to previously identified homes or individuals.334

250. Thanks to the intelligence work carried out preventively, the Mission has documented that the groups consolidate informal databases, in the form of informer lists, of people suspected of exercising leadership roles or opposition militancy, or who have simply shown themselves to be critical of the conditions
services in their neighborhoods. These lists are later handed over to security or intelligence agencies. According to an internal source, the collectives coordinate informally with the police; however, when they coordinate with the army, they do so through the Bolivarian Militia.335

251. In its 2024 report, the Mission documented cases of arrests of people who had previously been photographed or filmed by security forces and even by colectivos. In one case investigated by the Mission, a member[336] of a colectivo had struck the victim on the head during a demonstration; upon entering a health center, another member took a photograph of him, indicating to a family member that it was “a measure to register people who arrived injured.” The following day, DGCIM officials arrested him at a residence.337

252. The intelligence activities of the collectives are not limited to political and ideological surveillance. In this respect, the collectives have also served as informants for the security forces regarding the planning and execution of crimes.

331 Interview HHIV197.

332 Interviews YYIV025, YYIV027 and DP AK GP.

333 Interviews HHIV197, ABIV009 and YYIV034. Publication on Youtube, Channel 13, “They denounce that Chavista collectives “mark” the houses of opposition members to intimidate”, August 12, 2024. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiucRI_21SU; Impact news publication from August 2024, “Chavista collectives mark opposition members’ homes in Caracas with an intimidating black X,” Available at: https://www.noticiaimpacto.com/colectivos-chavistas-marcan-casas-de-opositores-en-caracas-con-una-intimidante-x-negra/

334 CFyPS2 Interview.

335 Interview HHIV197.

336 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, para. 667.

337 *Ibid.,* para. 735.

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of subsequent joint security operations against organized crime in marginalized areas. For example, in relation to the OLP, the collectives provided information on possible targets and were used by the PNB as containment rings at the exits of the neighborhoods338 .

253. The surveillance carried out by these groups transforms community spaces into environments of constant suspicion, limiting privacy and creating psychological pressure due to the constant fear of being denounced. In this way, the intelligence work of these groups becomes a mechanism, facilitated by the State, to neutralize civic and democratic space from its very foundations.

254. The role of collectives in the repressions evolved towards forms of selective persecution that are more evident from the presidential elections of July 2024 and during the subsequent crises.

255. Civil society reports indicate that the collectives compiled profiles of community leaders, poll watchers, and dissident citizens within their own neighborhoods.339 Their active participation in state security operations such as Operation Tun Tun and the "Bolivarian Fury" patrols was documented. In these operations, the collectives selectively visited private homes alongside hooded security agents to carry out arbitrary arrests without warrants.340

256. The persecution of dissent penetrated the social fabric from the grassroots as collectives refined their role by continuously monitoring people's activities, the social networks of neighbors, using control of public services or subsidized food (CLAP) to neutralize any hint of protest before it could reach the public space341 .

2. Territorial control and deterrent intimidation

257. In addition to gathering information and identifying targets, these groups exert ongoing control over certain territories and essential aspects of community life. This control manifests itself through their armed presence, patrols, checkpoints, the imposition of sanctions, and the coercive use of access to goods and services.

258. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives are not only armed groups acting as shock troops in repression, but that they exercise, either through the instances of the State's communal organization system or by de facto means, roles of management, maintenance of order and provision of services, becoming key actors in local governance while ensuring their own survival.

259. According to community sources interviewed by the Mission, the community committees control all the information about each house and each neighbor: their needs, subsidies, the number of people, the basic services they have, the number of vehicles, health needs, etc. Based on this information and by encouraging all neighbors to denounce the opposition, the Community Committees, with collective support, mark the houses of opposition neighbors, threaten them, and often even take their lives.
342

338 Interview HHIV197

339 CEPAZ, Human Rights of Venezuela in Movement, presents the report "Post-Electoral and Human Rights Crisis 2024 in Venezuela: The Dictatorship's Black Report," September 4, 2024. Available at: https://cepaz.org/derechos-humanos-de-venezuela-en-movimiento-presenta-el-informe-crisis-postelectoral-y-de-derechos-humanos-2024-en-venezuela-el-informe-negro-de-la-dictadura/

340 Interviews HHIV190, HHIV198 and YYIV026.

341 Interviews HHIV198 and HHIV190. Instagram post, Caraotadigital, “Maduro orders the creation of an app for his followers to report everything they see and hear,” October 21, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQE1C1bCUvD/?hl=en

342 Interviews YYIV026, YYIV016, YYIV011 and ABIV009.

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260. By monopolizing the use of violence in certain sectors, to the exclusion of state institutions or with their acquiescence, these groups have informally assumed the role of "protecting" residents from external crime—that is, from illegal acts committed by individuals outside the groups' sphere of influence or without their consent. This local security work is generally carried out through motorized patrols and is linked to the collection of extortion payments or "protection money" from local businesses *(see* Chapter III, Section B, *above).*

261. According to information received by the Mission, the collectives also exercise quasi-judicial functions, unilaterally imposing sanctions on those allegedly responsible for crimes committed in the areas under their control. The Mission received information about cases in which the collectives allegedly applied the death penalty as punishment for minor offenses such as theft.343 The information received by the Mission indicates that the collectives also exercise conflict resolution functions at the local level, including in cases of domestic violence.344

262. Valentín Santana, for example, one of the most recognized and historical leaders of the historical collectives of the January 23 parish, has made several public statements alluding to the fact that in his territory "crime is not allowed".345 .

a) Mobile patrol operations

263. Armed civilian groups conduct constant motorized patrols and make symbolic appearances on major avenues and key urban nodes in the country's main cities, occasionally leading to mass gatherings, displaying their weapons.346 These deployments are frequently carried out under the leadership of some political authority and with the acquiescence of the security forces, and even escorted by them.347

264. The Mission collected a significant amount of audiovisual documentation and testimonies relating to this type of operation. Due to its specific characteristics, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the patrol operations carried out by the collectives have as their primary objective the intimidation of the population and the deterrence of any kind of opposition or dissent.348

265. According to several testimonies gathered by the Mission, patrols by colectivos are frequent during electoral processes. In these contexts, armed civilian groups often circulate on motorcycles near polling stations before, during, and after the opening of the ballot boxes, as well as in areas or homes where opposition members are suspected of living.349 The Mission also learned of cases in which colectivos disrupted electoral processes in various

343 Interview ABIV004 and YYIV026. Redalyc, Academic Study 'Facções' of Fortaleza and "Caracas collectives: Two models of criminal governance," March 14, 2022. Available at: https://www.redalyc.org/journal/5638/563872581002/; 344 Interview YYIV036.

345 Document YYDOC003. INFOBAE, The reason behind the housing occupations in Venezuela: "They pay the colectivos for favors to the revolution," January 18, 2018. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/01/18/la-razon-detras-de-las-tomas-de-viviendas-en-venezuela-les-pagan-a-los-colectivos-los-favores-a-la-revolucion/; YouTube video, by El Toro Tv [@ElToroTv], "The colectivos, the armed wing of Chavismo in the streets of Venezuela," January 21, 2016. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfF5LGvMvN4

347 Instagram post, "Groups fire shots near Miraflores Palace, 29 July 2024, available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/C-Bdq4rPBtD/; Video obtained by mission: 9_gotham video

348 Interviews YYIV032, YYIV030, YYIV025, YYIV026 and YYIV027.

349 Interviews: YYIV031, YYIV016 and YYIV014.

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universities, intimidating the university population and even preventing elections in some cases350 .

b) Control of checkpoints (“alcabalas”)

266. The Mission has collected abundant primary sources on the activities of the collectives manning checkpoints on public roads, commonly referred to as “alcabalas.” The members of these collectives assigned to these checkpoints are usually dressed in civilian clothes, with their faces covered, and carry weapons, given the inaction of the security forces.351 The checkpoints are typically located on the main avenues and streets of territories controlled by civilian armed groups, in the case of large cities are usually central avenues and strategic roads of the city352 .

267. The Mission received information that armed civilians operating checkpoints and roadblocks intercept people traveling in vehicles and, occasionally, pedestrians. At these checkpoints, individuals are subjected to searches and inspections of their belongings, including mobile phones and other personal electronic devices. According to the information gathered, when armed civilians identify or perceive a person as a sympathizer of the political opposition or a critic of the authorities, that person is allegedly detained, threatened, and, in numerous cases, physically assaulted. The information received indicates that some of these individuals are subsequently handed over to state security agencies, while in other cases the perpetrators allegedly demanded payments from their families as a condition for their release.353

268. Many of these checkpoints are set up in the context of mass demonstrations and other politically significant events. Various sources indicated that their purpose is to discourage participation in protest activities, create an intimidating effect on the population, and reinforce surveillance and control mechanisms over individuals perceived as opposition members. According to the information received, the presence of these checkpoints frequently coincides with periods of high social mobilization or political tension. The sources consulted reported that, in the days immediately following the arrest of President Nicolás Maduro by United States forces on January 3, 2026, numerous checkpoints were established on the main roads of Caracas and other cities in the country. The information received indicates that interrogations and inspections of belongings, including electronic devices, were carried out at these checkpoints. However, the Mission did not receive information that would allow it to corroborate arrests linked to these operations.355

354

3. Intimidation and generation of fear in the population

269. The Mission notes that fear of collectives significantly influenced its own research. A considerable number of people

350 Open Classroom, Preliminary Report | Universities Under Pressure: Civic Space, Freedom Academic freedom and resilience in Venezuela and Latin America, June 23, 2026. Available at: https://aulaabiertalatinoamerica.org/2026/06/15/informe-preliminar-universidades-bajo-presion-espacio-civico-libertad-academica-y-resiliencia-en-venezuela-y-america-latina/

351 Interview HHIV187.

352 Facebook post, DWNoticias, “The collectives: Maduro’s last defense”, March 15, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/dw.espanol/videos/los-colectivos-la-%C3%BAltima-defensa-de-maduro/413286532761796/; YouTube post, Noticias Caracol, January 10, 2025. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqBTGBMljYg.

353 Interviews YYIV016 and YYIV027.

354 Interview HHIV030; El Nacional, “Caracas under surveillance: checkpoints and tension after the Decree of a State of External Commotion,” January 5, 2026. Available at: https://www.elnacional.com/2026/01/caracas-bajo-vigilancia-controles-alcabalas-y-tension-tras-decreto-de-estado-de-conmocion-exterior/; El Nacional, “Caracas under surveillance: checkpoints and tension after the Decree of a State of External Commotion,” January 5, 2026. Available at: https://www.elnacional.com/2026/01/caracas-bajo-vigilancia-controles-alcabalas-y-tension-tras-decreto-de-estado-de-conmocion-exterior/

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Those interviewed expressed fear of reprisals for speaking about these groups, a level of fear the Mission has not found to be the same for other actors examined in its previous reports. Several people agreed to be interviewed only outside their communities, or declined to provide information that would identify those responsible, despite knowing their identities.

270. This fear is not merely a methodological limitation, but a finding in itself, and stems from the characteristic that distinguishes these groups from other perpetrators documented by the Mission: they reside in the same communities as their victims and control the everyday environment on which access to food, services, and movement depends. As early as 2020, the Mission had noted that people were less likely to report these groups precisely because they live in the same neighborhoods as their victims.[356]

The fear also extends to those who hold public office: a former prosecutor from the state of Mérida declared that a well-known police officer warned her about the colectivos: “Be careful when you go home because they are armed and can harm you.”[357] This deterrent effect operates with regardless of whether the violence actually materializes in a specific case. As the Mission explained in 2025, the atmosphere of fear created by security agencies and groups has generated a climate of constant surveillance and intimidation, weakening the community fabric and seriously affecting the mental health of human rights defenders.[358]

4. Conclusions

271. Conditioning access to subsidized food, fuel and basic services on political affiliation violates the right to adequate food and social security[359], interpreted together with the obligation of non-discrimination[360].

The Mission considers that the withdrawal or threat of withdrawal of benefits from individuals perceived as opponents, as well as the delegation of distribution to actors who use such benefits as a means of punishment, violate both the obligation to respect and the obligation to protect this right. Discrimination based on political opinion is expressly prohibited, and any distinction in access to essential goods based on political affiliation or loyalty is unjustifiable.

272. The creation of population registers for the purpose of receiving social benefits, and their use to identify, profile, and locate individuals perceived as opponents, violates the right to privacy. When data obtained for the administration of social assistance is diverted for surveillance and target selection within the population, the resulting interference is neither lawful nor proportionate and constitutes arbitrary conduct within the meaning of Article 17 of the ICCPR. The marking of dwellings, the maintenance of checkpoints, and restrictions on movement within and outside the affected territories further compromise the right to freedom of movement and residence.[362]

[361] When information

273. The systematic collection of personal information on the population, including their political opinions and affiliations, and its transmission to state security and intelligence agencies, violates the right to privacy. This interference is not provided for by law, does not pursue a legitimate aim, and is disproportionate, and is therefore arbitrary within the meaning of Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Mission also observes that these practices have a chilling effect on the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression.

[356] A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 1601.
[357] A/HRC/48/CRP.5, para. 162.
[358] A/HRC/60/CRP.4, para. 551.
[359] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966), arts. 9 and 11.
[360] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 2(2); ICCPR, arts. 2(1) and 26.
[361] *Ibid.,* art. 17.
[362] *Ibid.,* art. 12.

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expression, peaceful assembly, association and participation in public affairs, recognized in Articles 19, 21, 22 and 25 of the Covenant: permanent community surveillance and the knowledge that critical expressions are recorded and communicated to the authorities discourage participation in public life regardless of whether any action is taken against the person being monitored.

274. The imposition of sanctions by groups for conduct they deem unlawful, outside of any judicial proceedings, violates the rights to personal liberty and security and to a fair trial.363 Detention carried out by persons not exercising a legal power of arrest is arbitrary regardless of the conduct attributed to the victim, and the substitution of ordinary courts with informal systems of sanction deprives the population of the protection of the law. The Mission examines separately the basis of State responsibility for such conduct (see sec. V).

275. Finally, the Mission observes that these forms of control disproportionately affect women, who predominantly bear the responsibility for providing for and supporting the household and who, therefore, are especially exposed to mechanisms of coercion, demands to report abuse by family members and threats of sexual violence.

B. Repression of the protests

276. Since at least 2002, the Government has involved civilians, including collectives, in security tasks, under the doctrine of “civic-military unity.” The Mission previously established that the highest levels of Government were aware that collectives were participating in security operations surrounding demonstrations, and that since 2014 the Government has expressly involved civilians in security tasks, often under the concept of “civic-military unity.” [364] This has included the participation of collectives in various forms of political repression, notably the repression of demonstrations during the most intense periods of protests against the Government and the targeted repression of individuals who are opponents or perceived as such. The Mission had access to a 2014 communication sent by a senior military officer to his superiors, including the Minister of Defense and the CEOFANB, informing them of the participation of collectives in “internal order operations,” which include protests, and indicating that this participation took place with the “support and knowledge of State entities and institutions and relevant authorities.”365

277. The typical deployment of the collectives is in motorized groups made up of armed individuals, with their faces covered with helmets or balaclavas, who They display pistols or long guns and, sometimes, insignia of their respective groups. Depending on the type of protest, these groups intervene before or after the police. They deploy beforehand at gathering points to harass, intimidate, and obstruct marches, acting as a shock force that precedes the police.

363 ICCPR, arts. 9 and 14.

364 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 2074.

365 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 2076.

366 Interview YYDC001. El Nacional, “GNB and armed collectives attacked students at UDO,” May 18, 2017. Available at: https://www.elnacional.com/2017/05/gnb-colectivos-armados-agredieron-estudiantes-udo_182974/; Infobae, “ Chavista collectives attacked a rally called by Juan Guaidó in Barquisimeto,” February 29, 2020. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/02/29/colectivos-chavistas-atacaron-una-concentracion-convocada-por-juan-guaido-en-barquisimeto/.

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security forces, or are mobilized in a coordinated manner in withdrawal actions once the PNB or the GNB are overwhelmed in the control of order367 .

278. During their interventions, the collectives fire shots into the air from their motorcycles to intimidate the population, and capture photographs or videos of the protesters to profile people who will later be arrested by the same collectives or by State agencies.368. On occasion, images of the participants in the protests were broadcast on public television programs, especially on *Con el mazo dando,* directed by Diosdado Cabello.369

279. The Mission's investigations showed that the collectives were summoned to participate in the control of the protests through various communication channels.370. On occasion, the collectives were mobilized through messages on social media. During the main protest cycles, the collectives had an operations center where they received, via radio communication, orders from the State security forces to intervene and support the PNB or the GNB.371

280. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that, in the context of the protests, armed groups have used violence improperly and indiscriminately, causing numerous deaths and injuries. The Mission has information on at least 54 people allegedly killed by armed groups between 2014 and 2024 in the context of demonstrations.372

281. In its 2020 report, the Mission examined seven cases in which collectives were responsible for the use of lethal weapons that killed protesters who were shot by members of pro-government collectives under patterns of state coordination or inaction.[373] In the case of Mr. Carlos José Moreno Baron, the Mission had reasonable grounds to believe that he was the victim of an arbitrary deprivation of life. Two men, members of the March 5 Collective, one of them nicknamed “Jonathan 38,” chief detective of the Sucre municipal police, and the other man called “Caimán,” were involved.374 In each of the seven cases analyzed, state security forces (such as the GNB, the PNB, or local police) did not intervene. Witnesses indicated that several PNB officers were near Plaza la Estrella, but left shortly before at least six motorcycles arrived with twelve men armed with pistols and shotguns, wearing balaclavas and bulletproof vests.375

282. According to testimonies gathered by the Mission, the level of force employed by armed groups, including authorization to carry and use firearms, was coordinated with the authorities prior to their deployment.376 The groups were also authorized to detain individuals they considered suspicious and subsequently hand them over to the security forces.377

283. The Mission concluded in its 2020 report that it had reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives were directly involved in several murders

367 Interviews YYIV030, DG AK GP and CFyPS3. Video YYDC001.

368 Interviews YYIV030, YYIV002 and YYIV026.

369 YouTube publication, Venezuelan Television, Con el Mazo Dando program 569, “Opposition members insist on requesting freedom for murderers and drug traffickers,” May 6, 2026. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGfLs9GAdZw

370 A/HRC/45/CRP.11 para 406.

371 Interviews YYIV030, DG AK GP and CFyPS3.

372 Document ABDOC001.

373 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, paras. 1600-1601.

374 *Ibid.,* paras. 1751-1763.

375 Former military and civilian intelligence officials, including former SEBIN director Christopher Figuera, testified that the colectivos operated clandestine networks that coordinated directly with state security forces, receiving weapons, official credentials, government communication channels, and indirect funding. See A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 218.

376 Interviews YYIV030 and ABIV005.

377 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 1593, footnote 2839; Paola Ramirez Case, *ibid.,* paras.

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arbitrary and that these occurred with the acquiescence or participation of officials from various state agencies.378

1. The repression of the 2014 demonstrations

284. Between February and May 2014, numerous demonstrations took place in different parts of the country, in a context of a growing economic crisis and under the government of President Nicolás Maduro. The protests, which intensified from February 12 onwards following previous mobilizations in various states, included demands for political change formulated under the slogan “La Salida” (The Exit). As the Mission later documented, the state response involved the deployment of security forces and the actions of armed civilian groups known as colectivos.379

285. As the Mission noted in its 2020 report, the authorities frequently mobilized collectives to repress protests. On February 10, 2014, President Maduro activated the anti-coup commandos (see chap. II, sec. B, above), a civilian-military unit, and announced the preparation of a *“zone by zone”* and *“name by name”* plan to prevent an alleged coup d’ état.380
A few days later, on February 12, President Maduro convened a meeting of these commands, made up of members of the armed forces and civilian groups, to “continue defeating the fascist coup in Venezuela”381 .

286. On March 5, 2014, during the commemorative events for the first anniversary of the death of President Hugo Chávez, President Maduro called on *“the UBCH, the communal councils, the communes, the collectives, any spark that is lit, any spark that is extinguished”* 382, implying that any form of protest would have to be immediately deactivated with the popular grassroots organizations – expressly including the collectives.

287. This repressive cycle left a toll of 43 dead persons, deaths which the Mission concluded constituted arbitrary deprivations of life383 .

2. The repression of the 2017 demonstrations

288. During 2017, the paralysis of democratic processes (suspension of the recall referendum and postponement of elections by the National Electoral Council at the end of 2016), coupled with shortages of medicines, supply problems, and hyperinflation, triggered massive protests throughout the country. The crisis worsened after Judgments 155 and 156 of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ), which eliminated parliamentary immunity and usurped the legislative powers of the National Assembly.384

289. To contain the protests, the government of Nicolás Maduro activated Plan Zamora, a political-military scheme that institutionalized the militarization of public order and allowed the coordinated action of security forces and armed civilians.
(see below).

290. The Mission obtained official documents from the Strategic Operational Command (CEOFANB) from December 2016 that were preparing the civic-military exercise 'Zamora

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378 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 2077.

379 Conflict Observatory, “Protesters in the sights of paramilitary groups”, February 2015. Available at: https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/oc/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Informe-Manifestantes-en-la-mira-de-paramilitares.pdf.

380 See YouTube Video, MultiMedio VTV, “Anti-coup Command will remain alert to possible attacks on the country”, February 10, 2014, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us7NeASIlL4.

381 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, §67

382 YouTube video, Andreina Flores, “Maduro”. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZzfVjoVDEc A/HRC/

383 45/CRP.11, paras. 2093-2094.

384 IACHR, Annual Report 2017, Chapter IV. B: Venezuela, para. 20 and paras. 31-37. Available at: https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2017/docs/IA2017cap.4bVE-es.pdf.

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200' (executed on January 14, 2017), which structured military cooperation with civilian groups to neutralize demonstrations or opposition categorized as 'guarimbas' in municipalities controlled by opposition mayors385 .

291. Regarding the actions of the security forces—primarily the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB)—in the context of the control and repression of the 2017 demonstrations, the Mission concluded that there was a systematic and excessive use of force. State officials employed potentially lethal force through direct and indiscriminate firing of firearms and live shotgun ammunition (lead pellets) against demonstrators who did not pose an imminent threat. They also made improper and diverted use of less-lethal weapons, firing tear gas canisters directly into the torsos of demonstrators.386

292. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
It reported that “of the 124 protest-related deaths that were under investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office as of July 31, 46 were allegedly the work of the security forces and 27 of the pro-government armed groups known as collectives.” [387] He also noted that the
The groups acted in coordination with or with the acquiescence of the authorities in various episodes of violence that occurred during the 2017 protests. For its part, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) documented that, among the episodes of violence attributed to the groups, the armed assault on the Federal Legislative Palace on July 5, 2017, stands out, where they attacked deputies, workers and journalists with pipes, gas and explosives, seriously injuring seven people.
They also carried out illegal violent raids, destruction of private property and demolition of residential gates in Lara, Miranda and Zulia388, and operated 'Transfer Zones' where they captured protesters, subjected them to cruel treatment and coordinated their physical delivery to official units389 .

293. The mission has documented attacks by armed groups targeting members of the academic community and assaults on university facilities, especially during 2017. On June 22, 2017, following student protests against the Constituent Assembly near the Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho Private Northeastern University (UGMA) and the University of the East (UDO) in Cumaná, members of the National Guard (GNB) repressed the demonstration. After the GNB withdrew, a contingent of armed armed groups arrived by bus, pursued the protesters, and violently entered the UGMA campus. The attackers stormed the facilities, stole belongings from a security guard, and threw stones, incidents reported by the director of UGMA Cumaná, Eloy Gil.390 Similarly, armed groups perpetrated

385 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, paras. 2093-2094.

386 *Ibid.*

387 OHCHR, Human rights violations and abuses in the context of the protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017, p. 10. Available in:
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf

388 IACHR, Human Rights Situation in Venezuela, OAS/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 209, December 31, 2017. Available at: https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/Venezuela2018-es.pdf El Nacional, “GNB and armed groups attacked students at UDO”, May 18, 2017. Available at: https://www.elnacional.com/2017/05/gnb-colectivos-armados-agredieron-estudiantes-udo_182974/

389 IACHR, Human Rights Situation in Venezuela, OAS/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 209, December 31, 2017. Available at: https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/Venezuela2018-es.pdf; El Pitazo, “Five students injured and nine arrested after repression at UDO and Ugma Cumaná”, June 22, 2017. Available at: https://elpitazo.net/regiones/oriente/cinco-estudiantes-heridos-y-nueve-detenidos-tras-represion-en-udo-y-ugma-cumana/.

390 Publication El Pitazo “Rector will denounce the National Guard to the Prosecutor's Office for destruction in Ugma Cumaná”, June 2017, available at: https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/rector-denunciara-ante-fiscalia-guardia-nacional-destrozos-ugma-cumana/.

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violent incursions into Lara state campuses such as the Lisandro Alvarado Central-Western University (UCLA), the National Experimental Polytechnic University (UNEXPO), the Libertador Experimental Pedagogical University (UPEL) and the Fermín Toro University (UFT)391 .

294. The Mission did not identify any public statements issued by the governing authorities regarding these events.

295. This pattern of joint action allowed for the delegation of illegal activities to civilians to guarantee operational anonymity and avoid legal liability. In this regard, a source with specialized knowledge of these mechanisms indicated to the Mission that the groups acted in support of the security forces and could be used to carry out actions outside of established procedures.

ordinary legal procedures, so that *"nobody will know who it was"* [392].

3. The repression of the 2024 demonstrations

296. The presidential elections of July 28, 2024, were followed by a major post-election crisis. The Carter Center's Technical Election Observation Mission declared that the election "did not conform to international parameters and standards of electoral integrity and cannot be considered democratic," and the United Nations Panel of Electoral Experts concluded that the National Electoral Council "failed to comply with basic measures of transparency and integrity to conduct credible elections."

[393].

297. On July 29, thousands of people took to the streets to demand transparency in the results in at least 17 of the country's 23 states and the Capital District, with popular sectors joining the protests throughout the territory.394 During those days and the days that followed, there was violent repression by the security forces and armed civilian groups affiliated with the Government, which resulted in 25 deaths and hundreds of injuries and arrests.395

The repression was instigated from the highest civilian and military levels of the State, including President Maduro, through threatening public statements: after the first protests he announced *"maximum punishment"* for the demonstrators and warned that "this time there will be no forgiveness".396 From July 30, the authorities launched the so-called Operation Tun Tun to arrest in their homes people who had participated in the protests or expressed critical opinions397 .

298. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict recorded 915 protests between July 29 and 30, 2024, throughout the country.398 According to public information recorded by the Special Monitoring Mechanism for Venezuela (MESEVE) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, of a total of 23 deaths recorded, six are linked to collectives and two to "mixed actions between

391 Instagram post from El Pitazo TV, attack by colectivos in Lara, May 2, 2017. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/BTnLFnrF-5Z/; PROVEA, "Protests 2017 | Collectives: from executors of a pattern to part of a repressive system", May 9, 2018. Available at: https://provea.org/paramilitarismo/protestas-2017-colectivos-de-ejecutores-de-un-patron-a-parte-de-un-sistema-represivo/; INFOBAE, "Day of terror in Barquisimeto: 4 dead during a violent incursion by pro-government groups in the Venezuelan city," July 1, 2017. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2017/07/01/dia-de-terror-en-barquisimeto-4-muertos-durante-una-violenta-irrupcion-de-colectivos-chavistas-en-la-ciudad-venezolana/; SIC Magazine, Systematization of repression in Lara 2017, May 2017. Available at: https://revistasic.org/sistematizacion-represion-en-lara-mayo-2017/; PROVEA, "Lara: Collectives moved from Community Councils to Universities", June 23, 2017. Available at: https://provea.org/paramilitarismo/colectivos-lara-especial-para-provea/.

392 Interview YYIV026.

393 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, para. 57.

394 *Ibid.,* para. 58.

395 *Ibid.,* para. 59.

396 *Ibid.,* para. 60.

397 *Ibid.,* para. 61.

398 *Ibid.,* para. 58.

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state forces and non-state groups" [399]. The NGO Monitor de Víctimas attributed six deaths to colectivos.400 PROVEA stated that the colectivos acted in "open coordination with agents of the public force." [401].

4. Conclusions

299. The Mission concludes that the deaths, injuries, beatings, and detentions inflicted on demonstrators by members of the colectivos constituted arbitrary deprivations of life, torture, and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as arbitrary detentions. The members of the colectivos had no legal authority to use force or to carry out arrests.

300. The Mission recalls its previous conclusion that the colectivos were directly involved in several arbitrary killings and that these occurred with the acquiescence or participation of officials from various state agencies. The Mission also notes that, according to the testimonies gathered, the level of force used by the colectivos, including authorization to carry and use firearms, was coordinated with the authorities prior to their deployment. The prior coordination of the use of lethal force with state authorities, and the subsequent lack of intervention by security forces present at the scenes, place these actions outside any framework of legality applicable to the use of force.

301. The Mission observes that the effects of this pattern of behavior extend beyond its direct victims. The foreseeable presence of armed civilians at demonstrations, as well as the knowledge that participation may lead to acts of violence for which no one is held accountable, has a chilling effect on the exercise of the rights of assembly and freedom of expression, regardless of whether or not violence actually occurs on any given occasion.402

C. Joint security operations

1. *Modus operandi*

302. Joint security operations have been identified as spaces for interaction between state agents and collectives, demonstrating significant levels of coordination and division of roles. The specific analysis of the El Junquito operation highlights the mechanisms by which collectives participated in security tasks alongside security institutions.

2. Case study: the El Junquito operation

303. Óscar Pérez, a CICPC inspector who rebelled against the government of Nicolás Maduro, led armed actions such as the helicopter attack on the Supreme Court in June 2017 and the assault on the Laguneta de la Montaña military barracks in December of that year.403 On January 15, 2018, a joint military and civilian assault operation involving more than 500 personnel located him in El Junquito.404 During the attack, Pérez posted videos and images on Instagram declaring his surrender and requesting a cease-fire to safeguard the lives of civilians and former officers who had taken refuge there.405 Despite this, the property

399 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, para. 554.
400 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, para. 555.
401 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, para. 563.
402 CDH, General Comment No. 37 (2020), CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 23.
403 See Globovisión Videos YouTube video @Globovisión videos, "Minister Reverol confirms the death of Óscar Pérez and six members of armed group", January 16, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY4wpOV1zKk; YouTube video, Inter-American Court of Human Rights "Public Hearing of the Case of Pérez et al. (El Junquito Massacre) v. Venezuela (Part 2)", June 17, 2026. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eh9VzE_XL2g; Document GGDOC002.
404 A/HRC/51/CRP.11, para. 96.
405 Document AB2018 0119CoI_OCI_Vidoscarpaerez.

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It was attacked with lethal weaponry, including an RPG-7 missile, resulting in the deaths of at least nine people406 . President Maduro made a statement the same day congratulating the armed forces that stopped the "terrorist threat"407
The Mission noted that it had received information in the case of Luis Enrique Ramos that members of the collectives may also have participated in the operations, although further investigation is needed.408

304. Among the deaths on the state side were reported the deaths of Andruin Ugarte, alias "Heiker Vásquez," who held the position of FAES intelligence officer and was also a historical leader of the Tres Raíces Collective in the 23 de Enero parish409, and FAES officer Roger Gonzalez. According to information from the autopsy, both had gunshot wounds consisting of execution-style shots to the head410 .

305. The assault was carried out under absolute official secrecy; the State immediately demolished the building, destroyed the victims' clothing and removed forensic images from the autopsies, preventing an independent criminal investigation. 411

306. The Mission obtained testimonies and documents from the Prosecutor's Office that confirm Armed groups were formally summoned by Major Alexander Granko Arteaga (DGCIM) to act as armed security rings on the periphery of the operation.
412

307. The close institutional relationship was evident at the funeral of Heiker Vásquez, where FAES officers paid him armed honors413 together with members of Tres Raíces, who fired rifles into the air to the approval of authorities such as Freddy Bernal (who released an internal audio paying tribute to the armed civilian leader)414 .

3. Conclusions

308. The Mission concludes that the participation in such operations of persons who are not State officials, who have not received training in the use of force, who are not subject to any operational or disciplinary regulation, and who are not

406 YouTube Post, Globovisión Videos, "Minister Reverol confirms the death of Óscar Pérez and six members of an armed group," January 16, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY4wpOV1zKk.

407 YouTube post, Luigino Bracci ROA, "Everything Maduro said about Oscar Pérez and his "Group dismantled this Monday," January 15, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RII2E4UHcr0

408 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 2040.

409 IACHR, *Oscar Pérez and others ("El Junquito Massacre")* (Venezuela), Case No. 14.178. Admissibility and Merits Report, Report No. 272/22 OEA/Ser.L/V/II Doc. 277, November 4, 2022. Available at: https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/Corte/2023/VE_14.178_ES.PDF.

410 Document YYDOC004.

411 The case was submitted to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In its brief of In its submission, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) alleged that the State failed to present documentation demonstrating the opening of an investigation into the deaths of the alleged victims. The Commission also maintained that there were deficiencies in the preservation and handling of evidence relevant to clarifying the facts, noting, among other things, that the building where the executions allegedly took place had been demolished, that the clothing of the alleged victims had not been preserved, that images related to the autopsies had been destroyed, and that custody of the evidence had been assigned to a military authority. According to the IACHR, these circumstances contributed to the persistence of impunity regarding the events in question. IACHR, *Oscar Pérez et al. ("El Junquito Massacre")* (Venezuela), Case No. 14.178. Admissibility and Merits Report, Report No. 272/22 OEA/Ser.L/V/II Doc. 277, November 4, 2022. Available at: https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/Corte/2023/VE_14.178_ES.PDF.

412 Document GGDOC002.

413 YouTube post, agustinsevecanal46, "Police pay tribute to Heiker Vásquez", January 18, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv1_9bvZgGQ

414 YouTube publication. NTN24, "Óscar Pérez Case: The Day of the Massacre (Part 1)", February 5, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS8pzFwFeCQ.

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The fact that these groups are not held accountable through any institutional mechanism is incompatible with the legal requirements governing such actions. The presence of these groups in these operations not only increases the risk of excessive use of force; it eliminates the very framework within which the legality of such use can be assessed and, consequently, any effective possibility of accountability. The Mission also observes that these groups have operated using uniforms and credentials of state security agencies, in contravention of the requirement that law enforcement officials be identifiable as such, with the result that neither the population nor the victims could distinguish between state agents and individuals acting outside any official capacity (see chapter 1).
III. sec. 2 *below).*

309. The Mission also observes that the participation of the colectivos in these operations was not always due to a spontaneous or tolerated presence: in the El Junquito operation, the armed colectivos were formally summoned by a DGCIM officer to act as security rings on the periphery of the operation, and among the state-suppressed dead was an individual who simultaneously held the position of FAES intelligence officer and leader of a colectivo. These elements indicate an integration that goes beyond mere operational coincidence.

310. The Mission also concludes that handing over people detained by collectives to state bodies does not remedy the illegality of the original detention.
An illegal detention from its inception does not become legal through the subsequent intervention of competent authorities; the State is obligated to release any person whose detention it knows or should know lacks a legal basis, and when, instead, it maintains the deprivation of liberty and subjects the person to the criminal justice system, the arbitrariness persists and is aggravated. The State's obligation to investigate deaths and injuries resulting from these operations is an obligation of means that must be fulfilled promptly, and it has not been satisfied in any of the cases examined by the Mission.

D. Selective political repression

311. Collectives have played a central role in the selective persecution of people perceived as opponents, using the surveillance and identification capabilities described above (see section A, *above).*

1. Operation Tun Tun and selective persecution after the 2024 elections

312. The so-called Operation Tun Tun has been described by victims, witnesses, and other sources interviewed by the Mission as a set of practices aimed at identifying, locating, and detaining individuals perceived as opponents, protesters, or activists, frequently in their homes. The term was used publicly by high-ranking state officials since at least 2017 and acquired particular relevance in the context following the presidential elections of July 2014.

313. The information received by the Mission indicates that, within the framework of the so-called Operation Tun Tun, raids were carried out without warrants, arbitrary detentions were made, and individuals were subjected to surveillance and identification through various means, including digital platforms promoted by the authorities (the “Ven App”). Several sources indicated that these practices had an intimidating effect on broad sectors of the population and contributed to inhibiting participation in protest activities and political expression.

314. The Mission examined various public statements by high-ranking officials related to the so-called Operation Tun Tun. Among them was a statement made by President Nicolás Maduro on March 30, 2020, in which he stated:

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> Justice *will come, Operation Tun Tun, to all the terrorists, all the violent ones, all the conspirators, all the plotters [...] Even you, who are watching me, it will come to you. Do you think it won't come to you? Justice will come to you. When they touch you, Tun Tun, don't start crying on social media.*
>
> .

315. The Mission noted that these statements were subsequently referenced by various victims and witnesses when describing practices of searching, locating and detaining people considered to be opponents.

316. Information received by the Mission indicates that members of collectives participated in activities to identify and target individuals perceived as opposition members. Various sources described practices consisting of marking homes, gathering information on residents, and accompanying operations carried out by security forces. The sources also reported raids without warrants, arbitrary arrests, acts of harassment, and threats against members of the political opposition or individuals perceived as critics of the Government.416

317. In these actions, armed civilian groups used their networks of informants and digital platforms, making available to the State security forces the civilian intelligence network they possess in the territory, using the entire network of informants, many of them part of the communal council structure of each neighborhood, to identify, profile and harass political opponents or any citizen who does not agree with any measure or action of the State417 .

318. These groups have systematically marked the doors of political opponents with an X or the letter F (for “fascist”) or a phrase such as “Bolivarian fury.” According to information received, these marks were allegedly used to facilitate subsequent surveillance, raids, or arrests carried out by security forces, sometimes accompanied by armed civilians.418

319. A former member of a colectivo interviewed by the Mission stated that, in Petare, members of colectivos actively participated in operations associated with the so-called Operation Tun Tun and that some of them wore uniforms or credentials of state security agencies. The source stated that “[i]n Petare, the entire Operation Tun Tun was operated by colectivos, who dressed as police officers or state officials, CICPC, DGCIM, and GNB, with credentials.” [419].

2. Arrests, disappearances and kidnappings

320. Another state function that has been delegated, formally or informally, to collectives is the detention of people who are perceived as opposition members, carried out systematically and with total impunity by the collectives. [420]

321. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the arrests carried out by the collectives took place in two main contexts. First, arrests made in the context of the protests, in their vicinity, or in the period following them. Second, arrests of individuals who were opponents or perceived as such, as a form of selective political repression, generally in coordination with the security forces.

322. In the context of the protests, the testimonies obtained from victims and former security officials are consistent in indicating that motorized members of

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[415] A/HRC/45/33CRP.11, para. 472.

416 Interviews YYIV016, YYIV011, YYIV025, YYIV026 and SP1 KAH-C3.

417 Interview HHIV197.

[418] A/HRC/45/33, para. 223.

419 Interview ABIV004.

420 Interview PPIV135. A/HRC/45/33, para. 1981; *Case 35: Marches, collectives and torture (February 12, 2014). Ibid.,* paras. 1608-1644.

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Armed groups positioned themselves near the protests and detained civilians who were participating in them or who were simply in the surrounding areas. After being forcibly detained, the people were taken by motorcycle to clandestine detention centers or handed over to the authorities for formal arrest.421

323. On occasion, arrests were carried out by joint operations with the security forces. Thus, in relation to the 2017 protests, the Mission documented the existence of "immediate action teams", made up of members of collectives and undercover agents who carried out surveillance and arrests outside the framework of the law"422 .

324. The participation of collectives in the arrests was again evident in the context of the demonstrations following the presidential elections of July 28, 2024, especially after President Maduro's public call to "detain at least 2000 people"423. In this cycle of protests, collectives were a key element in the mass arrest of civilians who were then handed over to the State security authorities, and who ended up facing extremely serious charges, such as treason or terrorism424 .

325. Outside the context of the repression of protests, collectives have been used by state authorities to carry out arrests of opposition members or those perceived as such, generally at or near their homes. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that, in some cases, arrests carried out by collectives as a form of selective repression followed direct orders from government authorities at all levels, including through social media and public television programs ,425 or operational orders from security forces.426 As detailed in previous reports by the Mission, arbitrary arrests for political reasons, practiced systematically and widely, have constituted the main mechanism of selective political repression by the State during the period covered by its mandate.

326. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that, in several of the cases it investigated, the targeted arrests carried out by the colectivos were conducted in direct coordination with state security forces. In these cases, thanks to their knowledge of the community environment, the colectivos provide intelligence and profile potential victims to the security forces, who are then responsible for raiding homes and arresting the previously identified individuals. However, the Mission also received testimonies of cases in which the colectivos raided homes, abducted civilians, and subsequently handed them over to state security forces.427 The Mission also received information about the interception of individuals at checkpoints

421 Interview PPIV135, HHIV196, YYIV030 and ABIV005. See Paola Ramirez Case
422 CFyPS2 Interview
423 YouTube post, El País, "VENEZUELA | Maduro claims there are 2,000 detainees in The protests after the elections," August 4, 2024. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoAcqbd9Xeo Video of the statement
424 Interviews YYIV030, YYIV025 and YYIV008.
425 Facebook post, Dnews, "The Venezuelan regime called on Chavista groups and motorcyclists to mobilize after the United States confirmed the capture of Nicolás Maduro. The order was disseminated by Diosdado Cabello," January 4, 2026. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/dnewsok/videos/-el-r%C3%A9gimen-venezolano-llam%C3%B3-a-colectivos-chavistas-y-motorizados-a-movilizarse-/257633114999717 59/; YouTube post, DWNews, Maduro threatens bloodshed and civil war if he loses the elections in Venezuela, July 18, 2024. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RT4lMEoUJt4;
426 Interviews ABIV003 and YYIV030. Instagram post, Efecto Cocuyo, "Maduro Speaks "Operation Tun Tun", May 21, 2025, available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DJ7yGwdp-OF/
427 Interview YYIV026.

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control (“alcabalas”), which were then transferred to the authorities for their arrest or to whom a ransom was demanded for their release428 .

327. According to testimonies received by the Mission, compared to those carried out by security forces, the arrests made by these groups generate great fear among the population due to the level of violence they employ.429 In this regard, the Mission documented cases in which detainees suffered physical abuse before being released or handed over to security forces. The Mission has gathered information from witnesses, victims, former members of security forces, and members of these groups regarding how they beat and mistreated people they captured or apprehended during demonstrations in various states across the country.

328. The information collected refers to blows with blunt objects, shouting and threats – including death threats, being pointed at with firearms at close range, and in the case of women, acts constituting sexual violence.430

329. Along with the arrests, the Mission was able to corroborate a repeated practice of enforced disappearances of opposition members or those perceived as such by collectives, especially in the context of protests. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that, when arrests are carried out by collectives and not directly by the security forces, the likelihood increases that family members or people close to the victims will not know their whereabouts or the conditions of their detention, even when they are subsequently handed over to the State security forces.431

330. Sources interviewed by the Mission emphasized that family members reported that no state authority provided them with information about civilians detained by colectivos. According to testimony collected by the Mission, in some cases, family members managed to contact members of the colectivos directly to request information about the whereabouts and condition of the detained individuals. However, this information was deliberately withheld.432 In the cases investigated by the Mission, individuals remained missing for periods ranging from several days to months.433 The Mission has received information about detentions carried out by colectivos of civilians whose whereabouts remain unknown, despite the families' efforts to locate them.434 One source mentions that she is still searching for her son, who was allegedly taken by the Tres Raíces colectivo more than a year ago. Upon inquiring about his whereabouts, the source obtained information that would suggest that his son had allegedly been taken to the gold mining area, but no one has provided more concrete information that would allow his location435 .

331. Sources emphasize that no state authority or other type of organization provided information about civilians detained by colectivos. The mission was informed that, in some cases,436 family members managed to make direct contact with a member of a colectivo to request information about the location of their relatives. However, in many cases, information and the whereabouts of the individuals were deliberately withheld.

428 Interview ABIV006

429 Interviews YYIV30, HHIV188, YYIV016 and YYIV011

430 Interviews YYIV034, ABIV004 and IIIV117.

431 Case 35: Marches, collectives and torture (February 12, 2014), A/HRC/45/33, paras. 1608 – 1644.

432 Interview ABIV010 and YYIV034.

433 Interviews YYIV30, YYIV016 and YYIV011

434 Interviews HHIV188, YYIV003 and YYIV012.

435 Interview ABIV010.

436 *Ibid.*

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332. Outside of a context of selective political repression, the Mission has received information about kidnappings carried out by collectives against alleged criminals, who in some cases are even killed, carried out in [437] These kidnappings, the informal exercise by these groups of public order maintenance functions, without the State authorities having taken any action in this regard.

333. The legal classification of enforced disappearance or abduction for these acts depends on the possible attribution to the State, that is, whether those responsible are “persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the State.”438 In the context of the protests, the collectives generally acted within the framework of operations coordinated with the security forces, which the Mission considers to constitute authorization, and, depending on the specific operations, support. The subsequent handover of previously detained and disappeared persons to state agents, without any criminal liability whatsoever, also constitutes a form of attribution of the acts to the State through acquiescence.

334. The mission investigated the case of Caso Hely Huerta (2017, a student at the University of Zulia in 2017. She was a victim of beatings and cruel treatment at the time of her arrest by collectives and military personnel, prior to her confinement in the La Ciega command439 .

335. Huerta witnessed members of colectivos stabbing a protester, so he sought refuge in nearby houses. When the colectivos and the GNB tried to violently enter the houses, he decided to climb onto the roof with other young people. About twenty people, including five GNB officers and armed civilians from colectivos (one of them carrying a hammer), stormed the roof, grabbed him by the hair, pointed a firearm at his head while threatening to kill him ("we're going to kill you, you bastard") and hurling stigmatizing insults ("damned guarimbero").

336. The colectivos grabbed him by the limbs to try to throw him from the roof onto the road to "kill him once and for all," stopping when one of them suggested he stay calm. After taking him down from the roof, the civilians continued throwing stones at his head, kicking him violently, and hitting him with slingshots and rolling pins (while a member of the National Guard punched him in the eye), dragging him along the asphalt to take him by motorcycle to the military command.440

337. The Mission investigated the case of Inti Rodríguez, a human rights defender from the organization PROVEA, who was kidnapped by collectives coordinated with police forces on February 12, 2014 in Caracas, after monitoring the student demonstration that culminated in riots and the deprivation of life of Bassil Dacosta and the leader of collectives Juan Montoya.

338. Upon returning to his home in the January 23 parish, Rodríguez was approached at the Agua Salud metro station by four armed civilians (including a woman) who were operating a "checkpoint" in conjunction with metro workers.

437 Interviews YYIV026, YYIV031 and ABIV005.

438 United Nations, International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. 20 December 2006. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/disappearance-convention.pdf

439 Publication Academic Freedom and University Autonomy, References to Venezuela 2010 to 2019. Available at: https://derechosuniversitarios.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Libertad-acad%C3%A9mica-y-autonom%C3%ADa-universitaria-una-mirada-desde-los-derechos-humanos-Referencias-a-Venezuela-2010-2019.pdf

440 Interviews WWIV006, IIIV116 and PPIV063. Publication on Facebook, Cúcuta Online, “Armed groups attack protesters…”, February 23, 2019. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=407576236660026; Infobae, “Chavista groups attacked a rally called by Juan Guaidó in Barquisimeto”, February 29, 2020, Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/02/29/colectivos-chavistas-atacaron-una-concentracion-convocada-por-juan-guaido-en-barquisimeto/

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Caracas. These civilians used subway security cameras to profile, physically assault, and detain people suspected of being opposition members or activists involved in previous student protests. Rodríguez was detained and intimidated while his captors called out to other members: "Look, we have Inti the teddy bear here, come and get him."

339. A few minutes later, a contingent of 40 motorcyclists (20 high-displacement motorcycles) arrived, equipped with long and short weapons, hooded with balaclavas, who beat him and took him to an abandoned plot of land in 23 de Enero that served as a command post for the FAES (later controlled by collectives).
Rodriguez was forced to kneel, repeatedly beaten, interrogated under accusations of murdering Montoya, and held at gunpoint to his head under death threats while his cell phone was checked.

340. His captors had printed photographs of press demonstrations, demonstrating a sophisticated system of infiltration, intelligence gathering, and surveillance. During his detention, they sent extortionate text messages to his family and the PROVEA team, falsely claiming that Rodríguez was being held at El Helicoide prison or that he had died in a confrontation.

341. After two hours of captivity, the leader of the collective received a call and ordered his release, stating: "I just spoke with the minister, and he says not to get carried away, that this guy is from PROVEA, and if we mess with him, we could be in serious trouble." Rodríguez was released under threat and formally reported the incident, but the State did not open any immediate criminal investigation.

342. The mission investigated the case of the detention of a journalist in Catia, in the Sucre parish of Caracas, in early 2025. According to her testimony, on January 8 of that year, two days before the presidential inauguration of Nicolás Maduro, a journalist who was carrying out press work in the Catia area was illegally detained for more than eight hours by members of armed collectives in an office located inside a building owned by the State441 .

343. According to the testimony, the armed civilians—who claimed to be public officials without showing identification—confiscated her cell phone, camera, and memory cards, and also detained her coworker, taking his phone and motorcycle. After several hours, several women belonging to the collective entered the office and physically assaulted the reporter, leaving her severely beaten. When she questioned her captors about how to resolve her illegal detention, they told her she should “talk to [Alexander] “Mimou.”

Vargas,” an influential politician from the PSUV. Finally, the members of the collective, after allegedly speaking with Vargas, released her.442

3. Aggression, harassment and intimidation

344. Armed civilian groups have frequently carried out physical attacks and other forms of harassment and intimidation against representatives of civil society, journalists, political dissidents or their families443 .

345. Opposition leaders have frequently been targeted by attacks from armed civilian groups. In its 2020 report, the Mission documented an attack by members of colectivos on the Federal Legislative Palace in July 2017, in which several opposition members of parliament were assaulted, with the security forces responsible for guarding the building standing by and not taking action.444 In January 2020, the media again reported on the incident.

441 Interview ABIV006.
442 Interview ABIV006.
443 Interviews YYIV016, YYIV026 and WWIV006.
444 A/HRC/45/CRP.11 para. 223.

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that the National Assembly was blocked by the colectivos445. In March of that same year, 16 members of the National Assembly446 reported that members of the colectivos had spray-painted their houses with the words “Bolivarian Fury”447 . According to the testimony of a former general of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) collected by the Mission: *“If an opposition activist is protesting and needs to be silenced, Maduro sends the colectivos, they paint their houses, they intimidate them and their families* [...] *then that person rethinks their way of acting”* [448].

346. The main leaders and candidates of political opposition parties in Venezuela have been subjected to physical attacks, death threats, stigmatization campaigns and serious restrictions on their freedom of movement by members of armed collectives449 .

The Mission has documented several attacks carried out by armed groups against opposition leaders and their teams during political activities. On February 29, 2020, during a rally led by Juan Guaidó in Barquisimeto, Lara state, members of armed groups fired weapons at the vehicle in which Guaidó and his entourage were traveling. At least five members of his security team and supporters were wounded by gunfire. The Mission also documented that the attack was preceded by surveillance of Guaidó and his entourage by agents of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service .

347. In August 2023, groups identified as government supporters attacked a political activity led by Henrique Capriles in Apure state.
According to public complaints made by Capriles and reported by various media outlets, 39 people were injured during the attack.[2] The available information does not allow the Mission to determine whether all the people who participated in the attack belonged to organized groups or to establish the degree of coordination of these groups with the state authorities451 .

348. The Mission also documented acts of intimidation and obstruction against María Corina Machado during her political activities. On July 20, 2023, while Machado and her entourage were traveling on Highway 13 toward Valle de la Pascua, Guárico state, a group of approximately 25 armed, hooded individuals on motorcycles intercepted and blocked their path.
The people who participated in the blockade were identified as members of collectives.452 .

349. Three days later, on July 23, 2023, the headquarters of the Vente Venezuela party in La Fría, Táchira state, was vandalized with graffiti containing death threats against Machado. The threats were publicly attributed to

445 Interview PCHH01; InfoBae, “Juan Guaidó and a group of deputies managed to break the police cordon and held a session in the National Assembly: ‘It was a feat’”, January 7, 2020. Available at: https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/01/07/en-vivo-tension-en-venezuela-juan-guaidointentara-ingresar-a-la-asamblea-nacional-y-el-chavismo-anuncio-que-no-le-permitira-presidir-lasesion/.

446 National Assembly, *Special Report on the Situation of Venezuelan Parliamentarians (Legislative Period 2016-2021)* (2019). Available at: https://www.analitica.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/INFORME-SOBRE-LA-SITUACION-DE-LOS-PARLAMENTARIOS-VENEZOLANOS.pdf

447 El Mundo, “Nicolás Maduro unleashes Bolivarian fury against the opposition”, March 30 2020. Available at: https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2020/03/30/5e822567fdddffd3468b45c5.html/

448 Interview DPAKGP.

449 A/HRC/54/CRP.8, para. 143.

450 *Ibid.,* para. 761.

451 El Nacional, “Number of injured in Chavista attack at Henrique Capriles event in Apure rises to 39”, August 16, 2023, Available at: https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/sube-a-39-el-n%C3%BAmero-de-heridos-por-agresiones-de-adeptos-al-chavismo-denuncia-capriles/48740794

452 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, para. 1059.

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local groups. Subsequently, the governor of Táchira state, Freddy Bernal, publicly accused Machado of having orchestrated the threats against herself.453

350. The Mission previously documented acts of harassment and intimidation against members of opposition parties attributed to collectives. In November 2019, the home of a member of Voluntad Popular was targeted in an act of intimidation: the walls were painted with a crossed-out “F” and leaflets were thrown out the window, one of them on fire, referencing the Bolívar Chávez Antifascist Front and threatening to “neutralize” those who generated “political intolerance.” That same night, the homes of two other members of opposition parties were targeted with threatening messages, and the Mission received information on at least 70 similar incidents against members of opposition parties in various states between 2019 and 2020.⁴⁵⁴

· The Mission concluded that it had reasonable grounds to believe that these acts were perpetrated by civilians belonging to groups acting with the acquiescence of the State, linking this acquiescence to the presence of police officers during the attacks and their lack of effective intervention455 .

351. Other frequent targets of these groups' attacks and intimidation tactics have been the media and media professionals. In this regard, the Mission received reports of the groups' involvement in closing down media facilities and technical equipment, or in attacks against them, as well as acts of harassment and intimidation against journalists.456

Frequently these actions were authorized by the authorities or carried out in cooperation with the security forces.

352. The Mission collected, for example, the testimony of a former employee of the newspaper El Nuevo País, a daily with 40 years of history and national circulation. In November 2017, the newspaper's headquarters, located in the San Agustín sector of Caracas, was seized by approximately 60 armed civilians belonging to collectives from San Agustín del Norte. The takeover lasted a month and, according to the testimony, was coordinated with the PNB457

353. Attacks by armed groups against journalists have been especially frequent in the context of the protests. The Mission received testimonies from several journalists, many of them exiled from the country, who recounted the violent attacks they suffered at the hands of these groups, who physically assaulted them and stole their work materials.458 In some cases, serious gunshot wounds were reported.

354. At times, armed groups have harassed participants in demonstrations over a period of years. The Mission documented the case of a woman who, after her release from prison, became the target of harassment by armed groups and authorities. On March 12, 2014, during a demonstration in her community, armed groups went to her home, firing shots into the air and threatening to kill her, shouting, “We’re coming for you, you damned guarimbera.” Between 2015 and 2017, she reported being followed and intimidated by armed groups at various public events, which she reported to the authorities without receiving a response.459

355. Restrictions on freedom of information and freedom of expression are among the serious violations that the Mission has observed during mass demonstrations and political crises, in which pro-government armed civilian groups harass journalists and media outlets.

453 A/HRC/54/CRP.8, para. 1060.
454 *Ibid.,* paras. 744-745.
455 *Ibid.,* para. 752.
456 Interviews JJIV008, ABIV006 and YYDOC003.
457 Interview JJIV008.
458 Document PPDC102.
459 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, Annex I, paras. 61-62.

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complementary to measures that the government has taken against television channels, radio stations, virtual media and professionals in the world of social communication460 .

356. Harassment and intimidation by these groups have also been directed against ordinary people, including in the context of demonstrations or vigils organized around social grievances perceived as critical of the government. One testimony collected by the Mission recounted that, on July 28, 2025, during a celebration of the election results at his polling station, a member of a local group approached him and said, "That little smile of yours will soon disappear." The following day, this person's 15-year-old son was arrested while playing in the street.461

357. According to information received by the Mission, on August 5, 2025, at around 10 p.m., a gathering in front of the Supreme Court of Justice in Caracas, convened by the organization Mothers in Defense of the Truth to demand the review of the judicial cases of their relatives, was violently dispersed by a group of approximately 70 members of the Carlos Sarría collective, who physically assaulted the women present and stole their belongings, including mobile phones462 .

4. Conclusions

358. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that members of the collectives inflicted beatings, threats, and other ill-treatment during these detentions, and that the individuals affected were selected because of their perceived political opinions. The acts of ill-treatment constitute torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment within the meaning of the Convention against Torture, the definition of which includes acts inflicted with the consent or acquiescence of a public official; in accordance with the Mission's findings, this requirement is met in this case.

359. Regarding the arrests, the Mission considers that any deprivation of liberty carried out by members of the collectives is, by its very nature, arbitrary.
A deprivation of liberty is only legal when it is carried out for reasons and through procedures established by law, by officials authorized to do so, and when the detained person is informed of the reasons for their detention, is officially registered, and is promptly brought before a Venezuelan judicial authority; the ordinary power of a private individual to apprehend a person[463] The collectives do not have the power to make arrests under the law.
in flagrante delicto is limited to their immediate delivery to the competent authorities and does not confer powers to keep them in custody, interrogate them, sanction them, or detain them.464 From this, it can be inferred that every deprivation of liberty practiced by collectives documented in this report was arbitrary from the outset, regardless of the conduct attributed to the detained person, the duration of the deprivation of liberty, or whether they were subsequently handed over to state authorities.

360. The absence of any valid legal basis has a further consequence. Detention carried out by state officials, even if illegal, occurs

460 *Ibid.* Interviews ZZIV015, ABIV006 and JJIV008; A/HRC/60/CRP.4, para. 577.

461 A/HRC/60/CRP.4, para. 427.

462 Interview HHIV187; Swissinfo.ch, "Venezuelan NGO denounces attacks on mother of prisoners" "Politicians at the doors of the Supreme Court," August 6, 2025. Available at: https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/ong-venezolana-denuncia-agresiones-a-madres-de-presos-pol%C3%ADticos-a-las-puertas-del-supremo/89793689/; TalCual, "NGOs and politicians condemn attacks by armed groups on mothers and relatives of political prisoners," August 6, 2025. Available at: https://talcualdigital.com/ong-y-politicos-condenan-ataques-de-colectivos-a-madres-y-familiares-de-presos-politicos/

463 ICCPR, art. 9(1)-(4); HRC, General Comment No. 35: Article 9 (Personal liberty and security), CCPR/C/GC/35, paras. 11-12, 23, 24-30, 31-38.

464 Constitution of 1999, art. 44(1); Organic Criminal Procedure Code, *Official Gazette* no. 6,644 extraord., September 17, 2021, arts. 233-235 and 372-373.

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within an institutional framework that generates records: an order, a record of detained persons, an identified place of custody, and a responsible official.
This framework is what allows the safeguards associated with detention to be operational, including the right of the detained person to know the reasons for their detention and to challenge its legality before a court, as well as the right of family members to be informed of their whereabouts.465 Detentions carried out by armed groups take place completely outside this framework: they do not generate any warrant, any record, or any identifiable responsible official, with the consequence that the safeguards are not only violated, but are also deprived of any possibility of effective application . The Mission recalls that States are obligated to maintain official records of persons deprived of their liberty and that the detention of persons outside the protection of the law is prohibited under all circumstances.466

361. When a person detained by armed groups is subsequently held incommunicado, or when the authorities refuse to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or conceal the person's fate or whereabouts, this conduct violates the prohibition against enforced disappearance. The Mission recalls that the definition of enforced disappearance includes acts committed by individuals or groups of individuals acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the State, and that, according to the Mission's findings, this condition applies to armed groups. The Mission has documented cases in which individuals detained by armed groups were not registered[467] in any official system and in which their families were unable to determine where they were being held.468 The Mission observes that enforced disappearance constitutes a continuing violation as long as the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person remain hidden and that it involves the violation of multiple rights, including the rights to liberty and security of person, recognition as a person before the law, and an effective remedy.

362. The Mission considers the involvement of collectives in this context to be particularly serious for two reasons. First, persecution carried out by neighbors within the victim's own community deprives them of any space for refuge or protection, since the structure responsible for the harm is also the structure that controls the environment in which they live. Second, the absence of any record, official documentation, or legal basis for arrests made by collectives eliminates the procedural safeguards that remain even in cases of unlawful detention by state agents, leaving families without any means of determining the whereabouts of their detained relatives.

[465] ICCPR, art. 9(2)-(4).

466 Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, General Assembly resolution 47/133, arts. 2, 7, 9 and 10; International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, arts. 17(1), 17(3), 18, 20, 22; Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, arts. I a), II, X and XI; ICCPR, arts. 9, paras. 1, 3 and 4, and 16; Human Rights Council, General Comment No. 35, CCPR/C/GC/35, para. 58; ; Human Rights Council, General Comment No. 20, "Prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (article 7)", 44th session (1992), compiled in HRI/GEN/1/Rev.9 (Vol. I), para. 11; Committee against Torture, General Comment No. 2, CAT/C/GC/2, para. 13; Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, General Assembly resolution 43/173, principle 12; United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), General Assembly resolution 70/175, rules 6 to 9; See also A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 35-39.

467 Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, art. II; Convention International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, art. 2; Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, third paragraph of the preamble. See also A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, para. 34.

468 Interview HHIV188, JJIV011, ZZIV014 and YYIV034.

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V. Responsibility

363. Human rights abuses and crimes perpetrated by the groups described in this report give rise to State responsibility under international human rights law, as well as individual criminal responsibility - as the case may be - either under domestic criminal law or international criminal law, or both.

364. Determining the international responsibility of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the actions of civilian armed groups has required establishing a rigorous framework of attribution under international law. In the analysis presented below, the Mission sets forth the technical and legal arguments that allow us to move beyond individual responsibility derived from mere direct or indirect perpetration of acts committed by these groups and infer the international responsibility of the State.

365. The Mission's analysis is based on three normative bodies of international law. The rules governing the international responsibility of States, codified in the International Law Commission's Draft Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, determine when conduct is attributable to the State and when its own conduct engages its responsibility. International human rights law, and in particular the treaties to which the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is a party, determines the content of the obligations binding on the State, including its obligations to prevent, protect against, investigate, and punish violations committed by private actors. International criminal law, and in particular the Rome Statute, governs the individual criminal responsibility of those who commit international crimes or contribute to their commission, which is distinct from and independent of State responsibility.

366. The following sections examine, successively, the attribution of the conduct of the collectives to the State, the acquiescence of the State with respect to such conduct, the failure of its own due diligence obligations, the substantive obligations committed by the documented conduct and individual criminal responsibility.

367. The Mission uses the following terms in the senses indicated. Attribution refers to the operation by which conduct is considered, under the law, an act of the State (Articles 4, 5, and 8 of the ILC Draft Articles). Due diligence refers to the standard of conduct required of the State in fulfilling its obligations to prevent, protect, investigate, and punish; failure to comply with this standard constitutes a wrongful act of the State itself and does not require that the conduct of the private actor be attributable to it. Acquiescence, in this report, refers to an element that forms part of the definition of torture and enforced disappearance, the commission of which by private individuals engages the responsibility of the State when there is consent or acquiescence from its agents. The Mission does not use this term in the sense it has in general international law, where it refers to a form of tacit expression of State consent.

A. State Responsibility

1. Responsibility for human rights abuses committed by non-governmental groups state

368. Based on what has been recorded, analyzed and explored during this period of investigation, the Mission has found no reasonable grounds to believe that collectives, as groups, constitute organs of the State in the sense of Article 4 of the Draft Articles. This does not preclude the conclusion, set forth in Chapter IV, that they operate as an integral part of the apparatus of repression and control.

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This does not apply to the social welfare of the State, nor to the situation of those members of groups who hold a formal position within State bodies, whose conduct in that capacity is indeed attributable to the State. That being the case, if the violations are committed by actors who are not formally part of the State security apparatus, this raises the questions regarding the attribution of conduct examined above.

369. Regardless of the State's responsibility, the Mission examines the human rights responsibilities of the collectives themselves. As discussed throughout this report, the State delegated to these collectives —formally in some cases and de facto in others—functions that ordinarily belong to the authorities, including the administration of food programs and basic services, the maintenance of public order, and the resolution of disputes. Based on this delegation, and the territorial control they exercise in certain areas, these collectives have come to wield de facto effective authority over the population in these sectors: they decide who has access to essential goods, regulate movement, impose sanctions, and mediate conflicts, displacing the competent state institutions.

370. To the extent that a non-state actor exercises that type of authority over a
Given the population, it is worth considering that the de facto authorities are obligated to respect the fundamental human rights of those under their control, to the extent commensurate with the functions they perform and the control they exercise. This approach is consistent with that adopted by other bodies with mandates from the Human Rights Council regarding the human rights responsibilities of *de facto* authorities.
and of non-state actors performing government functions469. The Mission stresses that this characterization is complementary to, and does not displace, the responsibility of the State: where the conduct is attributable to the State, the State is responsible.

371. To the extent that certain conduct is not attributable to the State, the Mission notes that groups could, in certain circumstances, be subject to independent obligations under international human rights law. However, given the degree and scope of conduct attributable to the State, the Mission does not consider it necessary to draw conclusions on this matter in this report and reserves its position on this issue for future investigations.

372. The use of collectives as perpetrators of repression does not necessarily absolve the State of responsibility. In this regard, the Mission analyzed the State's international legal responsibility arising from human rights abuses committed by collectives from two distinct and independent perspectives: the State's responsibility arising from the actions of collectives attributable to the State itself, on the one hand, and the State's responsibility for its failure to exercise due diligence in preventing abuses committed by collectives, within the framework of the State's obligation to protect against human rights abuses committed in its territory and/or under its jurisdiction. Neither of these grounds depends on the other: they can be applied to different behaviors or, when the facts so justify, to the same behavior.

469 See Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/34/64, Annex I (Applicable Law), para. 5 and A/HRC/28/69, para. 169; Joint Statement by Independent United Nations Human Rights Experts on Human Rights Responsibilities of Armed Non-State Actors (25 February 2021), available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/02/joint-statement-independent-united-nations-human-rights-experts-human-rights

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2. Factual evidence of the relationship between the State and collectives

373. To determine the possible attribution of international responsibility to the State arising from the acts of the groups, the Mission first analyzed the main relevant factual indicators as set out in previous sections of this report. These indicators do not, either individually or cumulatively, constitute an independent criterion for attribution. However, they are relevant in clarifying the legal questions concerning the attribution of responsibility. The factual indicators described below have been set out in other sections of this report; the Mission does not reproduce them here but refers to them. Throughout, the Mission applies its standard of proof of reasonable grounds to believe.

a) Legal authorization and delegation of governmental functions

374. While Venezuelan law does not recognize an autonomous legal category of "collectives," these groups have found legal and institutional support through a variety of state-developed bodies for community participation and the decentralized management of powers—under the People's Power model—as well as for the incorporation of civilians into security operations —in accordance with the doctrine of the "civic-military union." These bodies constitute essential pillars of the political model promoted by the governments of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro after the failed constitutional reform of 2007, outside the framework of the existing constitutional order.

375. On the one hand, the Organic Law of People's Power and the Organic Law of Communes (2010), and their subsequent legislative and regulatory developments, transferred powers belonging to the public authorities—including the allocation of subsidized food, price controls, and the supervision of basic services—to the bodies of People's Power. As analyzed above, thanks to their community influence, collectives came to assume control, directly or indirectly, of communal councils, communes, and other bodies, and thus the execution of the powers attributed to these organs.470

376. The collectives also infiltrated the various security structures and plans implemented by the State that sought to incorporate the civilian population into security, public order, and national defense efforts. Among the most relevant components of this scheme are the Bolivarian Militia, originally established in 2005 and integrated into the FANB since 2014, and the Peace Brigades (CUPAZ), deployed from 2019 onwards as organs of popular mobilization and internal security against alleged threats of destabilization or coups d' état.471

The creation of these bodies contributed to the institutionalization of the collectives, which became widely integrated within them while maintaining their own operational capacity and functional independence. Meanwhile, the various security plans implemented by the Government, such as the Zamora Plan (2017) and the Great Mission Quadrants for Peace (2018), continued to legitimize the intervention of armed civilians in functions that constitutionally belong to the State security forces . ⁴⁷²

b) Material support and financing

377. The Mission's investigations have verified that the collectives depend on the State for their existence and operational capacity. The State systematically provides them with the means essential for their existence and deployment, including motorcycles, communications equipment, weapons and ammunition, and, in the case of the CUPAZ, official uniforms and standard-issue weapons. Their funding is channeled

470 See chapters II and III *below.*
471 *Ibid.*
472 See Chapter III *below.*

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through public mechanisms, including specific budgets allocated to ministries, municipalities and social programs, partly without supervision or 473 State control of regulated markets, including control mechanisms.
Subsidized food (e.g., "CLAP bags") and fuel also support their daily activities.
[474] To the extent that these groups generate their own income, it largely stems from illicit economies that the state deliberately tolerates in the areas under its control. Both the resources the state provides directly and the income it allows these groups to obtain, therefore, originate from decisions made by state authorities.

378. Material support does not in itself establish the attribution or granting of governmental authority. However, when certain resources are provided as instruments for the exercise of an assigned function, as is the case with the weapons and uniforms delivered to the CUPAZ for the performance of paramilitary functions, such support is relevant to demonstrating the effective exercise of governmental functions in practice. At the same time, this material dependency constitutes an indication of the State's failure to fulfill its obligation to prevent, contain, and dismantle irregular armed groups: arming, equipping, and financing a group of this nature is the antithesis of the conduct required by due diligence.

b) Institutional integration

379. As established in this report, the collectives are integrated into the institutional structures of the State, rather than operating outside or parallel to them. Their members have been formally incorporated into State security agencies, including the FAES and the DGCIM; the collectives have assumed de facto control of the communal bodies through which public functions and State resources are administered; the CUPAZ have been incorporated into the system of grassroots structures and provided with official uniforms and regulation weapons; members of the collectives have operated using uniforms and credentials of State security agencies; and facilities that functioned as police command posts have been placed under the control of collectives.

[475] The Mission has
It has been observed that these groups have assumed functions of security, justice, administration of basic services and allocation of social programs, and that they participate in joint operations as a functional part of the state apparatus. [476]

380. This evidence is relevant in two ways. First, it establishes the capacity in which the groups acted when performing the functions described below, that is, under the guise of official authority and not as private individuals *(see* section vi, below). Second, the sustained maintenance for more than a decade of an armed structure using public funds, state infrastructure, and social programs constitutes an indication of a coordinated state policy, relevant to the analysis of compliance with the due diligence obligation.

c) Operational coordination with security and intelligence forces

381. The Mission has noted the participation of collectives in joint operations with state security and intelligence agencies, including, among other examples: the presence of SEBIN officials at the sites of attacks perpetrated by collectives in 2014; the links of these groups with SEBIN and DGCIM; the passage of collective members through cordons established by the GNB under Plan Zamora in 2017; their deployment in perimeters previously cleared by security forces; and the carrying out of patrols

473 See Chapter III *below.*
474 *Ibid.*
475 See chapters III and IV *below.*
476 *Ibid.*

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joint operations and arrests based on intelligence information in 2024. This body of evidence constitutes the main relevant evidence to determine the coordination with state agents or at least the tolerance of the State towards the abuses committed.

382. The Mission distinguished between conduct that demonstrates acquiescence on the part of state agents, such as the deliberate opening of security cordons or the withdrawal of state forces to allow the collectives to operate, and conduct that demonstrates state direction or control over an operation, such as their integration into a joint chain of command, the assignment of specific tasks, or the direction of the collectives by state officials present at the scene. Both types of conduct support different legal conclusions regarding the international responsibility of the State, ranging from responsibility for lack of due diligence to the direct attribution of the conduct in question to the State.

d) Political-party chain of command

383. The CUPAZ operate under the direction of the PSUV and its national leadership, and there is evidence that high-ranking Party leaders have issued instructions for 477 their activation.

The Mission observes that the exercise of command through a political party does not, in itself, constitute direction by a state body for the purposes of the principles governing the attribution of state responsibility. The relevant question is whether the person who gave the instruction did so in the exercise of state functions. When those who lead groups hold high public office, the distinction between party command and state command becomes blurred in practice.

The Mission considers that this circumstance constitutes a relevant contextual element for the analysis of the consideration of the actions of the collectives as acts of State and, at the same time, represents direct evidence of instigation, the existence of a State policy and acquiescence.

e) Instigation and public support

384. Public statements by the highest authorities, including statements attributed to President Maduro and the elements collected in the “official discourse” column of Table 2, constitute evidence of instigation and a policy of promoting or encouraging such conduct. Thus, in January 2024, President Maduro publicly stated: “I am one of you, and if one day the fascists should harm me or attempt to harm me, I leave it in your hands to do whatever you have to do to restore justice and peace in Venezuela.”

Activate the Bolivarian fury."478 These statements support the conclusion that the State failed to fulfill its due diligence obligations and are also relevant to support the existence of a state policy element in the context of the analysis of crimes against humanity.

f) Exercise of governmental functions

385. The Mission has documented in this report elements that demonstrate that the collectives exercise in practice functions of a governmental nature, including the resolution of disputes and the imposition of sanctions, displacing the ordinary criminal justice system; the performance of public order maintenance and parapolice functions; and the coercive administration of benefits

subsidized, including the use of CLAP as a mechanism of punishment or coercion. 479
In conjunction with the above *(see* paragraph (i) *above),* these elements satisfy the requirement relating to the effective exercise of governmental functions for the purpose of establishing the international responsibility of the State for internationally wrongful acts, as will be discussed below.

477 See chapters II and III *below.*
478 See Chapter III *below.*
479 See chaps. II, III and IV *below.*

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g) Impunity and lack of investigation and punishment

386. The systematic lack of investigation or punishment of violence perpetrated by collectives480 constitutes both an element of proof of the State's acquiescence and an autonomous violation of its obligations to investigate, punish and guarantee effective resources to the victims.

387. This omission is not due to a lack of complaints: when victims or human rights organizations have attempted to file formal complaints with the courts, the cases have been shelved or dismissed on bureaucratic technicalities, and in the few high-profile cases where an investigation has been opened, the proceedings have been delayed. The Mission observes

indefinite delays that have resulted in the dismissal of the cases. [481] Furthermore, the leaking of information about the complaints filed has exposed the complainants to reprisals from the groups, which constitutes an additional obstacle to access to justice and aggravates the failure of the state to guarantee effective remedies.

3. The State's responsibility for the direct attribution of the acts of collectives

388. The Mission examined the international responsibility of the State for human rights abuses committed by collectives as non-state actors who, in certain circumstances, have exercised state or quasi-state functions, with the collaboration and/or under the control of State organs.

389. According to the general rules of international law on state responsibility, codified in the Draft Articles (DAP) on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts of the United Nations International Law Commission (ILC), a State is responsible for any conduct that constitutes a breach of an international obligation and is attributable to it.482

390. As established in the ILC Draft Articles, conduct is attributable when it is carried out by an organ of the State, or when a person or group is in fact acting on instructions from, or under the direction or control of, the State in carrying out the specific conduct in question.483 On the basis of the evidence gathered, the Mission examined three possible modes of attribution:

a) When collectives act in a situation of complete dependence on the State, in such a way that they must be equated to state bodies484 .

b) When collectives act in the exercise of public powers conferred by law485 .

c) When collectives act on instructions or under the direction or control of the State486 .

480 See Chapter III.
481 *Ibid.*
482 International Law Commission (ILC), *Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts,* annexed to United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/56/83, 12 December 2001 (hereinafter, “ILC Draft Articles”), art. 2.
483 *Ibid.* arts. 4, 8.
484 *Ibid.* art. 4.
485 *Ibid,* art. 5.
486 Under Article 8 of the ILC Draft Articles, specific conduct is attributable to a State when it has been carried out on the instructions of, or under the direction or control of, State organs. This provision reflects the customary rule of attribution established by the International Court of Justice, according to which it must be shown that the State exercised effective control over the operations in

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391. In the following sections, these different modes of attribution are analyzed in light of the evidence gathered in this report, with a view to determining the international responsibility of the State in relation to human rights abuses committed by groups.

a) Equivalence to state bodies (art. 4 PDA)

392. The Mission does not consider it proven that any group operates in a situation of complete dependence on the State, in all areas of its activity, such that it should be equated with a state body. These groups maintain their own leadership structures, exercise control over their own territories, and pursue their own economic interests, including illicit economies; some have acted with a degree of autonomy sufficient to raise concerns among the central authorities. Their material and financial dependence on the State is considerable, but it does not reach the strict and exceptional threshold required by Article 4, which requires complete dependence in all areas of activity and not merely dependence on or support from the State.

393. Consequently, the Mission concluded that the threshold provided for in Article 4 is not met, and therefore the State's responsibility for the actions must be assessed in accordance with other legal assumptions, as discussed below.

394. A different matter is that of those members of the collectives who hold a formal position within State bodies. The Mission has concluded, with reasonable grounds to believe, that members of the collectives registered in the battalions of the Territorial Militia, a special component of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, pursuant to the reform of the Organic Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, and that some have served in State security forces (see Chapter III *above).* According to Article 4, paragraph 2, of the Draft Articles, a State body is understood to be any person or entity that holds that status under domestic law. The conduct of such persons, when acting in that capacity, is attributable to the State by virtue of Article 4, regardless of whether they exceed their powers or contravene instructions. This conclusion refers to conduct carried out in the exercise of that status, and not to every act performed by any person registered in such structures.

b) Groups acting in the exercise of public authority powers (art. 5 PDA)

395. As has been established in this report, the collectives administer a parallel system for conflict resolution and the imposition of sanctions,

whose course the alleged violations were committed. See ILC, *Report of the Commission to the General Assembly on the work carried out at its fifty-third session,* A/CN.4/SER.A/2001/Add.1 (Part 2); Commentary on Article 8, pp. 49-51. ICJ, *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America),* Merits, Judgment of 27 June 1986, ICJ *Reports* 2986, paras. 109-115. The International Court of Justice has confirmed that the rules of attribution contained in the Draft Articles reflect customary international law. See ICJ, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro),* Judgment of 26 February 2007, ICJ *Reports* 2007, paras. 385, 398-401. Such control must be demonstrated with respect to each operation during which the specific conduct occurred, and not generally with respect to all the activities of the group in question (see *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro,* para. 400). The Mission does not apply the "overall control" criterion *formulated* by the ICTY in *Prosecutor v. Tadiÿ,* IT-94-1-A, Appeals Chamber, judgment of 15 July 1999, paras. 116-145. The ICJ expressly examined that criterion and concluded that, whatever its usefulness in determining the international character of an armed conflict, it is not suitable for attributing conduct to a State, since it "strains too much, almost to the point of breaking, the link that must exist between the conduct of State organs and the international responsibility of the State." *Bosnia and Herzegovina v.*
Serbia and Montenegro, paras. 406) (unofficial translation). This approach is consistent with that adopted by the Mission in its previous reports, which has assessed the wrongful conduct of non-State actors on the basis of complete dependence, effective control or acquiescence, A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 2080; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 319.

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They perform public order maintenance and paramilitary functions, and control the distribution of subsidized benefits, exercising these functions coercively over the population. By their nature and purpose, these are powers inherent to public authority.

396. Pursuant to Article 5 of the ILC Draft Articles, the conduct of a person or entity that is not a State organ may be attributable to the State when two elements are present: (i) the granting, by the State's domestic law, of powers to exercise public authority and (ii) the entity's actions in that capacity in the specific case. Article 7, in turn, provides that such conduct is attributable to the State even when the person or entity empowered to exercise public functions exceeds the powers conferred upon it or acts in contravention of instructions.

397. The Mission considers the first element, concerning the powers transferred through the legislation of People's Power, to be established. The Organic Law of People's Power (2010), the Organic Law of Communes (2010), and the Organic Law for Community Management of Powers (2014) transferred powers belonging to the public sector to the People's Power bodies, including the allocation of subsidized food, price controls, and the supervision of basic services. These are organic laws, in force throughout the period under review, whose status as "domestic law of the State" for the purposes of Article 5 is indisputable.

398. The Mission also notes that Presidential Decree No. 2,323, of May 13, 2016, declaring a State of Exception and Economic Emergency, assigned "functions of surveillance and organization… to maintain public order and guarantee security" to the Local Committees for Supply and Production, the communal councils and other grassroots organizations of People's Power (see para. 195 above). This is a published normative act that confers public order functions on the same bodies referred to in the preceding analysis, and therefore satisfies the requirement of authorization by the State's domestic law for the purposes of Article 5. The Mission specifies, however, that this authorization refers to the organs of People's Power and not to collectives as such—so the reasoning set out below is applicable (see paragraph 389 below)—and that its temporal scope begins in 2016.487

399. As established in this report, the transfer of public resources to collectives operates through an administrative mechanism managed by the Ministry of Communes. To receive resources, these collectives must first be constituted as a Grassroots Organization of People's Power or a Socio-Productive Organization and register with the Communal Integration System, through which the State transfers resources directly, ordinarily for the financing of local development projects, thus avoiding the controls that the Public Procurement Law would otherwise impose. Registration in this system enables the organization to manage public resources and implement projects in the areas under its control. The Organic Law of the Communal Economic System empowers socio-productive organizations and other instances of People's Power to receive and administer the resources thus transferred.488

400. The Mission observes that these legal forms are not conferred upon collectives as such. However, members of collectives constitute, manage, and operate the entities to which the law transfers powers and resources, including foundations, cooperatives, socio-productive organizations, and, in certain sectors with a strong presence of collectives, the communal councils whose management they have come to absorb.489 This distinction does not alter the analysis under Article 5.

The entity empowered by the State's domestic law remains the organization

487 See chaps. II, III and IV.

488 Organic Law of the Communal Economic System, *Official Gazette* No. 6,011 Extraordinary, December 21, 2010, arts. 27.6, 58, 59 and 61.

489 See chapters II and III.

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registered or the communal body, and the exercise of the transferred powers continues to constitute the exercise of public authority powers conferred by law. The entities act through the natural persons who comprise and direct them, and the affiliation of said persons does not deprive the entity of the authorization conferred upon it by law. When the powers transferred through the legislation of People's Power are exercised through entities constituted, directed, and operated by members of the collectives, the requirement of authorization under the State's internal law is considered satisfied.

401. In relation to the CUPAZ, the Mission notes that their deployment from 2019 onwards took place at the initiative of the Executive Branch and that the State provided them with official uniforms and regulation weapons for the performance of public order and intelligence functions.[490] However, the Mission has not been able to identify a published normative act that formally confers public powers on these structures and, consequently, does not formulate a conclusion based on Article 5 with respect to the CUPAZ, without prejudice to the relevance of these elements for the analysis under Article 8 and the State's due diligence obligations.

402. The Mission does not reach conclusions on the basis of Article 5 regarding conduct that is not exercised through entities to which powers have been transferred, including those cases in which groups act jointly with agents or organizations of the State, while remaining distinct from them.[491] In such cases, the element of authorization under the State's domestic law required by that provision is not present. The State's responsibility for such conduct is examined in light of State acquiescence and its due diligence obligations.

403. The second element required by Article 5 is that the entity acted in that capacity in the specific case. As established in this report, entities constituted, directed, and operated by members of the collectives have administered public resources and implemented projects in the areas under their control, and in certain sectors, the collectives have exercised the powers transferred through communal bodies whose management they absorbed.492 The Mission considers that, in such circumstances, these powers were exercised in the capacity conferred by law and not by private individuals acting in a private capacity.

404. Attribution is not precluded by the unlawfulness of the conduct. Pursuant to Article 7, the conduct of a person or entity empowered to exercise public authority is attributable to the State even when it exceeds its powers or acts in contravention of instructions, provided it does so in that capacity. Consequently, conditioning access to subsidized food and basic services on political conformity, withdrawing such benefits as a form of punishment, excluding individuals from beneficiary registers for political reasons, and using registers compiled for the administration of social assistance programs to identify and locate individuals perceived as opponents, remain attributable to the State even if no conferred power authorized such acts. The Mission distinguishes from these behaviors those of a strictly private nature, such as ordinary extortion or abusive conduct unrelated to any delegated official function, which are not attributable on this basis and must be analyzed, as appropriate, in light of state due diligence obligations or as criminal conduct of groups subject to domestic legislation.

405. Consequently, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the conduct carried out in the exercise of the powers transferred through the

490 See Chapters II & III.
491 See Chaps. II, III & IV.
492 See Chapters II & III.

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legislation of People's Power, when such powers are exercised through entities constituted, directed and operated by members of the collectives, attributable to the State in accordance with Articles 5 and 7 is of the Draft Articles of the CDI.

406. The Mission clarifies the temporal scope of this conclusion. The powers transferred through the legislation cited above were in force for most of the period examined in this report. The Mission emphasizes that the conclusions presented in this section are based on the information collected and analyzed to date. The phenomenon examined is broad and complex and requires continued research. The Mission anticipates further investigation in future research into aspects that it has not been able to examine exhaustively in this report, including the funding mechanisms of these groups, their internal composition, and their relationships with other levels of government and with private sector actors.

407. With regard to conduct that falls outside the scope of Article 5, the State's responsibility is examined in light of State acquiescence and its due diligence obligations.

c) Groups acting on instructions from State bodies or under their direction or control (art. 8 PDA)

408. Under article 8 of the ILC Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, specific conduct may also be attributable to a State when it was carried out on the instructions of, or under the direction or control of, State organs. Such control must be demonstrated with respect to each operation during which the specific conduct occurred, and not generally with respect to the group's activities as a whole.493

409. The attribution of international responsibility under article 8 of the Draft Articles requires that the specific operation during which a violation occurred was carried out on the instructions of, or under the direction or control of, State organs. Control must be demonstrated with respect to each particular operation and not with respect to the relationship between the parties in general terms; however, a single State-directed operation may, in principle, serve as a basis for attributing responsibility for multiple human rights violations committed within its framework.

410. The Mission recalls some of the elements established in Chapter III that are relevant to this analysis: that the mobilization orders of the collectives came from state bodies, including the Presidency of the Republic —through a liaison of the Honor Guard of the Miraflores Palace—, the Executive Vice Presidency, ministries, governorships and state security bodies; that the collectives obey a higher command instance that maintains direct contact with the state authorities and receives operational orders from them; and that the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives had until 2024 the express authorization of the authorities for the use of lethal force against demonstrators494 .

411. Attributing responsibility for the actions of collectives to the State, in accordance with Article 8, requires evidence of the assignment of specific tasks, the existence of a chain of command or joint planning, the direction of the collectives by State officials during the operation, or their integration into a State-led operation. To carry out this analysis, the Mission examined a selection of five events documented in the

493 ICJ, *Nicaragua v. United States,* Judgment, June 27, 1986, paras. 115; *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro,* Judgment, February 26, 2007, paras. 399–400.

494 See Chapters II, III, and IV.

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This report identifies in detail the links between the State and the actions of the groups (see Table 2).

Table 2
Links between collectives and the State during the period 2014-2024

Event	Official discourse (instigation)	Actions of the groups	Link with the State
2014 Demonstrations	Call to the "Bolívar-Chávez Battle Units" (UBCh) to defend the revolution.	Armed attacks against student gatherings.	Coordination of the presence of officials of SEBIN in the same points of attack by armed civilians (Bassil Da Costa case).
2017 Demonstrations	Activation of the "Zamora Plan" (joint military and civilian forces).	Use of firearms against protesters and siege of residential areas under GNB surveillance.	State management: the Plan Zamora institutionalized the joint action of the FANB with the collectives; separately, opening of cordons.
Operation The Junquito (2018)	Presidential statement congratulating the forces that stopped the "terrorist threat".	Acting as armed security rings on the periphery of the operation.	State leadership: formal convening of the collectives by an official of the DGCIM, accredited by Prosecutor's Office documents.
Humanitarian aid crisis (2019)	Statements regarding the defense of the territory by "the organized people".	Blocking of border bridges and attacks on aid trucks with long guns.	Logistics: use of official vehicles and support from local governments for the transfer of these groups.
Operation Tun Tun (2024)	References to the “civic-military-police union” to defeat the “coup d'état”.	Joint patrols in popular neighborhoods and marking of houses of opposition people (“Operation Tun Tun”).	Operational control: The groups act as the enforcement arm of neighborhood intelligence for arbitrary arrests massive.

Source: Prepared by the Mission

412. The approach adopted by the Mission stems from the requirement that control be demonstrated with respect to each specific operation. When the State itself has designed, ordered, and publicly announced an operation, as occurred with Plan Zamora and Operation Tun Tun, and incorporates collectives into its execution, the operation relevant for the purposes of Article 8 is the State plan itself. It follows that violations committed by collectives in the execution of that plan, within its temporal and operational scope and in accordance with the established procedures, are attributable to the State without the need to demonstrate specific direction with respect to each individual incident that comprises it.

413. When a specific incident is documented within the scope of one of these plans and its *modus operandi* matches the established pattern for that plan, the Mission considers that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the incident was part of the State-directed operation. This inference does not extend to events occurring outside the temporal or operational scope of an identified plan.

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414. The Mission distinguished between evidence of state direction or control and evidence of state acquiescence. Conduct such as the deliberate opening of security cordons to allow attacks by collectives, or the withdrawal or inaction of security forces present at the scene, constitutes evidence of acquiescence but, on its own, does not demonstrate that the State directed or controlled the operation.

415. In this regard, the Mission does not consider the general pattern of integration, financing, and coordination between the State and the collectives to be sufficient, in and of itself, to attribute to the State conduct occurring outside the framework of an identified operation, nor does it infer direction or control with respect to operations for which there is no evidence of such direction or control. Conduct that falls outside an operation for which direction or control has been established, including conduct that merely demonstrates acquiescence and territorial or economic activities carried out by the collectives on their own behalf, is examined later in relation to State due diligence obligations and, when not attributable to the State, in relation to the collectives' own responsibility as armed groups.

i) The repression of the 2014 protests

416. In relation to the protests of February 12, 2014 in Caracas, on the occasion of Youth Day, the report has documented the simultaneous actions of the Bolivarian National Police, collectives, SEBIN officials and plainclothes agents who made excessive use of force to repress the protesters.

This included the indiscriminate use of firearms, which resulted in three deaths, including Bassil Da Costa and Juan Montoya, as well as dozens of injuries. [495]

417. Also during the same night, a checkpoint operated by a group was recorded at the Agua Salud metro station, located in the 23 de Enero Parish. The checkpoint was operated jointly with metro workers, that is, public employees, using the system's own security cameras to identify people linked to the opposition, some of whom were beaten and others handed over to the authorities.

[496]

418. The subsequent operation to detain people involved individuals in civilian clothes who traveled on high-powered motorcycles used by state security forces and took place in downtown Caracas, a location that currently serves as a command post for the National Police, under the direction of collectives.

[497] During that operation, the group's leader communicated with a Minister, who gave instructions that determined the victim's fate. [498]
The Mission also noted a contemporaneous communication from a high-ranking military officer addressed to the Minister of Defense and the CEOFANB, reporting on the participation of collectives in internal order operations with the knowledge and support from state entities and competent authorities. [499] This took place in the context of a parallel operation that coordinated with the collectives and operated an “immediate action team” in charge of surveillance and arrests outside the law, as described to the Mission by General Cristopher Figuera, at that time director of SEBIN. [500]

419. Taken together, these elements demonstrate joint action by state agents and collectives, the use of state infrastructure and personnel, a chain of command reaching the ministerial level, and the knowledge and support of the highest levels of the defense apparatus. However, the Mission

495 See chapters III and IV.
496 See chapters III and IV.
497 Interview YYIV034.
498 *Ibid.*
499 A/HRC/45/CRP.11, para. 2076.
500 *Ibid.,* para. 1981.

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It notes that the documented ministerial instruction operated to restrict, and not to initiate, the conduct in question, and that the report does not allow one to determine who planned or ordered the deployment of the collectives on February 12, 2014.

420. Based on the available evidence, the Mission considers that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the actions of the collectives on that date were part of a coordinated internal order maintenance operation carried out with the support and knowledge of State authorities. However, the evidence gathered by the Mission to date is not conclusive regarding State direction or control of the collectives' actions during the events of February 12, 2014. In any case, the State's responsibility for these events is established below in relation to its failures to fulfill its due diligence obligations.

ii) The repression of the 2017 protests

421. As the Mission documented in previous reports, Plan Zamora was a civic-military operation ordered by the Executive Branch in April 2017 as the cornerstone of a combined military and civilian strategy, through which the joint action of the Armed Forces with the collectives and militias to repress social protest was institutionalized.501 In its implementation, the Government expanded the scope of action of the collectives and state officials provided them with weapons, vehicles and logistical resources.502 The integration of the collectives into the operation was an inherent element of the state design itself and not a mere tolerated consequence of its implementation.

422. Consequently, the Mission considers that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the actions of the collectives carried out in execution of Plan Zamora were conducted under the direction of the State and that the violations committed within that framework are attributable to the State pursuant to Article 8. The Mission distinguishes, however, those actions that occurred during the same period that merely demonstrate acquiescence, in particular the opening of security cordons to allow the collectives to attack and subsequently withdraw. Considered in isolation, these actions demonstrate a State omission in preventing the events, rather than direction of the operation, and are examined further below.

iii) The El Junquito operation

423. As previously stated, on January 15, 2018, a military and police operation involving more than 500 personnel was deployed against Óscar Pérez and others in El Junquito. The Mission obtained testimonies and documents from the Prosecutor's Office confirming that armed groups were formally summoned by Major Alexander Granko Arteaga, an officer of the DGCIM, to act as armed security rings around the perimeter of the operation.503

The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the participation of the collectives in said operation responded to a formal call made by an identified state official, with assignment of a specific role within a state-directed operation, and that the violations committed by the collectives in its execution are attributable to the state pursuant to Article 8.

iv) Humanitarian Aid Crisis (2019)

424. In relation to the so-called humanitarian aid crisis – the blocking by security forces of a humanitarian aid convoy promoted by Juan Guaidó at the Simón Bolívar International Bridge in Táchira State on the border with Colombia – the Mission has extensively documented the use of vehicles

501 See A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 84, 183-185, 216-224, 229-232, 1507, 1549-1558 and 2061-2063; A/HRC/54/CRP.8, para. 143; A/HRC/57/CRP.5, paras. 563-564 and 652.

502 See A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 219-221, 1615, 2074-2077; A/HRC/51/CRP.3, paras. 51, 64 and 80.

503 See Chapter III.

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Officials and state government support for the transport of groups to the border area constitute evidence of material and logistical support and, at its most extreme, state acquiescence. However, the Mission does not consider that these elements alone establish the existence of state direction or control over the operation.

v) Operation Tun Tun (2024)

425. As documented in previous sections of the report, Operation Tun Tun is the informal name given to the campaign carried out by the State's own security agencies to arrest real or perceived opponents in their homes after the July 2024 elections. The name was incorporated into the official discourse of President Maduro and other high-ranking State officials, and was institutionalized in the first weeks of August of that same year.
year.[504]

426. The State established the information infrastructure for the operation, including a government-promoted mobile application for anonymous reporting by residents. Within the framework of this operation, the collectives participated in joint operations as a functional part of the state apparatus; they carried out arrests based on profiles developed from records used for the distribution of social benefits in the districts under their control; and they handed over the detainees to state authorities, who subsequently prosecuted them formally, including for terrorism offenses.
[505] A former member of a collective interviewed by the Mission stated that, in Petare, Operation Tun Tun was carried out entirely by collectives whose members wore uniforms and carried credentials from state security agencies, including the CICPC, the DGCIM, and the GNB.506

427. A former member with a relevant role within the collectives declared to the Mission that coordination was directly linked to governors, ministers and the Presidential Honor Guard; that a colonel acted as a liaison and direct communication channel with the collectives; and that, within the framework of the strategies for protecting the Government, each collective was assigned a specific area, carrying out intelligence and shock operations coordinated with the authorities.507

428. These elements, namely, an operation designed and announced by the State, a target identification infrastructure provided by the State, the actions of collectives under State insignia, and the handover of detainees to the institutional apparatus of the State, exceed mere parallel or tolerated activity and suggest that the actions of the collectives were part of a State-directed operation.
The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the human rights abuses committed by the collectives in the execution of Operation Tun Tun are attributable to the State in accordance with Article 8 of the Draft Articles on State Responsibility.

vi) Conclusions on the application of Article 8

429. The Mission concludes that when the State itself has designed, ordered, and publicly announced an operation, and incorporated collectives into its implementation, the operation relevant for the purposes of Article 8 is the State plan itself, and the violations committed by collectives in implementing that plan, within its temporal and operational scope, are attributable to the State. On this basis, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the violations committed by collectives in implementing the Zamora Plan, which institutionalized joint action by the

504 See Chapters II, III & IV; A/HRC/57/CRP.5, paragraphs 644–649 and 664–666; Nicolás Maduro, speech during the reception of a youth march at Miraflores Palace, Caracas, August 5, 2024, available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdCWANxflKc&t=701s, minutes 11:41–12:13.

505 See chapters III and IV.

506 *Ibid.*

507 See Chapter III.

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The actions of the Armed Forces and the collectives in the repression of the protests, and of Operation Tun Tun, designed and announced by the State and within which the collectives identified, detained and handed people over to the custody of state agencies, are attributable to the State under Article 8.

430. With regard to the events of 12 February 2014, the Mission has documented the joint actions of state agents and collectives, the use of state infrastructure and personnel, and a chain of command extending to the ministerial level. However, it considers the evidence concerning the direction or control of the operation to be less conclusive than in the two cases mentioned above and, consequently, does not draw a conclusion on that basis.

431. In relation to the events of 2019, the use of official vehicles and the support provided by state governments constitute evidence of material and logistical support and, at its maximum degree, state acquiescence, rather than direction or control of the operation.

4. State responsibility for failure to exercise due diligence

432. The second basis for State responsibility stems from the failure to fulfill its obligations to prevent, protect, investigate, and punish, under international human rights law. This basis for State responsibility is independent of whether or not the acts of groups are attributed to the State and, consequently, of whether they are characterized as acts of the State.

433. Regardless of whether specific acts by groups give rise to State responsibility under the various modes of attribution discussed above, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela incurs responsibility for its failure to comply with its own obligations under international human rights law. The obligation to protect human rights, which derives from both international treaties ratified by the State and customary international law, requires States to protect individuals against violations committed by private actors, exercise due diligence to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm, and investigate, punish, and provide effective remedies for abuses that occur.[508] This set of duties constitutes the State's obligation to protect, the fulfillment of which is assessed according to the due diligence standard.[509]

434. In this regard, General Comment No. 36 of the UN Human Rights Committee specifically requires States to protect life against threats from “criminals, organized crime or militia groups, including armed or terrorist groups” and to dismantle irregular armed groups, such as private armies and vigilante groups, responsible for deprivations of life.[510] None of these obligations depends on the conduct of these groups being attributed to the State.

435. The evidence gathered by the Mission allows us to conclude that the State knew, or could not reasonably have been unaware, of the recurring participation of these groups in acts of violence against real or perceived opponents. The violent actions of these groups have been widely documented in the public eye for more than

[508] ICCPR, art. 2; Human Rights Committee (hereinafter “HRC”), General Comment No. 31, on the Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, para. 8; HRC, General Comment No. 36, CCPR/C/GC/36, paras. 7, 21 and 23.

[509] OHCHR, *Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,* HR/PUB/14/2, 2014, p. 27; OHCHR, *Human Rights and New and Emerging Digital Technologies: Human Rights Due Diligence for AI and State Obligations,* A/HRC/62/33, paras. 14 and 16. See also Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, para. 8; UN Women, *Guide on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 and UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security,* 2015.

[510] CDH, General Comment No. 36, CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 21.

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a decade, repeatedly documented by media outlets, civil society organizations and international human rights bodies, including the Mission itself in its previous reports.[511] This is evident from the public instigation and support described above, the existing degree of institutional integration, and the Mission's previous findings. The harm was foreseeable and recurrent throughout the protest cycles of 2014, 2017, and 2019, as well as during the period following the 2024 elections.

436. The Mission has not identified any measures taken by the State in any of these incidents to prevent the groups from committing abuses: there is no evidence that the authorities disarmed them, dissolved their structures, restricted their deployment in the context of public order operations, or adopted disciplinary or other measures in response to the previously documented violence. On the contrary, as explained above, the State continued to provide them with material and financial resources, publicly supported their mobilization, and allowed their deployment alongside its own security forces. The State's conduct was therefore contrary to the obligation to protect, as assessed by the due diligence standard.

437. Far from taking the measures required of it, the State armed, equipped, and financed these groups using public budgetary resources and through its control of regulated markets; publicly encouraged their mobilization; and allowed them to operate in areas under the effective presence of its own security forces, even by establishing security cordons to facilitate their actions. Such conduct is the antithesis of the obligation to prevent and contain violence, as well as the obligation to dismantle irregular armed groups responsible for arbitrary deprivations of life.

438. At the same time, the systematic absence of investigations into the violence attributed to the groups and the impediments to them, coupled with the consequent lack of sanctions on those responsible, constitute an autonomous violation of the obligations to investigate, sanction and guarantee effective resources to the victims.
This omission is not due to a lack of complaints: those filed by victims and human rights organizations have been shelved or archived, and their leaking has exposed the complainants to reprisals.512 The obligation to investigate requires prompt, thorough, independent, and impartial investigations, and failure to do so constitutes in itself a violation of the State's international obligations.513

439. These obligations acquire a reinforced dimension with respect to damages, which gender-related issues documented in this report, concurrent[514], activates the obligations of the State regarding due diligence and non-discrimination515 .

440. Consequently, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the State failed to fulfill its obligations to prevent the violations committed by the collectives, to protect the population from them, and to investigate them, punish those responsible, and guarantee effective remedies for victims. This non-compliance extends to all the conduct documented in this report, including that attributable to the State under Articles 4, 5, and 8

511 See, among others, A/HRC/45/CRP.11; A/HRC/48/CRP.5; A/HRC/51/CRP.3; A/HRC/54/CRP.8; A/HRC/57/CRP.5; A/HRC/60/CRP.4; A/HRC/61/CRP.4.

512 See Chapter III.

513 CDH, General Comment No. 31, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, para. 15; CDH, General Comment No. 36, CCPR/C/GC/36, paras. 27-28.

514 See Chapters III & IV.

515 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 35, CEDAW/C/GC/35, July 26, 2017, para. 24 b); Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women ("Convention of Belém do Pará"), adopted on June 9, 1994, art. 7 b); Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Case of González et al. v. Mexico,* judgment of November 16, 2009, Series C No. 205, paras. 258, 395 and 402.

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of the Articles Project, and does not depend on any attribution threshold being met.

5. Conclusions by context

441. The Mission sets out below its conclusions regarding the conduct documented in this report and its classification under international human rights law. Such conduct engages the State's responsibility on the grounds established in the section above: when attributable to the State under Articles 4, 5, or 8, the State is responsible for it as its own conduct; when committed with the acquiescence of the State, such acquiescence constitutes, in the cases of torture and enforced disappearance, an element of the violation itself, and therefore no further question of attribution arises; and, in all cases, the State is responsible for its failure to comply with its own obligations to prevent, protect against, investigate, and punish such conduct.

442. The human rights obligations set out in this section pertain to the State. As will be explained below, the Mission has concluded that the vast majority of the conduct examined in this report engages the State's responsibility, either because it is attributable to the State or because it constitutes breaches of its own international obligations. To the extent that certain conduct is not attributable to the State, the Mission notes that groups could, in certain circumstances, be subject to separate obligations under international human rights law. However, given the extent and scope of the conduct attributable to the State, the Mission does not consider it necessary to draw conclusions on this matter in this report and reserves its position on this issue for future investigations.

a) Social surveillance and control

443. The Mission has concluded that the exercise of social control by these groups violated the rights to adequate food and social security, the prohibition of discrimination on political grounds, the right to privacy, freedom of movement, and the rights to personal liberty and a fair trial (see sec. IV *above).* This section examines the basis on which such conduct engages the State's responsibility.

444. The exercise of social control by collectives in the territories under their influence entails a specific set of state obligations, distinct from that examined by the Mission in the contexts of the repression of protests and selective political repression.

445. The exercise of social control through the administration of state welfare and benefit programs involves obligations, in particular the rights to adequate food and social security516, read together with the prohibition of discrimination on political grounds517 and with the right to privacy or private life518 .

446. When the administration of essential goods and services is transferred to armed actors, and when access to such goods is conditioned on political compliance, the conduct involves obligations arising from both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, interpreted in conjunction with the prohibition of discrimination. The Mission recalls that both Covenants are interdependent and that the deliberate use of economic benefits and

516 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 2200 A (XXI), of 16 December 1966 (hereinafter, "ICESCR"), arts. 9 and 11.

517 ICCPR, arts. 2(1) and 26, ICESCR, art. 2(2).

518 ICCPR, art. 17.

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The use of social norms as instruments of political coercion constitutes a concurrent violation of both, and not a separate infringement of each. This compromises the state's obligations of due diligence and non-discrimination under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women ("Convention of Belém do Pará"), and requires that harm be understood as a phenomenon permeated by gender considerations in its distribution and not merely in its manifestations.

447. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has established that the obligation to respect the right to food prohibits States from adopting measures that impede existing access to it, and that the obligation to protect requires ensuring that companies or individuals do not deprive third parties of such access.519 For its part, in relation to the right to privacy, the Human Rights Committee has established that the collection and storage of personal information by public authorities or private entities must be regulated by law, and that every person must be able to know what data is stored about him or her and for what purpose.520

448. The Mission's conclusions in this context are based primarily on Article 5 of the CDI Draft Articles. The powers transferred by the Organic Law of People's Power (2010), the Organic Law of Communes (2010), and the Organic Law for Community Management of Powers (2014), including the allocation of subsidized food, price control, and supervision of basic services, constitute public powers conferred by the State's domestic law and in force throughout the period under review.

449. When collectives exercised these powers through the communal structures they came to occupy, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that their conduct in exercising such functions is attributable to the State. [521]
Under Article 7, abuses committed in the exercise of these functions, including conditioning access to essential goods on political conformity, withdrawing benefits as a form of punishment, and using registers drawn up for the administration of social assistance to identify and locate persons perceived as opponents, remain attributable to the State even if no power conferred authorizes them.

450. Regarding the imposition of sanctions outside of any judicial process, the Mission observes that the powers transferred through legislation to the People's Power are of an economic and welfare nature and do not include the power to resolve conflicts or impose sanctions. Decree No. 2,323 conferred oversight and public order maintenance functions on the People's Power bodies starting in 2016; however, these functions do not include the power to impose sanctions outside of judicial proceedings. The Mission therefore does not reach conclusions based on Articles 5 and 7 regarding this conduct, the responsibility of the State for which is examined in light of acquiescence and due diligence obligations.

451. The Mission distinguishes between strictly private conduct, unrelated to any official function, which is not attributable to the State on this basis. Acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment committed in the exercise of social control engage the State's responsibility due to its acquiescence, which is part of the very definition of the violation. With respect to all documented conduct, the State is responsible for failing to fulfill its obligations to prevent and protect

519 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter “CESCR Committee”), General Comment No. 12, *The right to adequate food (art. 11),* E/C.12/1999/5, 12 May 1999, . 15 and 19.

520 Human Rights Council, General Comment No. 16, “Right to privacy (article 17)”, 32nd session (1988), compiled in HRI/GEN/1/Rev.9 (Vol. I), p.228, para. 10.

521 CDI, Art. 5, and supra.

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in the face of, investigate and sanction such conduct, including their enhanced due diligence and non-discrimination obligations in relation to the gender-based damages documented in this report.

b) Repression of protests

452. The Mission has concluded that the conduct documented in the context of the repression of the protests constituted arbitrary deprivations of life, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and arbitrary detentions (see chap. IV *above).* This section examines the basis on which such conduct engages the State's responsibility.

453. The obligations applicable in the context of protests have been set out in the Mission's previous reports and are not reiterated here.522 The Mission recalls that the use of force in maintaining order during assemblies and demonstrations must be governed by the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and precaution, and that the intentional use of firearms resulting in death is permitted only when strictly unavoidable to protect life. It also recalls that the right to peaceful assembly imposes on the State not only the obligation to refrain from unjustified interference, but also the positive obligation to protect those participating in such assemblies from interference by third parties, including private actors. Participants do not lose the protection of this right because of isolated acts of violence committed by other persons.523

454. Much of the Mission's previous analysis of the repression of protests concerned the conduct of state security forces, whose power to use force derives from an identifiable legal basis and whose exercise is regulated by domestic law. This report concerns conduct by persons who do not possess such authority,[524] and therefore the analysis must begin with a preliminary question.

455. International standards regulate the use of force by law enforcement officials—that is, persons authorized by the State to perform police functions—and require that the circumstances under which force may be used be prescribed by law, that such officials be selected, trained, and equipped for that purpose, and that the use of force be subject to supervision, accountability, and review. Under Venezuelan law, the responsibility for maintaining public order lies with the police forces, and the progressive and differentiated use of force is regulated accordingly.526[525] The requirements of necessity and proportionality operate as limits on the exercise of a legitimate power; they presuppose the existence of such a power. When this power does not exist, the use of force cannot even be evaluated according to these criteria, since even the minimum threshold of legality is not met.

522A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 1524-1531; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 76-83 (evolution of the regulatory framework), 162-165 (2017 protests), 166-177 (2019 protests).

[523] ICCPR, arts. 6 and 21; HRC, General Comment No. 36, CCPR/C/GC/36, paras. 12 and 18; HRC, General Comment No. 37, CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 23-24, 78 and 88; Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (hereinafter "Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms"), A/CONF.144/28/Rev.1, chap. I, sec. B.2, principles 4, 5, and 9. See also A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 1524-1525 and 1528.

[524] A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, para. 1528; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 76, 83-84.

[525] Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, General Assembly resolution 34/169 of 17 December 1979, arts. 1-3; Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, principles 1, 11, 18-22.

526 Constitution of 1999, art. 332; Organic Law of the Police Service and the Police Corps National (hereinafter "Organic Law of the Police Service"), arts. 68-72; A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, para. 1528.

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456. What this report adds is that the third parties against whose actions the State was obliged to protect the demonstrators were, in the contexts examined here, armed groups that the State itself financed, equipped and mobilized, and that acted alongside the State security forces, with their acquiescence and, in certain operations, under the effective control of the State.

457. The Mission considers it important to emphasize that this conclusion does not depend on attributing the conduct to the State: when the conduct is attributable to the State, it is responsible for a use of force lacking a legal basis; when it is not, the State fails to fulfill its obligation to protect assemblies against armed third parties and to maintain an effective regulatory framework governing the use of force.

458. This conclusion is also unaffected by any powers the State may have sought to confer upon some of these structures. The legality of the use of force depends not only on the existence of a formal granting of powers, but also on the conditions under which force may be legitimately employed.

Force may only be lawfully used by officials trained for this purpose, subject to operational regulations and command and discipline mechanisms, identifiable as agents of the State and subject to institutional accountability mechanisms, requirements reflected both in international standards and in the internal legal framework that regulates police action.527 Granting patrol, search or detention powers to armed civilian structures that do not meet any of these conditions does not make the use of force they exercise lawful; on the contrary, it constitutes in itself a breach of the State's obligation to regulate the use of force and to guarantee that the use of force and deprivations of liberty are carried out exclusively by competent officials, on the basis of reasons and procedures established by law.528

459. The Mission's conclusions in this context are based on the following considerations. The conduct carried out within the framework of Plan Zamora is attributable to the State under Article 8, given that this plan institutionalized the joint action of the Armed Forces and collectives in the repression of protests.529. In relation to the events of 12 February 2014, the Mission has documented the joint action of State agents and collectives, the use of State infrastructure and personnel and the existence of a chain of command that reached the ministerial level, although it notes that the evidence relating to the direction or control of the operation is less conclusive.530

460. When security forces opened security cordons to allow armed groups to attack protesters and then withdrew, such conduct constitutes a positive act by agents of the State, directly attributable to the State. When security forces remained present at the sites of the attacks without intervening, it constitutes evidence of State acquiescence. Acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment inflicted in this context engage the State's responsibility by virtue of that acquiescence, which is part of the very definition of the violation.

461. Article 5 is not applicable in this context: the use of force against demonstrators does not constitute the exercise of a function conferred by law. With respect to all the documented conduct, the State is responsible for the

[527] Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, principles 1, 11, 18-22; Organic Law of the Police Service, arts. 68-72.

[528] ICCPR, arts. 6, 7 and 9; Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, General Assembly resolution 39/46, 10 December 1984, A/RES/39/46 (hereinafter "Convention against Torture"), arts. 1 and 16. On similar findings of the Mission regarding other perpetrators in the same contexts, see A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 162-165 and 176-177; A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 1831-1839; A/HRC/51/CRP.2, paras. 703-704.

529 See Chapters III & IV.

530 See Chapters III & IV.

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failure to fulfill its obligations to protect meetings from interference by armed third parties, to maintain and enforce an effective legal framework regulating the use of force, and to conduct effective investigations, sanctions, and reparations.

c) Security operations

462. The Mission has concluded that the participation of these groups in joint security operations with state forces was incompatible with the legality requirements governing such actions, and that the arrests made in this context were arbitrary (see section IV *above).* This section examines the grounds on which such conduct gives rise to state responsibility.

463. The Mission recalls the obligations governing security and law enforcement operations, which it has examined in its previous reports in relation to operations carried out by police and military security forces. All deprivations of liberty must be carried out by competent officials, on a valid legal basis and in accordance with procedures established by law; the use of force must conform to the principles of necessity and proportionality; and the State must guarantee prompt, effective, independent, and impartial investigations into deaths and injuries resulting from such operations.[531][532]

464. This report documents the participation of collectives in security operations carried out jointly with state forces, including public order operations, intelligence gathering and carrying out arrests[533] .

465. The Mission's conclusions in this context are based on the following considerations. Conduct that forms part of operations designed, ordered, and publicly announced by the State, in whose execution the collectives were incorporated, is attributable to the State under Article 8; this includes joint patrols and intelligence-based arrests carried out in 2024. When the collectives exercised public order and police functions transferred to communal structures, or acted from facilities functioning as state command posts and using uniforms and credentials of state security agencies, their conduct in the exercise of these functions is attributable to the State under Articles 5 and 7.

466. When state forces deployed collectives in areas they had previously cleared, provided official vehicles for their transport, or took into custody persons detained by them, such conduct constitutes positive acts by state agents. Acts of torture and enforced disappearance committed in the course of these operations engage the State's responsibility by virtue of its acquiescence, which is part of the very definition of these violations. With respect to all the documented conduct, the State is responsible for failing to fulfill its obligations to ensure that deprivations of liberty are carried out only by competent officials, based on grounds and procedures established by law; to regulate and

531 See A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 27-30, 1595; A/HRC/48/CRP.5, paras. 339 and 340; A/HRC/54/CRP.8, paras. 152-154; A/HRC/57/CRP.5, para. 21; and A/HRC/60/CRP.4, paras. 206-208; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 182 and 382.

532 ICCPR, arts. 6 and 9; HRC, General Comment No. 36, paras. 13-17 and 27-28. On the internal regulatory framework applicable to the progressive and differentiated use of force, see A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, paras. 1528, 1595; Organic Law of the Police Service and the National Police Corps, arts. 68-72; Ministry of Popular Power for Defense, Resolution No. 008610, of January 23, 2015, which establishes the "Rules on the actions of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces in functions of control of public order, social peace and citizen coexistence in public meetings and demonstrations", *Official Gazette* No. 40,589, January 27, 2015.

533 See Chapter III.

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to supervise the use of force; and to promptly, effectively, independently and impartially investigate deaths and injuries resulting from these operations.

d) Selective political repression

467. The Mission has concluded that the conduct documented in the context of targeted political repression constituted arbitrary arrests, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearances, and acts of harassment directed against individuals selected for their actual or perceived political opinions (see section IV.4 *above).* This section examines the basis on which such conduct establishes State responsibility.

468. The obligations applicable to the selective persecution of real or perceived opponents have been set out in the Mission's previous reports and are not reiterated here.534 The Mission recalls, in particular, the rights to personal liberty and security and the prohibition of arbitrary detention; the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the rights to freedom of expression, association and participation in public affairs; the prohibition of discrimination; and the State's obligation to guarantee an effective judicial remedy.535

469. This report establishes reasonable grounds to believe that the collectives performed identification, surveillance and detention functions within this pattern of persecution.536 The selection of individuals for political reasons compromises State obligations of non-discrimination and the rights to freedom of expression, association and participation in public affairs, whether the conduct is attributable to the State or because the State has failed in its obligation to protect these rights against interference from private actors.

470. The Mission’s conclusions in this context are based on the following considerations. The conduct carried out in the execution of Operation Tun Tun is attributable to the State under Article 8, as explained above. Article 5 is not applicable to the detentions or acts of harassment examined in this section: they do not constitute the exercise of any function conferred by domestic law. With respect to conduct occurring outside the framework of an identified State operation, the Mission observes that the collectives frequently acted in coordination with the security forces and that the authorities took no action against them; acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as enforced disappearances, engage the State’s responsibility by virtue of its acquiescence, which is part of the very definition of these violations. With respect to all the documented conduct, the State is responsible for failing to fulfill its obligations to prevent, protect against, investigate and punish such conduct and to guarantee an effective remedy for the victims.

B. Individual responsibility

471. International criminal responsibility rests with individuals and is distinct from the international responsibility of States. The considerations that follow are limited to individual criminal responsibility for international crimes in accordance with the Rome Statute, to which the Republic of Venezuela was a party during the period

534 A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, para. 2085; A/HRC/54/CRP.8, paras. 702-1311; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 216-221 and 329-332.

535 ICCPR, arts. 2(3), 7, 9, 19, 22, 25 and 26. On the serious deprivation of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and to participate in public affairs, see A/HRC/54/CRP.8, paras. 702-1313; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 330.

536 See Chapter III *below.*

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temporal in which the events occurred.537 The Mission reiterates that it cannot formulate definitive conclusions on criminal responsibility, and that the determination of the criminal responsibility of any person corresponds exclusively to the competent judicial authorities, acting in full respect of procedural guarantees and the rules of due process.

1. Acts constituting crimes against humanity

472. This report documents the participation of members of the collectives in conduct that may be legally classified as acts constituting crimes against humanity within the meaning of article 7 of the Rome Statute: murder (art. 7(1)(a)); imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty (art. 7(1)(e)); torture (art. 7(1)(f)); and other inhuman acts intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health (art. 7(1)(k)).

473. The Mission has also documented disappearances of civilians after their detention by collectives, facts that could constitute enforced disappearance within the meaning of article 7(1)(i), the definition of which includes acts committed by organized groups acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State.

474. The Mission has also received information indicating the commission of acts of sexual violence against women by armed groups during detention, as well as slavery and forced labor in territories controlled by armed groups in mining areas. The Mission considers that these incidents require further investigation before it can draw conclusions regarding their legal classification.

475. The crime against humanity of political persecution (art. 7(1)(h)) can be based on the same acts constituting other crimes against humanity, aggravated by conduct that constitutes an intentional and serious deprivation of other fundamental rights in contravention of international law, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, as well as the right to participate in public affairs.538 The distinguishing element of the crime of persecution is that the conduct is directed against a person, group or collectivity for discriminatory reasons, including political reasons.539 In its previous reports, the Mission concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the documented violations before and after the 2024 presidential elections, taken together, constitute the crime against humanity of political persecution, and that this crime continued to be committed against government critics and actual or perceived opponents.540

476. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that several of the victims of the violations documented in this report were selected because of their identity as persons perceived as opponents of the Government.

477. The Mission considers that conditioning access to food, fuel and basic services on political conformity, as well as depriving individuals or entire families of such access as a form of punishment for being considered opponents or dissidents,[541] constitutes a serious deprivation of rights

537 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 17 July 1998, *UN Treaty Series,* vol. 2187, no. 38544 (hereinafter, "Rome Statute"), arts. 25, paras. 1, 2 and 4, 126, para. 1, and 127. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela signed the Statute on 14 October 1998 and deposited its instrument of ratification on 7 June 2000. On 24 July 2026, it notified its withdrawal, which will take effect on 24 July 2027.

538 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 330; A/HRC/54/CRP.8, paras. 702-1311. As regards the requirement that the prosecution involve a deprivation of fundamental rights of a gravity comparable to that of the other acts listed in article 7(1), see ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Kupreškiÿ and Others,* IT-95-16-T, Trial Judgment, 14 January 2000, paras. 621 and 627.

539 Rome Statute arts. 7(1)(h) and 7(2)(g); A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 331.

540 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, paragraphs 853, 856-863, 870 and 871.

541 See Chapter IV *below.*

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fundamental contrary to international law. Assessed cumulatively and in the context of the other documented acts, and taking into account the dependence of the affected population on State-controlled distribution channels to meet their basic subsistence needs, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that these conducts reach the threshold of gravity required by article 7(1)(h) and that they were directed against persons because of their perceived political opposition.542

2. Contextual elements of crimes against humanity

478. In its previous reports, the Mission concluded that the documented violations were committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the civilian population, with knowledge of that attack and pursuant to or in furtherance of a State policy, and that the conditions underlying that attack have persisted as a continuing course of conduct.543 The question raised in the present report is whether the conduct of the collectives was part of that attack and whether it was carried out in execution or in furtherance of the same State policy.

3. Attack against the civilian population

479. Article 7(2)(a) defines an attack against a civilian population as a course of conduct involving the multiple commission of acts against a civilian population pursuant to a policy of a State or of an organization to commit such an attack or to further that policy.544

480. The incidents documented in this report fall within three of the operational contexts that the Mission has previously identified: public order control during the protests of 2014, 2017, 2019 and 2024; security operations,
such as the PLO; and selective political persecution, including Operation Tun Tun. The Mission also identifies in this report a fourth context: the exercise of social control in areas under the influence of the collectives, which it considers part of the same attack. The Mission concluded that the abuses committed in this fourth context are directed against the same group of victims, pursue the same objective of suppressing real or perceived opponents, and utilize the same structures and relationships that characterize the three previous contexts. The Mission concurred that the abuses committed in this context are directed against the same group of victims, pursue the same objective of suppressing real or perceived opponents, and utilize the same structures and relationships that characterize the other two contexts.

481. The multiplicity of the documented acts, their reiteration for more than a decade and throughout the national territory, as well as the recurrence of the same modus operandi, exclude that they can be characterized as isolated and uncoordinated acts committed by individuals acting randomly or on their own behalf545 .

4. Widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population

482. The Mission has concluded in its previous reports that the documented violations were committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the civilian population, and that the conditions underlying that attack have continued over time as part of a continuing pattern of conduct.546 The attack was widespread, as the acts occurred over a period

542 On the evaluation of acts of persecution in their cumulative context and not in a isolated, see ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Kupreškiÿ and Others,* IT-95-16-T, Trial Judgment, 14 January 2000, para. 622.

543 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 339–340, 349; A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11; A/HRC/51/CRP.3.

544 Rome Statute, art. 7(2)(a).

545 On the concept of “course of conduct” and the requirement that the acts form part of a general course of events rather than the actions of isolated and uncoordinated individuals, see *ICC, Prosecutor v. Gbagbo,* ICC-02/11-01/11, Decision Confirming Charges, June 12, 2014, para. 209; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 335.

546 A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11; A/HRC/54/CRP.8; A/HRC/57/CRP.5; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 339-340 and 349.

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prolonged and throughout the national territory, and systematic, since it had an organized character and did not obey an accidental repetition of similar conduct, repeatedly employing the same modus operandi against the victims.547

483. The Mission considers that its previous conclusion regarding the existence of crimes against humanity remains correct and is broadly supported by an extensive body of evidence. The Mission does not assess whether the conduct of the groups, considered in isolation, would by itself satisfy that threshold: the relevant question for the purposes of this report is whether such conduct formed part of the attack already identified by the Mission, which is examined below.

5. State Policy

484. The Mission has previously concluded that the acts documented in its reports were committed in accordance with a State policy aimed at silencing, discouraging and repressing opposition to the Government, directed against persons identified as real or perceived opponents548 .

485. The question in this context is whether the conduct of the collectives was carried out in execution or promotion of that policy. The Mission considers that it was. The State deliberately mobilized public resources to arm, equip, and finance the collectives; integrated them into its institutional structures; publicly instigated and supported their violence at the highest levels; deployed them within the framework of publicly announced state operations; and systematically refrained from investigating or punishing their conduct. The collectives acted against the same group of victims, in the same operational contexts, and with the same objective as the conduct previously examined by the Mission.

486. In view of the evidence gathered, the Mission concludes that the conduct of the collectives was carried out in execution of the state policy identified in its previous reports, aimed at silencing, discouraging and repressing opposition to the Government of President Nicolás Maduro, including by persecuting people who, by various means, expressed their dissent with the Government or were perceived as opponents of it, as well as their family members and close associates, who were the object of actions directed against them because of their association with said people549 .

487. Article 7(2)(a) of the Rome Statute contemplates the existence of a policy of a State or an organization. Having concluded that the documented conduct was carried out in furtherance of the State policy identified in its previous reports, the Mission does not consider it necessary to further examine whether the groups constitute, in and of themselves, an organization with the capacity to adopt and implement such a policy.

a) Link and knowledge of the attack

488. The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the acts in which members of the collectives participated were committed as part of and with knowledge of the broader attack directed against the civilian population. Given their objectives, nature, and consequences, these acts shared the context and circumstances of the broader patterns previously identified by the Mission.

489. As has been demonstrated in this report, the collectives acted in coordination with state security and intelligence agencies and, in several cases, in the execution of publicly announced state operations. Some of their members were simultaneously members of state security agencies; they received weapons, funding, and equipment from state sources and, in

547 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 340.
548 A/HRC/57/CRP.5, paragraphs 853, 856-863, 870 and 871.
549 A/HRC/45/33/CRP.11, para. 2089; A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 336-339, 349.

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On certain occasions, they operated using official uniforms and credentials; they acted on the basis of target identification information derived from state-administered records; and high-ranking officials made public and repeated calls for their mobilization against individuals identified as opponents.

490. The people who acted in such circumstances, for more than a decade and against a consistently identified group of victims, could not reasonably have been unaware that the violence in which they participated was part of a broader and coordinated pattern of conduct, and not of isolated or spontaneous acts. This applies especially to the leaders of the collectives, who typically act as links between these groups and state or party authorities. It is not necessary for each participant to have known all the details of the policy or all the elements of the attack.550

b) Legal conclusions

491. Based on the preceding assessment of the contextual elements, the Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the violations and crimes documented in this report were committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the civilian population, with knowledge of such attack and pursuant to or to promote a State policy aimed at silencing, discouraging, and repressing opposition to the Government of President Nicolás Maduro, including through the persecution of individuals who, by various means, expressed dissent with the Government or were perceived as being in opposition to it, as well as their family members and associates, who were subjected to actions directed against them because of their association with said persons.

c) Modes of responsibility and need for further investigation

492. Under Article 25(3) of the Rome Statute, persons who intentionally commit, order, solicit, induce, facilitate, aid or assist, or otherwise contribute to the commission of crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court may incur individual criminal responsibility551 .

The Statute further states that military commanders and civilian superiors may incur liability under Article 28 when, in exercising effective command or effective authority and control, they fail to take all necessary and reasonable steps within their power to prevent or suppress the commission of offenses or to bring them to the attention of competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.552

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550 ICC, *Elements of the Crimes,* ICC-PIDS-LT-03-002/11_Spa, [hereinafter "Elements of the Crimes"), Article 7, Introduction, para. 2; ICC, *Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga,* Trial Chamber II, Judgment pursuant to Article 74 of the Statute, 7 March 2014, ICC-01/04-01/07-3436, para. 1125; ICC, *Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga and Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui,* Pre-Trial Chamber I, Decision on the Confirmation of Charges, 30 September 2008, ICC-01/04-01/07-717, para. 402.

551 Rome Statute, art. 25(3)(a)-(d). Regarding indirect co-authorship (or mediate co-authorship) through control of an organized apparatus of power, see ICC, *Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga and Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui,* Pre-Trial Chamber I, *Decision on the confirmation of charges,* 30 September 2008, ICC-01/04-01/07-717, paras. 500-518, bearing in mind that the Trial Chamber ultimately convicted Mr. Katanga pursuant to Article 25(3)(d); and ICC, *Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo,* Trial Chamber I, *Judgment pursuant to Article 74 of the Statute,* March 14, 2012, ICC-01/04-01/06-2842, paras. 980-1018, on co-authorship.

552 Rome Statute, art. 28. See also ICC, *Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo,* Trial Chamber III, *Judgment pursuant to Article 74 of the Statute,* 21 March 2016, ICC-01/05-01/08-3343, paras. 170-213, and ICC, *Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo,* Appeals Chamber, Judgment on the appeal of Mr. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo against the judgment of Trial Chamber III pursuant to Article 74 *of the Statute,* 8 June 2018, ICC-01/05-01/08-3636, paras. 166-170 and 186. in relation to the requirement of

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493. The Mission has not conducted an assessment of the individual criminal responsibility of identified persons in this report. Its investigation has established the relationship between groups and State structures, as well as the contextual elements of crimes against humanity. Determining individual responsibility requires establishing, with respect to each person, the relevant conduct, the applicable form of responsibility, and the required material and subjective elements.553

The Mission recalls that, when the available information has not allowed such conclusions to be reached, its practice has been to point out the need for further investigations rather than to formulate definitive determinations554 .

494. The Mission considers that the following aspects justify further investigations with a view to determining the individual criminal responsibility of members of collectives: (i) the perpetrators of the acts documented in this report; (ii) those who ordered, instigated or induced violence, including through public calls for its commission; (iii) those who supplied weapons, funding, vehicles, credentials or information for the identification of targets, with knowledge of the use that would be made of such means; (iv) those who contributed to the commission of crimes by a group of persons acting with a common purpose; and (v) those who held leadership positions, both in the structures of the collectives and in State institutions, including those who organized, coordinated or exercised authority over these groups, in order to determine whether their responsibility is configured as perpetrators, by virtue of the control exercised over the structure, or as superiors, for not having prevented or repressed the crimes committed by those who were under their command or effective authority and control.

495. Further investigations are also necessary in relation to those State officials, particularly those holding positions of civil or military authority or who articulated, coordinated or exercised authority over the collectives, in order to determine whether, in a specific case, such relationship constituted effective command or effective authority and control within the meaning of Article 28.

496. In this respect, the Mission observes that the simultaneous membership of certain individuals in State security groups and bodies, as well as the role played by individuals holding high public office in the articulation and coordination of these groups, can give rise to forms of responsibility both through the structures of the groups themselves and through the State chain of command.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

497. **In this report, the International Fact-Finding Mission has analyzed the complex phenomenon of pro-government armed civilian groups known as “colectivos” in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, their close ties to the State, and their role in the serious human rights violations perpetrated within the time frame of the Mission’s mandate. The report, which responds to the Human Rights Council’s call for the Mission to pay “special attention” to the violence perpetrated by**

that the superior has taken all necessary and reasonable measures that were materially within his power to prevent or suppress the commission of the crimes, or to refer the matter to the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.

553 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, paras. 350–351.

554 A/HRC/61/CRP.4, para. 379.

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These groups555 fall within the line of research on the structures responsible for the commission of human rights violations and international crimes.

498. **The extensive evidence gathered and analyzed by the Mission allows it to conclude that the collectives are not marginal or peripheral groups, but are a central part of the state repressive apparatus, acting in coordination, complementarity or convergence with state institutions and agents.**

499. **The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the consolidation and expansion of the colectivos during the governments of Presidents Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro was not accidental, but rather the result of a political strategy aimed at strengthening the support base for their political project, including through violence and coercion. In this sense, the colectivos have played a central role in the implementation of the structures associated with the so-called "Communal State," infiltrating communal councils and other instances of community representation and management, and contributing to the creation of a governance model parallel to the Venezuelan constitutional regime.**

500. **Similarly, the colectivos have been key figures in implementing the doctrine of the "civic-military union," strengthening and expanding the bases of key components of this security model, such as the Bolivarian National Militia and the Peace Brigades (CUPAZ). The symbiotic relationship between the colectivos and the security forces has been reinforced in recent years due to the formal incorporation of members of these groups into the Bolivarian National Police (PNB), and, conversely, by the integration of retired or active members of the armed forces and security forces into the colectivos.**

501. **The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the colectivos have played key roles in supporting state repression, including surveillance and intelligence activities to identify individuals who oppose or criticize the government, and operational support during repressive actions. The human rights violations analyzed in this report demonstrate the active involvement of the colectivos, generally in coordination with the security forces, in the violent suppression of citizen protests; selective political repression; and security operations against organized crime.**

502. **However, the collectives are not merely "shock troops" acting under orders from the authorities in episodic acts of state repression. Due to their significant territorial presence and their penetration of the various structures of the communal organizational model, the collectives have integrated a characteristic system of local governance.**

503. **The Mission observed that, thanks to the impunity with which violence is used and the predominant role these groups play in the management and distribution of public goods and services, subsidies, and other social benefits, they exert social control in the sectors where they are present, generating clientelistic networks, rewarding political loyalty to the government, and punishing any expressions of criticism or dissent. This control over public services also facilitates political mobilization in favor of the ruling party, particularly during election periods.**

504. **The social control functions performed by these groups also include surveillance and intelligence gathering, crime control, and coercive mediation in community matters. These practices have contributed to creating a climate of fear among the population and restricting all**

555 A/HRC/RES/57/36, paragraph 16.

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expression of criticism or dissent, undermining the civic and democratic space from its very foundations.

505. **The information analyzed by the Mission reveals consistent evidence that these groups receive material and logistical support from state agents and institutions, including various forms of direct and indirect funding, privileged access to public resources, weapons, and other operational equipment. These forms of support have contributed to strengthening the operational capacity and territorial presence of these groups. At the same time, the explicit political support of high-ranking government officials, coupled with the impunity fostered by state institutions themselves, constitutes a form of institutional protection that shields the actions of these groups and legitimizes them in the eyes of the population.**

506. **The State's consideration for the support of the collectives has also involved the *de facto*** transfer **to these groups of control over local economies over entire sectors (including illicit economies, such as drug trafficking or arms trafficking), and the tolerance of other activities that generate illicit income, such as extortion ("vaccines") and the sale on the black market of fuel, medicines and other basic necessities.**

These dynamics are not isolated phenomena, but are part of broader patterns of corruption and criminal infiltration in state institutions.

507. **In light of the above, the Mission concluded that the State has explicitly or implicitly delegated functions related to maintaining public order, managing conflicts, and controlling illicit activities to these groups. The complexity, persistence, and extent of these practices, as well as their impact on the full enjoyment of human rights, suggest the existence of structures and dynamics that require analysis from macro-criminality perspectives, beyond individual criminal acts.**

508. **The actions of these groups have had direct negative consequences for human rights, contributing to the broader patterns of serious violations and crimes analyzed by the Mission in its various reports. Their participation in repressive actions or security operations, whether in coordination with security forces or independently, has contributed to arbitrary deprivations of life, arbitrary or unlawful detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture. Furthermore, the instrumentalization of these groups as mechanisms of coercion, surveillance, and social control has generated systematic violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, political rights, and the right to privacy and family life.**

509. **The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that certain actions by the collectives are attributable to the State: in particular, those carried out in the exercise of powers transferred through the legislation of People's Power, when such powers were exercised through entities constituted, directed, and operated by members of the collectives; and those committed in the execution of Plan Zamora, the El Junquito operation, and Operation Tun Tun, with respect to which the Mission has established state direction or control of the operation. The conduct of those members of the collectives who hold a formal position within state bodies, including their incorporation into the Bolivarian Militia or state security forces, when acting in that capacity, is also attributable to the State. The Mission did not conclude, however, that the collectives as groups can be considered state bodies for the purposes of determining state responsibility.**

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510. **Regarding the events of 12 February 2014, the Mission has documented the joint actions of state agents and collectives, the use of state infrastructure and personnel, and a chain of command that reached the ministerial level, although the evidence concerning the direction or control of the operation was less conclusive. The State's responsibility for these events is established by virtue of its failure to fulfill its due diligence obligations.**

511. **Regardless of whether or not specific conduct by these groups is attributed to the State, the Mission considers that the State is responsible for the human rights abuses committed by these groups by virtue of its failure to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and remedy these abuses.**

512. **The Mission also has reasonable grounds to believe that, in a significant number of cases, the actions of the colectivos were perpetrated as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the civilian population, with knowledge of such attack and in accordance with a State policy to silence, discourage, and eliminate opposition to the Government of President Maduro. This provides the basis for investigating the possible international criminal responsibility of leaders and members of colectivos, public officials, and other actors who may have ordered, facilitated, coordinated, or carried out conduct constituting crimes under international law. Analysis of the chains of command, coordination relationships, and individual contributions is essential to determining the extent of such responsibility.**

B. Recommendations

513. **On the basis of the above, the Mission recommends to the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela:**

General recommendations

a) **Ensure the legitimate monopoly of force by the State and guarantee that the civilian population does not participate in police, military or intelligence activities or exercise such functions.**

b) **Ensure that the State ceases all forms of direct or indirect material support to the groups, including the provision of weapons, equipment, financing, logistical assistance or other resources.**

c) **Implement a progressive, peaceful and human rights-based process of disarmament, demobilization and dismantling of the collectives.**

Dismantling of the enabling institutional and legal framework

d) **Review and reform the legal framework of Communal Power and other relevant legal provisions that provide legal or institutional coverage to collectives, in order to guarantee their conformity with the Constitution and international human rights standards.**

e) **Review the mandate, structure and functions of the Bolivarian National Militia in order to guarantee a clear distinction between military, security and political or partisan functions.**

f) **Refrain from delegating coercive or public security functions or civilian structures that lack a clear legal basis, adequate training and effective oversight mechanisms, such as CUPAZ and similar entities at the communal level, and ensure that all civilian participation in security matters remains under state control**

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g) **Ensure that its activities are carried out under effective civilian control and in full compliance with international human rights obligations.**

h) **Subject foundations and entities controlled by communal structures to independent audits and ensure their compliance with the legal framework applicable to civil society organizations.**

i) **Review the mechanisms for delegating the administration of public goods, services and subsidies to community councils and other instances of Community Power, in order to guarantee universality and non-discrimination in access to them, in accordance with international human rights standards.**

Security sector reform

j) **Restore constitutional control over the possession, transfer, carrying, marketing and use of firearms under the exclusive authority of state institutions established by law.**

k) **Restructure security institutions, including the PNB, SEBIN and DGCIM, to prevent collaboration or dependence on collectives and other criminal groups.**

l) **Conduct investigations into the operational and administrative staff of security institutions and separate, with full respect for due process guarantees, those officials who maintain illicit links with the collectives.**

Accountability and the fight against impunity

m) **Conduct prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigations into crimes committed by collectives, ensuring accountability and victims' access to justice.**

n) **Investigate and prosecute State officials, including senior officials and others within the chain of command, who have facilitated, directed, tolerated, financed or failed to prevent abuses committed by collectives.**

o) **Investigate the financial networks that support the groups, including possible payments from public entities, as well as assets and financial flows linked to illicit economies.**

Protection of victims and reconstruction of the social fabric

p) **Provide comprehensive reparation to victims of rape and abuses attributable to the groups.**

q) **Restore state control over the maintenance of public order in communal sectors, including protection measures for individuals or groups subjected to coercion or violence by collectives.**

r) **Promote citizen oversight and independent monitoring of the disarmament and demobilization processes of the collectives.**

s) **Implement measures aimed at rebuilding trust in public institutions and restoring civic space and participation at the community level.**