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Violence against women, a persistent evil



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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A PERSISTENT EVIL

December 2021-February 2022

Summary

The ULA Women's Commission and the Human Rights Observatory of the University of the Andes (ODHULA) offer in this report an overview of violence against women in the Andean region of Venezuela (Táchira, Mérida and Trujillo), during the quarter between December 2021 and February 2022. In order to give an account of the facts, firstly, an account of the events that occurred in the Andean region during the year 2021 is made. Secondly, violence against women in the Andean region between December 2021 and January and February 2022 is presented, with emphasis on the performance of justice operators such as the Public Ministry and the reform to the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence. Subsequently, topics such as access to health, gender violence and feminicides/femicides are discussed, using case studies, to finally present the results of a survey on sexual education and menstrual hygiene in adolescents applied to high school students in the municipality of Mérida state.

Methodology

Both institutions (the ULA Women's Commission and ODHULA) have compiled information based on documentary and testimonial research on women's human rights in the states of Mérida, Táchira and Trujillo, based on data collected through interviews, surveys and documentary observation of secondary sources, regional media and accounts of reporters covering events in the Andean region.

A combination of techniques such as surveys, semi-structured interviews and documentary research was used. The semi-structured interview was used to communicate directly with lawyers, activists and defenders of women's human rights and women who live and work in political spaces. During the course of the interview, questions on these or new topics of interest for this report were incorporated.

Through documentary research, data was collected from secondary sources, regional and national media publications, social network accounts of state security forces and personal accounts of journalists covering events in the Andean region.

The ULA Women's Commission and ODHULA state that this documentation only includes cases that are made public, despite knowing that many women do not denounce their aggressors and that others, who do, do not receive timely and adequate attention from the relevant state agencies, and often do not report this revictimization either.

1. Violence against women in 2021

Violence against women, girls and adolescents manifests itself in all sectors of society, including academic and cultural spaces, and even in the highest levels of political power of the State. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN Women), one third of the world's women¹ (2.6 billion women) are generally victims of physical or sexual violence from the time they are very young².

The report presented by UN Women in November 2021 highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's safety, both at home and in public spaces³. In this regard, Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, said, "Violence against women is an existing global crisis that grows in tandem with other crises. Conflict, climate-related natural disasters, food insecurity and human rights violations all contribute to women and girls living with a sense of danger, even in their own homes, neighborhoods or communities. The COVID-19 pandemic, which required isolation and social distancing measures, gave way to a second pandemic of shadow violence against women and girls, as they were often confined with their abusers. This new data underscores the urgency of concerted efforts to put an end to this situation"⁴.

During the first 9 months of the year 2021, 207 women were murdered for gender reasons in Venezuela⁵. Another 41 did not die, but were victims of attempted femicide⁶. On average, every 26 hours a woman was a victim of femicide or attempted femicide. These statistics were part of the information presented by women's human rights organizations before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), in the first hearing on the human rights situation of women, adolescents and girls in Venezuela, held on October 28, 2021, in the framework of its 181st period of sessions⁷.

In Venezuela the Femicide Monitor "Utopix" counted by the end of the year 2021 a total of 239 cases and warned that from the State there is no concrete proposal to

1 World population December 2021: 7.8 million people. <https://www.worldometers.info/es/poblacion-mundial/>

2 UN News. 09 March 2021. One in three women in the world suffers physical or sexual violence from a very young age. <https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/03/1489292>

3 OCHA services. November 24, 2021. New data from UN Women confirms that violence against women has worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/nuevos-datos-de-onu-mujeres-confirman-que-la-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-ha-empeorado>

4 Idem.

5 Women's Commission of the Universidad de Los Andes. October 30, 2021. One femicide every 31 hours occurred in Venezuela between January and September 2021. <https://ulamujer.org/2021/10/30/un-femicidio-cada-31-horas-ocurrio-en-venezuela-entre-enero-y-septiembre-de-2021/>

6 Idem.

7 Idem.

address this problem, in addition to a large increase in femicides in degree of frustration which shows that violence against women continues to rise⁸.

In the Andean region, from January to November 2021, the ULA Women's Commission was able to monitor through interviews with relatives of victims and social networks, 28 cases of violent deaths of women, 82% of these are typified within the crime of femicide. Eight cases were registered in the state of Mérida, eight in the state of Táchira and seven in the state of Trujillo. There were also 3 cases of attempted femicide, 2 in the state of Mérida and 1 in the state of Trujillo.

2. Violence against women in the Andean region between December 2021 and February 2022

2.1 Access to information

In Venezuela there are no official statistical data on discrimination and violence against women, a situation that limits research and the development of public policies to minimize these types of events. The National Institute of Statistics does not contain data on this matter. If a search is made on its web site (<http://www.ine.gov.ve/>) with the respective words, it does not yield any results.

In 2016, the Public Prosecutor's Office presented its latest report in which it revealed the number of gender-related murders of women. The impunity of the cases was 96%⁹.

In November 2021, the ULA Mujer Commission requested information from the Merideño Women's Institute (IMMFA) and the Women's Institute in the Alberto Adriani municipality on cases of gender violence attended during 2021; however, as of the date of completion of this report they have not provided access to the data.

It was also not possible to access the website of the National Electoral Council to corroborate the number of regional and municipal positions in which women were elected in the Andean region, because the page only shows the results of the election held in January 2022 in the state of Barinas¹⁰.

8 Utopix. January 18, 2021. December 2021: That's 20 cases of femicides for a total of 239 femicides this year. <https://utopix.cc/pix/diciembre-de-2021-son-20-casos-de-femicidios-para-un-total-de-239-femicidios-este-ano/>

9 Amnistía Internacional. 10 de mayo de 2017. Impunidad y violencia de género: sin justicia no es posible la igualdad. <https://www.amnistia.org/ve/blog/2017/05/2420/impunidad-y-violencia-de-genero>

10 National Electoral Council. Elections held in 2021.

http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/estadisticas/index_resultados_elecciones.php. Consultation on February 22, 2022.

The State violates Article 58 of the National Constitution and Article 14 of the Law of the Public Statistical Function, by not guaranteeing any person, natural or legal, access to information¹¹.

2.2 Access to justice

Impunity continues to be the rule, and the lack of updated statistics makes it impossible to analyze public policies, agencies, organizations and programs aimed at promoting the eradication of violence against women¹².

"Impunity reproduces violence."

Karol Monero, women's human rights activist.

2.2.1. Performance of organizations receiving denunciations

For Fabiana Santamaría, president of the Merida Institute for Women and the Family (IMMFA), during the period February - November 2021, the management had limitations due to the bureaucracy in the procedures: "there are many processes for a case of violence to be attended and there is still a lack of awareness of gender-based violence"¹³. Its management was also limited by lack of resources, mainly because it was not part of a submissive management to the National Executive, a fact that conditioned the public policies of support and programs, having to focus the work of IMMFA to only awareness campaigns and to publicize the institution.

"During my administration there was no support, no real interest, and no communication channel between the regional administration and the national government."

Fabiana Santamaría.

11 Law of the Public Statistical Function. Article 14. Every natural or legal person has the right to be a user of the statistical information of public interest collected, produced and processed by the State.

The right to have access to statistical information arises at the moment when the State concludes the activity that configures the statistical product and presents it officially.

<http://www.ine.gov.ve/documentos/INE/BasesLegales/pdf/LeydelaFuncionPublicaAct.pdf>

12 Amnesty International. 07 December 2017. Between Cedaw recommendations and reality: justice, health, and violence against women.

13 Interview with Fabiana Santamaría, February 17, 2022.

- Public Prosecutor's Office

Since April 2021, ODHULA has legally assisted and accompanied direct and indirect victims in 8 cases of gender violence. The cases deal with psychological violence, harassment, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and femicides. None of them has been dealt with expeditiously by the competent agencies.

On December 25 and 31, 2021, Prosecutor's Office 20, with competence in the defense of women's rights in the state of Merida, did not have a prosecutor on duty, nor did it post a notice with contact information for victims of violence to go to, thus impeding their access to justice¹⁴.

2.2.2. Amendment to the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free from Violence

On December 16, 2021, the Reform to the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence was published in the Official Gazette No. 6.667. In this regard, our Research Team considered it pertinent to gather the opinions of lawyers, women's rights defenders and leaders in the state of Merida, since these are the people who know first hand the cases and the existing weaknesses in both the law and the system.

Most of the people interviewed are of the opinion that:

-The new reform is insufficient and the State is not legislating according to the existing reality and needs.

-In the new reform of this Law, the State continues not to recognize its responsibility in the violent deaths of women, vicarious violence and disappearance.

- With respect to protected rights, this new reform eliminates the rights contained in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, "Convention of Belém do Pará"¹⁵ (rights protected in the previous law), without any explanation from the legislators so that the population can know the reason or motive for this elimination¹⁶.

14 Testimonies of women human rights defenders, Mérida state. February 24, 2022.

15 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, "Convention of BELÉM DO PARÁ".

https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/44013/Convenci_n_de_Bel_m_Do_Par_.pdf

16 The previous law (2014) stipulated: "The others enshrined in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and in all international conventions and treaties on the matter, signed by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, such as the Law Approving 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)". But in the reform of 2021 this

- The State reforms a law without the previous law having been regulated and without protocols for its practical application.
- The State continues to disregard the participation of independent and autonomous civil society in terms of consultation and participation in law reforms and formulation of protocols.
- As for protection and security measures, the State continues to fail to promote and provide the necessary resources and actions for shelters, even though such a measure is provided for in Article 106, paragraph 2 of the reform¹⁷. In Venezuela there are no temporary shelters for victims of gender violence, thus confirming that the law is not supported by real public policies or transparency.

2.3. Lack of a law on women's access to political participation

For UN Women, "in addition to being a central part of gender justice, the presence of women in leadership roles increases the likelihood that their needs will be considered in decision-making, motivates other women to carry out these roles and promotes gender equality as a central axis in democracy"¹⁸.

However, the Venezuelan State is indebted to the equality of women in political participation, both in popularly elected positions and in political administrative positions, since not only has it not legislated or enacted a specific law on this matter, but it also went backwards in relation to the quota for women's political participation contemplated in the Organic Law on Suffrage and Political Participation of 1998.

Indeed, in 1998 the Organic Law of Suffrage and Political Participation was enacted¹⁹, article 144 of which obliged political parties to include in their electoral lists at least 30% female participation. According to jurist Sonia Sgambatti, this legal quota was only applied in the 1998 elections, because since the year 2000 the National Electoral Council (CNE) illegally ordered the non-application of said regulation, through Resolution N° 000321-544, adopted in its extraordinary session

wording is changed and the Convention of Belém do Pará is excluded, in the following terms: "The others enshrined in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and in the international conventions and treaties on the matter, subscribed and ratified by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)".

17 Ministry of Women. Law Reform. <http://minmujer.gob.ve/?s=reforma+law+reform>.
<http://minmujer.gob.ve/?s=reforma+of+law>

18 UN Women. Women's political participation and leadership. <https://mexico.unwomen.org/es/nuestro-trabajo/participacion-politica-y-liderazgo>

19 Official Gazette No. 5.223 Extraordinary dated May 28, 1998.

Available in the web site of the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (Parlatino).

<https://parlatino.org/pdf/temas-especiales/elecciones/ley-organica-sufragio-participacion-politica.pdf>

of March 21, 2000, in violation of the then in force article 144 of the above mentioned Law²⁰.

In 2009 the Organic Law of Electoral Processes was enacted (published in the Extraordinary Official Gazette No. 5.928 of August 12, 2009), which repealed the Organic Law of Suffrage and Political Participation of 1998; but, contrary to the previous one, this new Law of 2009 does not contain any article instituting equal conditions for women in political participation.

In 2013 the National Electoral Council (CNE) created the General Regulation of the Organic Law of Electoral Processes²¹, which also does not contemplate gender parity in its articles, but empowers itself to create regulatory resolutions on electoral matters for specific electoral events, that is, with provisional character, which lose validity once such event is fulfilled; Besides, among other flaws, they are produced extemporaneously, they lack the formalities established in the National Constitution for binding normative acts, and such regulations also lack a stable legal denomination.

In this regard, in 2015, the CNE issued 'norms' to guarantee the rights of political participation on a parity basis in the elections of deputies to the National Assembly of that same year 2015²². For the 2020 National Assembly elections it presented a 'Gender Parity Project'²³. For the regional and municipal elections of November 21, 2021, it produced an 'Instructive' on parity and alternate nominations of both sexes for the Regional and Municipal Elections 2021²⁴, dated July 29, less than 4 months before the electoral process, thus violating Article 298 of the National Constitution which prohibits the modification of electoral laws from six (6) months prior to the date of the election.

In the absence of a law that establishes the mandate of gender parity in political participation, decision making in political parties continues to be managed by men, and women are forced to continue their permanent struggles to have access to these positions in each electoral call that is made; for example, as reported by a national newspaper, in the legislative electoral process of 2020 "the CNE held a

20 Lozano, Desireé, "La mujer venezolana en la política: una lucha de 100 años" (Venezuelan women in politics: a 100 year struggle) <https://www.vocesvisibles.com/la-mujer-venezolana-en-la-politica-una-lucha-de-100-anos/>

21 CNE. General Regulations of the Organic Law of Electoral Processes.

http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/normativa_electoral/reglamentos.php

22 CNE. Norms to regulate the Verification and Certification of Manifestations of Will in support of persons who aspire to run on their own initiative in the Elections for Deputies to the National Assembly 2015.

http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/normativa_electoral/elecciones/2015/asamblea/documentos/RESOLUCION_150625-147.pdf

23 CNE. Gender Parity Project.

http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/normativa_electoral/elecciones/2020/asamblea_nacional/documentos/paridad_de_genero/proyecto_de_paridad_de_genero.pdf

24 CNE. Instructions on parity and alternate nominations of both sexes for the Regional and Municipal Elections 2021.

http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/normativa_electoral/elecciones/2021/elecciones_regionales_y_municipales_2021/documentos/manuales/proyecto_de_paridad_de_genero.pdf

meeting with female leaders of several political parties to present the gender parity regulation"²⁵. This means that one of the human rights that should operate expeditiously, becomes in fact a mere concession of this electoral body, which is factually subordinated to the Executive Power.

In this way, women's equality in political participation is subordinated -in each electoral process- to the will or discretion of the members of the CNE, whose decisions in this regard have been made extemporaneously -violating art. 298 of the National Constitution which prohibits the modification of electoral laws six months prior to the date of the election-, which hinders strict compliance, and even more so in the situation of institutional chaos that Venezuela is going through. Thus, for example, in the 2020 parliamentary elections, out of 26 political parties, only 3 of them complied with the parity indicated by the CNE²⁶.

In the State Legislative Council of Merida (CLEMB) there is a progressive increase in the participation of women. In the 2008-2012 period, out of the total of 9 legislators, there were 2 women; in the 2013-2017 period, 2 women; 2018-2021, 4 women. For the 2021-2025, composed of 11 legislators, the "Instructivo" of the CNE²⁷ was applied and 5 women were elected.

However, in the political parties there is no real training with a gender perspective and it is still mostly men who occupy the positions and who decide, among the candidates, which of them to include in the lists, being mostly women candidates included to only comply with the parity quota beyond their capabilities²⁸, which leads to the fact that many of those who are elected do not even know what functions they should develop in the position; to the detriment of the most competent and qualified women candidates who are usually excluded. Hence, of the 15 main parties that exist in the state of Merida, only 5 of them are coordinated by women²⁹.

Regarding mayoral offices, of the 23 corresponding to the state of Merida, only two have women mayors: Carla Perez of the municipality of Rivas Davila and Maria Villasmil of the municipality of Andres Bello.

In terms of administrative and management positions, by appointment, there is also a significant predominance of the male sector. In Mérida, the governor elected last

25 Chronicle One (July 30, 2020). Gender parity regulation for the 21-N improves some aspects of the 2020 regulation but still has inaccuracies. <https://www.redobservacion.org/2021/07/30/reglamento-de-paridad-de-genero-para-el-21-n-mejora-algunos-aspectos-del-de-2020-pero-sigue-teniendo-impresiones/>

26 CEPAZ, November 11, 2020. Gender parity in Venezuela is a historical debt <https://cepaz.org/articulos/la-paridad-de-genero-en-venezuela-es-una-deuda-historica/>

27 CNE. Instructions on parity and alternate nominations of both sexes for the Regional and Municipal Elections 2021.

http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/normativa_electoral/elecciones/2021/elecciones_regionales_y_municipales_2021/documentos/manuales/proyecto_de_paridad_de_genero.pdf

28 Interview with Fabiana Santamaría, CLEMB legislator. February 17, 2022.

29 ODHULA Monitoring. February 22, 2022.

November 21, 2021, Jehyson Guzmán³⁰, when forming his work team, appointed only 14 women out of the 44 directorate positions³¹.

2.4. Access to health

In the health sector, deficiencies in the care of pregnant women continue to be widespread.

The National Executive disregards and does not comply with the measures for the protection of the life and health of women. Consequently, it does not guarantee the quality and free public health care established in the National Constitution. Thus, for example, on February 9, 2022, patients of the Padre Justo Hospital in the town of Rubio, Junín municipality, Táchira state, denounced that, in order to be attended in labor or cesarean section, a list of materials and supplies such as: physiological solution, vitamin K, surgical caps, 15 pairs of gloves, bond paper and a white light bulb is required³². Similar situations are repeated in all health centers in Venezuela and the Andean region.

In terms of women's health, the figures contained in the latest report of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have been deepened to date³³.

2.5. Gender-based violence and femicide

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"³⁴.

For its part, the World Health Organization (WHO) points out that, worldwide, up to 38% of murders of women are committed by their intimate partners³⁵. In addition to intimate partner violence, 6% of women worldwide report having been sexually

30 Jehyson Guzmán had been arbitrarily imposed by Nicolás Maduro as "protector" of the state of Mérida, in 2017, to manage the budget and take powers away from the governor-elect of that year, who belonged to the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática.

31 Mérida Digital. December 03, 2021. Jehyson Guzmán appointed those who will accompany him in the execution of his Government Plan. <https://meridadigital.com.ve/2021/12/03/jehyson-guzman-diseño-a-quienes-lo-acompanaran-a-ejecutar-su-plan-de-gobierno/>

32 La Nación. February 09, 2022. At the Rubio hospital they ask for a long list of supplies from the laboring women. <https://lanacionweb.com/regional/yoreportoalanacion-en-el-hospital-de-rubio-piden-a-las-parturientas-una-larga-lista-de-insumos/>

33 UNFPA. As the crisis facing women in Venezuela deepens, UNFPA urgently needs funds to save their lives and protect their rights. <https://lac.unfpa.org/es/news/mientras-la-crisis-que-enfrentan-las-mujeres-en-venezuela-se-profundiza-el-unfpa-requiere>

34 World Health Organization. 08 March 2021. Violence against Women. <https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

35 Idem.

assaulted by someone other than their partner, although data on this subject are more limited³⁶. Globally, nearly one-third (27%) of women aged 15-49 who have been in a relationship report having experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner³⁷.

"When there is violence against women, there can be no space for peace and freedom for them".

Verónica Colina, women's human rights activist.

Violence can negatively affect women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health and, in some settings, can increase the risk of contracting HIV³⁸.

The monitoring of the month of December 2021 conducted by the Femicide Observatory of the Center for Justice and Peace (CEPAZ), revealed that during the month of December 2021 there were 34 consummated femicides and 4 femicides in degree of frustration in Venezuela³⁹. On average there was a feminicide action in the country every 19 hours. Twelve children were orphaned. Six of them witnessed the violent death of their mother⁴⁰.

In the period from January 01 to February 28, 2022, the ULA Women's Commission and ODHULA registered 31 cases of gender-based violence in the Andean region. 19 occurred in the state of Merida, including 2 femicides, 8 cases in the state of Trujillo and 4 in the state of Tachira, including 1 case of frustrated femicide. Seventy-seven percent of the cases occurred during the month of January 2022⁴¹.

The registered cases constitute 8 of the 21 types of violence that are typified in the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence. The types of violence found in the 27 documented cases are: psychological violence, harassment, threats, physical violence, family violence, sexual violence, trafficking of women, girls and adolescents, and femicide.

2.5.1. Cases of violence against women

In the Andean region, 2 cases of femicide and 1 case of attempted femicide were documented, as well as the disappearance of 4 women. As described below:

36 Idem.

37 Idem.

38 Idem.

39 CEPAZ. January 2022. Monitoring of femicides in Venezuela. December 2021.

https://cepaz.org/documentos_informes/monitoreo-de-femicidios-diciembre-2021/

40 Idem.

41 Women's Commission of the Universidad de Los Andes. February 10, 2022. 24 cases of gender violence were registered in the Andean region during January. <https://ulamujer.org/2022/02/10/24-casos-de-violencia-de-genero-registraron-en-la-region-andina-durante-enero/>

a) Femicides:

- ✓ On January 01, 2022, Mairoby Tahiri Villarreal Díaz, 20 years old and mother of two girls, was murdered with a firearm, allegedly by her ex-partner who acted with the complicity of two brothers who are already in custody, according to ongoing police investigations⁴². Christian Piero Rojas Parra, the main suspect, remains a fugitive from justice. Authorities indicate that he may have fled to Colombia. This case, in addition to being a femicide, left two orphaned girls and four victims by extension: them and Villarreal's parents, who were left in charge of their granddaughters. ODHULA's legal team is representing these victims who are still waiting for justice.
- ✓ On January 27, officers of the Merida State Fire Department found the body of Adelaida Karina Rojas Saavedra, 37 years old, inside an apartment where the victim lived with her victimizer and their son, only 3 years old. Next to her was the child and the lifeless body of her murderer, Carlos Alexander Rivas Peña, who committed suicide after suffocating her. Firefighters found a letter written by Rivas, who confesses his crime and alleges her infidelity as the cause.

b) Frustrated double femicide:

On February 27, 2022, Luis Omar Patiño, a retired sergeant of the National Guard shot his wife Fanny Contreras, 47 years old, and his daughter, Fanny Patiño, 29 years old, after they both told him that he would be denounced for sexual abuse⁴³. The man sexually abused his daughter since she was 14 years old, and from this constant aggression a son was born who is currently 3 years old. Luis Omar Patiño took his own life after members of the Bolivarian National Police tried to mediate so that he would give himself up. The incident occurred in Torbes municipality, Táchira state.

c) Cases of missing women:

In addition to the 31 registered cases, the disappearance of four women so far this year 2022, among them a minor, is striking. Three disappeared in Táchira and one in Mérida. As of the date of publication of this report, there was no new information on the course of these events.

42 Information provided by the legal team of the Human Rights Observatory of the Universidad de Los Andes (ODHULA). January 2022.

43 El Pitazo. Retired military officer shoots wife and daughter. <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/tachira-militar-retirado-dispara-contra-su-esposa-e-hija/>

- ✓ On January 2, Rosa Angelica Ramirez Castellanos, 27 years old, disappeared. She lived in the Vega de Aza sector, Córdoba municipality, Táchira state. Ramirez has a mild infantile condition, controlled with medication⁴⁴.
- ✓ On January 11, Luiris Daniela Ledesma Castro, 19 years old, left her home located in the village of La Mulata, Pedro María Ureña municipality, Táchira state. Neighbors told the newspaper La Nación that Ledesma was going to the Colombian city of Cúcuta, but never returned. The young woman is the mother of a 4-year-old child⁴⁵.
- ✓ On January 12, Helianny González, 16 years old, was reported missing in Mérida. "The teenager was last seen this Wednesday morning, when she left her residence located in the Miranda passage of the La Milagrosa neighborhood, in the Libertador municipality of the Merida entity", indicates the publication of a local journalist⁴⁶.
- ✓ On February 9, in Táchira, Dominga Antonia García Mancilla, 18 years old, according to witnesses, was approached by some men while riding her bicycle and was forced to get into a pick-up truck in the La Paz sector, Fernández Feo municipality⁴⁷.

The ULA Women's Commission and ODHULA reject any action that constitutes violence against women and express their concern for the permanent normalization of acts that denigrate women and make them more vulnerable than men.

We demand the Venezuelan State to develop concrete policies focused on prevention, education and guidance to eradicate violence against women, and not only sanction and enact laws that are then not enforced.

3. Sex education and menstrual hygiene in adolescents

In February 2022, the ULA Women's Commission conducted a survey to 68 adolescents between 15 and 17 years old, students of an educational institution in the municipality of Libertador, Merida state, to know their expectations and previous learning about sexual and reproductive rights and menstrual health.

44 lanaciónweb. January 13, 2022. They are looking for Rosa Angélica, missing since January 2 in Vega de Aza. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYrhYJOLVHo/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

45 The Nation. January 24, 2022. Missing young woman in Ureña. <https://lanacionweb.com/regional/desaparecida-joven-en-urena/>

46 Morales Jordin. January 13, 2022. Search for missing teenager in Merida. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYsOy9sMPLG/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

47 The Nation. February 11, 2021. Alleged kidnapping of a girl in Naran-jales reported. <https://lanacionweb.com/regional/denuncian-presunto-secuestro-de-una-muchacha-en-naranjales/>

Of those surveyed, 81% were in 5th grade and 19% in 4th grade of high school. 71% of the respondents identified themselves as female, 28% as male and 1% preferred not to identify themselves. Regarding sexual orientation, 85% identified themselves as heterosexual, 13% as bisexual and 2% did not identify with any sexual orientation.

The results of the survey were as follows:

-Sexual and reproductive rights: 94% had received information on sexual and reproductive education, while 6% had not. Of the young people who had received information on sexual and reproductive rights, 33% indicated that the information was provided through family members; 30%, by the educational institution; 23%, through social networks; 13%, by friends; 0.5%, by some state institution; and 0.5%, by others.

- 89% of respondents indicated that they know about contraceptive methods and their use.

- Known contraceptive methods: respondents indicated that they know about the male condom, contraceptive pills, IUD, coitus interruptus, copper T, and vasectomy. 28% of respondents indicated that they know about contraceptive methods.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they were sexually active, and 58% reported using male condoms, 23% indicated that they did not use contraceptive methods, 15% used oral contraceptives, and 4% used female condoms.

-Knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases: 91% of the respondents said they knew about sexually transmitted diseases, while 2% indicated that they had at some point suffered from a sexually transmitted infection. Thirty-one percent said they knew about HIV, 25% about gonorrhea, 22% about syphilis, 21% about human papillomavirus (HPV), and 1% said they had no knowledge of any sexually transmitted disease.

- Menstrual health: 23% of the respondents were unaware of the topic and the main source of information for young people was their family members and the content they found through social networks. Forty-four percent indicated that they received the information through their relatives; 27%, through social networks; 16%, from the educational institution; 11%, from friends; 1%, from another; and 0% from State institutions.

Regarding access to menstrual hygiene products, 77% of young women use sanitary pads; 17%, tampons; and 7%, menstrual cups. In the case of young people, 67% indicated that the women in their family have access to menstrual

hygiene products, 28% say they have no information, and 6% indicated that they do not have access to these products.

On the question of whether the purchase of menstrual hygiene products is considered a priority product for the household, 87% said yes, 10% had no information, and 7% said they were not considered a priority product. Regarding the purchase of menstrual hygiene products in the household, 41% said that the mother is in charge; 30%, herself; 23%, both parents; 3%, the father; and 2%, other relatives or friends.

- Access to drinking water: 8% said that they do not have frequent access to drinking water, 47% said that the lack of drinking water interferes with their studies and work, 23% said that the institution where they study does not have appropriate bathrooms for menstrual hygiene, and 35% said that they do not have menstrual-related products such as painkillers, contraceptives, among others.

Despite the progress and efforts of family members, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations, it can be said that women's human rights continue to be secondary, as these products are not considered a priority in monthly household purchases, and that it is not an issue that involves the entire family. It is also significant that the surveyed population stated that they have not received information on menstrual health provided by State institutions.

Access to drinking water is a human right and difficulties in access affect men and women differently. Without access to drinking water and adequate toilets for menstrual hygiene, the daily lives of girls and women are significantly affected.

The visibility of women's rights should be conceived as a priority issue in government plans; therefore, the aspects inherent to their realization should be an obligatory part of the public policy agenda of all States.

It is worth mentioning that in the 3rd Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the member states evaluated 34 human rights issues in Venezuela.

Among the recommendations made in the area of women's rights, they referred to the right to health and sexual and reproductive health, noting that the high inoperability of health services keeps the public health system in collapse, which has led to an increase in diseases for which treatment is not guaranteed⁴⁸.

Likewise, reference has been made to the fact that precarious working conditions and lack of personal safety have caused a massive withdrawal of health personnel. Regarding the right of women and girls to a life free of violence and discrimination, it has been pointed out in this review that the State ignores and does not comply with measures of the Inter-American system in terms of justice and protection of

48 Justice and truth. January 26, 2022. Recommendations of the States in the 3rd cycle of the UPR Venezuela, evidence of serious human rights failures. <https://www.justiciayverdad.org/es/recomendaciones-de-los-estados-en-el-3er-ciclo-del-eput-venezuela-evidencian-graves-fallas-en-derechos-humanos/>

the life and health of women, and that there is no access to official statistics and impunity is the underlying cause of the increase in femicides in the country⁴⁹.

In view of the above, the ULA Women's Commission urges the Venezuelan State to comply with the recommendations made in the UPR, and to implement truly effective concrete measures that contribute to correcting the violations of women's human rights in the country.

49 Idem.



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