

*With this first newsletter, the Venezuelan Program of Education and Action on Human Rights, PROVEA, started a monthly series designed to inform national and especially international level, on the situation of human rights in Venezuela. Our targets are the actors and organizations within and outside of Venezuela: social organizations and human rights organizations, media and journalists, government analysts, NGOs and monitors of the human rights mechanisms of multilateral organizations, among others.*

*This newsletter will keep a simple structure: The first section focuses on the global issues and general statistics, a second section will discuss specific topics of human rights and a third section will address issues of national circumstances. In this first issue we will approach the fight against poverty, followed by the effects of the situation of insecurity in the economic, social and cultural rights, and will end with the presidential election called for this April after death of President Chavez.*

*This information is also available in our web site <http://www.derechos.org.ve> . We appreciate your suggestions and comments to: [boletin@derechos.org.ve](mailto:boletin@derechos.org.ve).*

## > GLOBAL TOPIC

### The fight against poverty: ups and downs

One of the most recognized achievements in the 14 years of President Chavez's government is poverty reduction. According to figures from the National Statistics Institute poverty was 42.8% in 1999 and for the second half of 2012 was 21.2%. This means a rate of variation of 100.1%. This is a major achievement in human rights field. It was reached following a series of social programs known as *Misiones* (Missions) and a large part of the gains **from the extensive oil revenues** were distributed in this way.

However, the fight against poverty is developed with ups and downs. For example, for four consecutive years, there was no significant progress in the poverty subject. From 2007 to 2011 the variation was only 0.97%. Even poverty increased in the first half of 2012 by 0.7% compared to 2011.

That stagnation was overcome in the second half of 2012. We achieved a positive variation of 25%. What is the explanation for the behavior described above? Why in four years the results have been so low and within a year have made that leap? **The answer is Political.** The era of stagnation was characterized by a huge deficiency in social programs and some of those programs suffered setbacks and precariousness but in 2012 there was a special circumstance: the presidential election process. This led the government to allocate large investments to social field and improve governance of some of those missions. President Chávez not only began to recognize inefficiencies in governance, but to take steps to overcome them. President Chavez also launched four new missions: one about housing «*Gran*

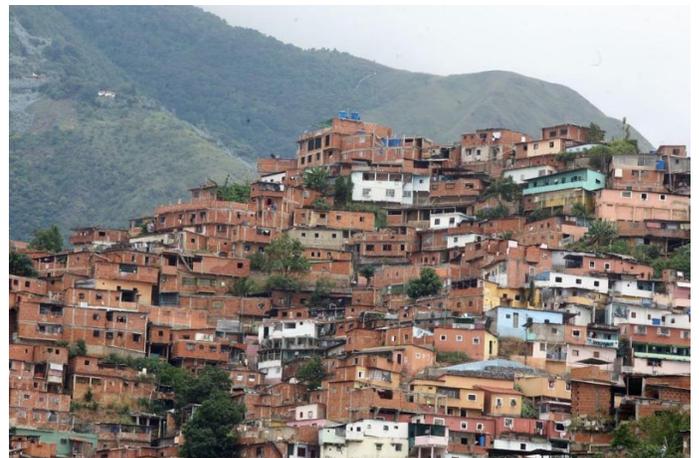


Photo: [imvihsucre.wordpress.com](http://imvihsucre.wordpress.com)

*mission vivienda Venezuela*», and one that seeks to promote the inclusion of unemployed people to the workforce: «*Gran Misión Saber y Trabajo*», also a mission to ensure maximum inclusion of older persons «*Misión en Amor Mayor*» and finally «*Gran Misión A Toda Vida Venezuela*» the first comprehensive security public policy.

This jump in the poverty reduction achieved in 2012 is similar to that achieved in 2005 when in just one year the rate of variation was 24%. **It was the time of greatest impetus to social policies.** A year earlier, the government had won a referendum sought to revoke the presidential mandate of Hugo Chavez and was preparing for the presidential election of 2006.

The reduction of poverty in Venezuela corresponds to a positive trend in poverty reduction in Latin America, according to the Latin American and Caribbean Economic Commission (CEPAL for its acronym in Spanish) in its 2012 Social Panorama report for Latin America. The report states that poverty and indigence in Latin America continued to decline, so that current rates are the lowest seen in the past three decades. Poverty does not experience a reduction in all countries of the region during the most recent period, however, in some countries poverty retreats. The increase in the income of the poor people is mainly due to an increase in labor income, according to records in recent years. Seven countries showed, in 2011, declines in their poverty rates: Paraguay (-5.2 points), Ecuador (-3.7 points), Peru (-3.5 points), Colombia (-3.1 points), Argentina (-2.9 points), Brazil (-2.0 points per year between 2009 and 2011) and Uruguay (-1.9 points). In these countries, poverty also declined significantly.

The Human Development Report of the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP) indicates that **in Venezuela continue to improve other social indices**. The increase in life expectancy to 74.6 years and expected years of schooling to 14.4.

However, the Venezuelan social landscape is more complex. Undeniable social improvements cannot lead us to conclude that the Venezuelan people enjoy adequate living conditions. Along with these advances there are still situations that adversely affect the inhabitants of the country like Insecurity, public services crisis, high inflation among others. The challenge as a country is moving forward in reducing poverty and ensuring better living conditions for all the people.

## > SPECIFIC TOPIC

### The right to security of the person and social rights

Different Venezuelan pollsters found that according to several opinion surveys **the insecurity and violence are the main concerns of Venezuelans**. On 01.03.13 the Minister of Interior and Justice, Nestor Reverol revealed that during 2012, 16,000 homicides occurred, equivalent to an increase of 12% compared to the previous year record.

The diagnosis on the consequences of insecurity in Venezuela and how it affects the enjoyment of human rights is a challenge for local social organizations. There are initiatives that have investigated the situation and prepared reports, such as the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV by its acronym in Spanish), The Research Institute of Coexistence and Security (INCOSEC by its acronym in Spanish) and the Center for peace and human rights of the Central University of Venezuela. The monitoring of public policies must face one main obstacle: **barriers in access to public information about the right to security of the person**. It has been a real challenge to get the disclosure of data by government agencies on the number of crimes and killings but the available information allowed getting an overview of the situation of some civil rights. However violence affects not only the enjoyment of those rights but also economic social and cultural rights (ESCR).

Some organizations have conducted researches on this field. In 2010 the Observatory on participation and Social coexistence of the *Gumilla Center* conducted a research to know the levels of violence in the schools of Caracas. Of the students surveyed, 73% have witnessed violent situations within the campus: verbal aggression (88%), physical assaults (79%), indiscriminate use of power (24%) and sexual abuse (5%). **Although there is no systematic information that can be consulted**, some allegations say that public schools are victims of theft of computer equipment and real estate endowment, which impoverishes the



Photo: Noticias24.com

conditions of the teaching process, resulting in suspension of classes. Teachers also are victims of theft, and this situation makes it difficult for other teachers to be recruited in public schools. In Universities and other institutes the current situation of violence is generating the minimization of non-academic activities in other areas outside the classrooms, fueling tensions between the need to develop control and prevention measures and the obligation to respect the autonomy of universities, especially in the case of public campuses.

Despite the inability to obtain statistics on the impact of violence in hospitals, theft situations have been consistently reported and the firearms are the main instrument to commit those crimes. The thefts have affected the employees, patients and medical staff, in some situations, has generated the temporary closure of hospital emergency services. These services have also been overwhelmed by the number of gunshot and other weapons victims in the major urban centers of the country.

**Due to the high level of exposure to violent situations, medical professionals are reluctant to take night guards in public hospitals.** These situations contribute to increase the demand in private health care centers, located in less dangerous developments, which undermines the right of access to a free and appropriate health service for a large number of people. The quality of the service is also affected by the theft of medicines and medical equipment.

The right to housing is also diminished by insecurity and violence. One of the components of the right is «habitability», which according to the ESCR United Nations Committee should ensure the physical safety of occupants, so violence becomes an additional element of degradation of habitat in the communities. **In 2012, PROVEA counted the amount of 12 people killed in the shelters created for families affected by rains.**

## Brief

- Venezuela became part of United Nations Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015.
- From June 29 of 2012 Venezuela formally joined as a full member of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur).
- On September 6 of 2012 Venezuela submitted an instrument of denunciation of the American Convention on Human Rights which will take effect a year later if the State maintains that complaint.

## > ISSUES OF NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

### Unforeseen elections

The death of President Chavez has opened an electoral process that will define this April if the executive power remains under the control of the Chavez supporters or goes to the opposition forces. The National Assembly will continue to be under the current government majority as a result of the last election in 2010 and will remain that way until January 2016.

Whoever result elected president will face a scenario **distinguished by high social conflict and institutional weakness.** These two aspects will seriously affect the governance of a country whose president will face, almost surely, the motion for a recall referendum after completing half of his term in 2016.

The conglomerate of social conflicts caused by the lack of institutional responses to social needs has influenced popular organization about various forms of manifestations day by day, most of them peaceful. According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict, **in 2012 there were 5483 protests.** The main rights dissatisfied that generate these protests are, in descending order, labor rights, the right to decent housing, to public safety, the rights of prisoners, political participation, the right to justice and right to education. By February 2013, the same source reported an increase in politically motivated protest. The expectation about this situation is to continue in the same way: the negative impact of the recent devaluation and increased inflation joined to the unexpected increase of violent deaths in 2012 are just some aspects that feed the existing conflict.



Photo: <http://www.codigovenezuela.com/>

On the other hand the institutional weakness of the state to respond to the social needs with comprehensive public politics according the Constitution **becomes a source of social conflict.** The Venezuelan government suffers from a lack of transparency in its public administration, high levels of administrative corruption and lack of independence of the authorities. Then there is the construction of a communal state required by government project to build the XXI Century Socialism. During the referendum of December 2007 mostly people rejected the proposed amendment to the Article 136 of the Constitution that would

