

## Introduction

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Impulso18 is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to FoRB in Mexico and advocates for FoRB in Latin America.
2. This joint submission, prepared ahead of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR), outlines critical human rights issues, including the right to FoRB and the impact of illegal and armed groups.

## Previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

3. Venezuela supported 119 out of the 328 recommendations it received during the third review, and supported a further 102 which it alleged 'have been or are already being implemented'.<sup>1</sup> The state noted 48 recommendations and rejected 59.<sup>2</sup>
4. Supported recommendations included calls to 'provide an enabling democratic environment for activities of political opposition, journalists and human rights defenders'<sup>3</sup> and to 'ensure that human rights defenders are protected from harassment, criminalisation and persecution, and adopt policy for the protection of human rights defenders'<sup>4</sup>, yet with the same breath Venezuela rejected recommendations to 'fully respect freedom of expression and halt and prevent all acts of repression against members of the democratic opposition and civil society'<sup>5</sup>, and to 'take all necessary measures to prevent acts of persecution and targeted repression, including based on political affiliation, and ensure that human rights defenders are protected without discrimination on any grounds'.<sup>6</sup> These contractions reveal the systemic lack of political will to protect and promote human rights. In addition, Venezuela's decision to reject a recommendation from Latvia to 'Conduct full and impartial investigations of all threats and attacks against and killings of journalists, civil society actors and human rights defenders, and hold the perpetrators accountable'<sup>7</sup>, further highlights the lack of willingness by the state to fulfil its obligations to international human rights standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which the state is party.

## Significant Political Developments

5. Over the past quarter of a century, Venezuela has been

governed under two successive authoritarian regimes backed by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV): those of Presidents Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) and Nicolás Maduro (2013–2026). The most recent and highly disputed presidential elections were held in July 2024 and characterised by irregularities, accusations of fraud and mass demonstrations. The incumbent president, Maduro, claimed victory despite strong evidence that he had in fact lost by a wide margin.

6. On 3 January 2026 the US forcibly removed Nicolás Maduro from power in Venezuela in what many hoped would signify an end to authoritarian rule. Despite the removal of Maduro, however, leaders in the PSUV remain entrenched in power, including former vice-president and now acting president Delcy Rodríguez, her brother Jorge Rodríguez, the president of Venezuela's National Assembly, Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, and Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino.
7. The PSUV's strategy to entrench its power, in the context of rampant corruption and a collapsing economy, has included steady attacks on independent civil society, including human rights defenders, pro-democracy groups and members of the political opposition, who are routinely targeted with harassment, violence, arbitrary detention, and in some cases enforced disappearance. Those in arbitrary detention are subject to unsanitary conditions, water deprivation and punishment cells without ventilation. In a recent report, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela (FFMV) warns of an alarming increase in prolonged incommunicado detention and dehumanising treatment in state custody.<sup>8</sup> Various reports by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have also documented allegations of prolonged isolation, psychological coercion and pressure aimed at obtaining incriminating statements in high-profile cases. Such reports suggest coordination between the judiciary and security forces, the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) and the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), to pressure technical professionals, seize digital tools and compel individuals to sign false statements under threats directed at their families.
8. According to the UN FFMV, crimes committed by Venezuela's military and civil state intelligence agencies are part of a coordinated and effective plan to

1 United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 11 April 2022, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/50/8>; United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Addendum, 'A/HRC/50/8/Add.1', 1 June 2022, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/50/8/Add.1>

2 *Ibid*

3 *Ibid*, Recommendation from Ukraine, 31.175

4 *Ibid*, Recommendation from Slovenia, 31.171

5 *Ibid*, Recommendation from Denmark, 31.187

6 *Ibid*, Recommendation from Bahamas, 31.181

7 *Ibid*, Recommendation from Latvia, 31.201

8 United Nations, Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, (A/HRC/60/61) <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffmv/a-hrc-60-61-unofficialtranslation.pdf>

silence government opposition through crimes against humanity.<sup>9</sup>

9. Rule of law and the right to a fair trial no longer exist in the country. This has established a culture of impunity leading to increased fear and reluctance to report crimes to local justice mechanisms. Religious leaders who are threatened and intimidated by the authorities often prefer to remain silent or, in extreme cases, emigrate.
10. Indigenous groups have also suffered serious human rights violations including massacres and forced displacement at the hands of the government, and fundamental human rights including freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of conscience, all of which overlap significantly with FoRB are systematically and often egregiously violated.

### Violations of freedom of religion or belief

11. During the third UPR cycle, Venezuela only received one recommendation pertaining to the right to FoRB, which was noted. The recommendation, given by the United States of America (US), called on Venezuela to 'End immediately all undue interference with freedoms of expression, religion, association and peaceful assembly. Allow all independent media, religious institutions, civil society organisation and humanitarian organisations to operate without undue restrictions or threats.'<sup>10</sup>
12. Throughout the reporting period, CSW has consistently documented FoRB violations in law and practice.

### Legal framework and the right to FoRB

13. Constitutional protections for FoRB are limited by the condition that the practice of any religion may not violate 'public morality, decency, or public disorder'. In 2017 the Constitutional Law against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence, and Tolerance (usually referred to as the Law Against Hatred) was adopted. Although the government has claimed that the purpose of the law is to combat hate-crimes, terminology has been criticised as overly general or undefined and open to abuse targeting political dissidents.
14. Religious groups are required to register with Vice Minister of Religious and Worship Affairs, attached to the Ministry of Interior, Justice and Peace. The registration process requires that the petitioning group declare any property, identify the individuals involved in leadership, provide its articles of incorporation, demonstrate in what way they will provide social services to the community, and produce a letter of support from neighbourhood 'community councils' aligned with the government.
15. Articles 209, 210 and 212 of the Criminal Code, modified in 2005, criminalise expression interpreted as critical of the government and Article 211 allows the state to

interfere in the internal affairs of churches, limiting their autonomy and freedom to govern according to their own principles.

16. The Law on the Oversight, Regularization, Operation, and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Non-Profit Social Organizations, enacted on 15 November 2024, has raised significant concerns regarding its impact on FoRB. The legislation imposes severe restrictions on civil society organisations, including religious groups, affecting their autonomy, freedom of expression, and ability to operate independently. Religious organisations are prohibited from engaging in political activities or receiving funding from foreign sources without government approval, restricting their ability to address social and humanitarian issues.
17. In 2024 the Venezuelan government passed the Simón Bolívar Law Against the Imperialist Blockade and in Defence of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, imposing severe restrictions on freedom of expression, political participation, and access to information under the banner of national sovereignty. Some articles directly threaten FoRB, including Article 7 which prohibits 'collaboration' with foreign organisations and could criminalise legitimate communication between religious leaders and human rights groups, and Article 21 which threatens religious media and communities with fines, shutdowns, or the loss of licenses if they oppose the government.
18. Venezuela and the Vatican maintain a concordat from 1964 that provides state funding for Roman Catholic run schools. An agreement with the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference (CEV) and the state allows the teaching of Roman Catholicism in public schools in preparation for First Communion, but this is implemented inconsistently. Roman Catholic chaplains in the military are guaranteed under the law; other religious groups do not enjoy the same privilege. The Roman Catholic Church and other religious groups are not permitted to visit political prisoners.
19. In 2020 the Inter-Religious Social Forum of Venezuela (IRSFV) was established, bringing together the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference, the Evangelical Council of Venezuela, and smaller and more vulnerable minorities including the Jewish community (which has been subjected to anti-Semitic rhetoric, harassment and abuse in Venezuela). In response to the creation of the IRSFV, the government created the National Interreligious Council (NIC), comprised of religious groups supportive of President Maduro.

### Targeting of religious leaders during protests

20. Priests and members of religious orders who expressed

9 United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 20 September 2022, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/51/43>

10 United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 11 April 2022, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/50/8>; United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Addendum, 'A/HRC/50/8/Add.1', 1 June 2022 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/50/8/Add.1> (Recommendation from the United States of America, 31.176)

their dissent or offered pastoral assistance during the 2024 protests were accused of supporting the opposition and subject to harassment and slander, despite Venezuela purporting to have accepted and already implemented recommendations to 'Ensure respect for freedom of assembly, opinion and expression for peaceful demonstrators or protestors.'<sup>11</sup> Religious leaders were also aggressively pressured to endorse the PSUV and Maduro and threatened if they did not overtly express support for Maduro. At the same time, the government offered incentives including infrastructure improvements to religious groups that were willing to publicly demonstrate their support for Maduro and his party.

21. Another wave of protests erupted around the announcement on 28 July that Maduro had won another term in office. In the weeks leading up to and following the elections, officers from the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) were seen carrying out surveillance at Roman Catholic parish houses and the offices of Protestant pastors in Zulia State and Caracas. They were especially visible in working class neighbourhoods including Petare and El Valle in the capital city. The surveillance also included the deployment of paramilitary members who took photographs of those attending masses and religious services.
22. Chávez's leadership and the early years of the Maduro regime were characterised by a combative relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in particular, including the denial of renewed residence permits for religious personnel and the promotion of a prayer 'Our Chávez', replacing the 'Our Father' of the traditional Christian prayer.
23. The government has also strengthened or developed links with other religious groups, including those with Afro-Venezuelan roots such as the Federación Venezolana de Religiones Ancestrales Aganju Sola y Yanza and the Consejo Nacional Espiritista de Venezuela. Both organisations belong to the NIC, and high-ranking government figures, including Maduro, have appeared at or participated in religious ceremonies organised by the two groups.
24. In 2023 several government benefit programs were launched to reward religious groups, primarily Protestant, aligned with Maduro. These initiatives included the Good Pastor Bonus, Church Social, and My Well-Equipped Church, with the latter operating under the broader Mission Beautiful Venezuela initiative created in January 2019. This signalled a shift in the government's official strategy to the active engagement with and cultivation of ties with faith communities. In

March 2024, the 2023 programs were placed under the new overarching framework of the Hugo Chávez Great Mission for Equality and Social Justice, centralising the distribution of resources.

### **The Co-opting of Religious Events and Institutions**

25. The government has also repeatedly attempted to hijack or orchestrate other high profile religious events. On 15 June 2024 Maduro declared a national 'Day of Repentance in Christ and Day of Hope' involving a public ceremony asking God to forgive sin in general terms, and in January 2025 Maduro declared the first Saturday of each August as the 'Day of the National March for Jesus', effectively endorsing and co-opting an existing initiative created and previously led by the Protestant sector. In response, several movements and organisations withdrew their support from the initiative.
26. In January 2025 Maduro signed an agreement with the Ministry for the Penitentiary Service and some Protestant groups, allowing pastors from participating groups to spread the 'message of Jesus Christ' in prisons throughout the national territory in order to build the 'path of redemption'.<sup>12</sup>
27. The specific denominations were not publicly disclosed but are assumed to include those that are known to be aligned with the government.<sup>13</sup> The Evangelical Council of Venezuela (ECV) did not officially participate. In February 2025 the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP) expressed concern that political prisoners at Tocarón prison in Aragua State were being forced to participate in Protestant religious activities, noting that this qualifies as forced religious indoctrination and violates freedom of thought and conscience. Families of the detainees reported that those who refused to participate were threatened with punishment.
28. In contrast to the access granted to some Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church has faced restrictions on its ability to enter detention facilities in recent years.

### **Repression, surveillance, arbitrary detentions and targeted harassment of religious leaders**

29. Religious leaders from all groups, including those who benefit from government programs and other forms of preferential treatment, are under constant surveillance. Government informants in congregations are common. There is a constant threat of possible violence, arbitrary detention, or the loss of specific rights. Religious leaders who say the 'wrong' thing, as interpreted by the government, are treated as traitors and sometimes attacked by the illegal armed groups supported by the regime.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Recommendation from Lithuania, 31.203

<sup>12</sup> El Tiempo, 'Nicolás Maduro: Churches will spread the message of Jesus Christ in Venezuelan prisons', 30 January 2025, <https://eltiempove.com/nicolasmaduro-iglesias-difundiran-el-mensaje-de-jesucristo-en-las-carceles-venezolanas/>

<sup>13</sup> The Protestant movements aligned with the PSUV are MEV, MOCEV, and Christians for Peace Movement of Venezuela (MCPV): a broader not exclusively Protestant Christian movement.

30. Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) officers harass and threaten religious leaders viewed as unsupportive of the Maduro government. This strongly discourages pastors from preaching or speaking, even in informal meetings, on topics that could be sensitive for the government. Freedom of expression concerns extend beyond religious groups to associated media outlets. In October 2022 four local Protestant Christian radio stations were shut down by the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) without any explanation or prior notice.<sup>14</sup>
31. Over the past two decades, Roman Catholic leaders have pointedly criticised the government, calling for rights to be respected and commenting on the humanitarian situation. In return, Roman Catholic leaders, including lay leaders, have been harassed and subjected to intimidation tactics. This includes verbal and physical attacks, threats of arrest, and in some cases arbitrary detention.
32. In July 2025 Cardinals Baltazar Enrique Porras Cardozo, Archbishop of Caracas, and Diego Padrón Sánchez, Archbishop Emeritus of Cumaná, issued a joint position paper analysing the country's situation following the July electoral results and expressing the concerns and fears held by members of the clergy. In response, Minister of the Interior and secretary general of the PSUV Cabello accused Cardinal Porras Cardozo of having 'placed himself at the service' of the opposition to conspire against the government, and alleged that the cardinal and other Venezuelan Catholic Church leaders, had attempted to block the canonisation of Venezuelan physician José Gregorio Hernández.
33. In October President Maduro amplified similar accusations against Cardinal Porras Cardozo, who was physically prevented from travelling to Isnotú, Trujillo State, where he had intended to preside over a mass in honour of Hernández. In December 2025 the bishop was prevented by Venezuelan migration authorities at Maiquetía International Airport from travelling to Spain. In addition, his passport was seized and cancelled, allegedly for 'noncompliance with regulations'.
34. Protestant denominations have been divided, as is typical in much of Latin America, and the government has played on those divisions. The Evangelical Christian Movement for Venezuela (MOCEV) and the National Religious Council publicly support the Maduro regime and receive preferential treatment in return. Protestant groups outside of the favoured circle, including the ECV (part of the UN-accredited World Evangelical Alliance) have been subject to intimidation and pressure tactics and have experienced discriminatory treatment and direct attacks on their leaders.
35. In June 2024 Pastor Gricelia Josefina Solórzano Malpica was arrested and charged with terrorism, as well as embezzlement and conspiracy after she was accused by Colonel Ramón Alonso Carrizalez Rengifo of being one of those responsible for losing the internal elections of the PSUV when she was the administrator of the Legislative Council of the State of Apure (CLEA) from 2008 to 2013. She was transferred over 400km away from her home to a prison in Caracas, isolating her from her family and church, to pressure her into providing information on other government targets. Pastor Solórzano's arrest orders were issued by Interior Minister Cabello, the second most powerful person in the Bolivarian Revolution and a close friend of Colonel Carrizalez.
36. In a separate incident, in June 2026, Bishop Dr. Jylman Red Jurado Farfán of the Latin American Anglican Church reported to CSW that he was suffering from severe health concerns, with forensic experts warning of a possible hypovolemic shock or cardiac arrest arising from inadequate management of his atypical pneumonia, intercostal neuritis and gastrointestinal bleeding during five years of detention. Bishop Jurado Farfán was arrested on 30 July 2021 after being summoned under false pretences to explain an academic project which he had been developing. He was subsequently charged with terrorism, criminal association, and conspiracy, based on the authorities' interpretation of his civic education work as an attempt to destabilise the State.
37. Prior to his detention, Bishop Jurado Farfán led an active social ministry that included providing free legal assistance to political prisoners and managing community soup kitchens, activities that the authorities characterised as 'political confrontation'. The judicial process against him has been marred by serious irregularities, including the withholding of his case file for nearly ten months and the suspension of his trial after almost two years of hearings without any conclusive evidence being presented. He has also been subjected to restrictions on access to religious materials and spiritual support, and to inhumane and degrading treatment for advocating for the religious rights of other inmates.
38. Government officials also have a history of antisemitic statements which have led to increased social hostility targeting members of the Jewish community. This has, in part, contributed to the departure of a significant proportion of the Jewish population, which has dropped from 25,000 in the 1990s to around 6,000 today. Declarations by government officials targeting religious groups or their leaders are also often mirrored in the government allied press. In 2020 and 2021 Maduro allied media published conspiracy theories linking 'Zionists' to COVID-19 as part of an alleged plot to bring down the government.
39. The provision of humanitarian aid and social programs by religious groups has been a particular flashpoint over the years and the government has increasingly

<sup>14</sup> Monitoreamos, 'Reports that Conatel ordered the closure of four Christian radio stations in Cabimas, Zulia', 13 October 2022, (Spanish), <https://monitoreamos.com/venezuela/denuncian-que-conatel-ordeno-cierre-de-cuatro-emisoras-cristianas-en-cabimas-zulia>

attempted to restrict religious groups from providing aid, in some cases using violence to prevent them from doing so. Following the earthquakes that struck Venezuela in June 2026, 37 human rights organisations<sup>15</sup> called on the State to ensure timely and non-discriminatory access to humanitarian assistance and to allow civil society organisations to carry out their work independently. This appeal is particularly significant in the context of the 2024 Law on the Oversight, Regulation, Operation and Financing of Non-Governmental Organisations and Non-Profit Social Organisations, which has expanded state control over civil society organisations. These restrictions may also affect religious and faith-based organisations engaged in humanitarian assistance, indirectly limiting the exercise of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and the ability of religious communities to provide support to affected populations. Religious leaders told CSW that members of their congregations involved in social outreach programs or humanitarian work led by their religious groups are regularly followed and harassed by SEBIN officers, and some have reported being photographed in their homes.

40. Religious organisations operate under serious administrative and judicial restrictions, such as revoked permits and heavy fines, limiting their operations. Religious leaders have been subjected to persecution, including threats, arbitrary arrests, and violence aimed at silencing dissent and block human rights reporting. Repression intensifies during elections, with the UN noting that the government's repressive machinery remains a constant threat.<sup>16</sup>

### Illegal armed and criminal groups

41. During the third UPR, Venezuela noted a recommendation from Canada calling on the government to 'Address the presence of non-State armed groups and corruption linked to illicit gold mining in the Arco Minero and take action to stop human rights abuses reportedly taking place in the region'<sup>17</sup> as well as rejected a recommendation from the US to 'Hold accountable all Venezuela operatives, agents and members of security forces or armed groups who are responsible for human rights violations or abuses – including those such as the FAES involving unlawful killings, forced disappearances, torture, and other physical and sexual abuse – by initiating investigations into credible allegations in the next six months'.<sup>18</sup>
42. Inaction by the government and continued impunity has contributed to continued illegal mining and human rights violations by armed groups.
43. Illegal mining and the presence of armed groups have led to the destruction of sites considered sacred by

indigenous communities. In Amazonas State, Cerro Autana, a geologic formation, and waterways and rainforest essential to the spiritual life of the Piaroa and Ye'kwana peoples have been polluted and severely damaged by illegal mining. Canaima National Park in Bolívar State, home to the Pemón people, has been invaded by illegal miners, causing damage to sacred geologic formations known as tepuis. The Kamarata River, another site of profound spiritual significance, has also been contaminated, further threatening traditional religious practices.

44. In addition, Colombian illegal armed groups—including right-wing paramilitary and narcocriminal groups as well as left-wing guerrilla organisations, particularly the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissident factions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP)—have operated in Venezuela for decades, but their presence has intensified significantly in recent years. The government has repeatedly been accused by Colombian authorities, security analysts and independent organisations of allowing—and in some cases facilitating—the presence and operations of these groups on Venezuelan territory, with particular support reported for the ELN.
45. The presence of these groups has created a climate of violence and intimidation, forcing entire communities to flee and depriving them of access to their sacred places. The destruction of these sacred lands prevents indigenous peoples from performing their rituals and severs their spiritual, cultural and ancestral connection to their territory. This constitutes both a grave violation of their right to FoRB as well as a form of spiritual ethnocide and highlights the lack of state protection for the spiritual and religious rights of indigenous peoples, who face intersecting threats: environmental destruction of their territories and obstacles to their right to practice their religions or beliefs.
46. In some areas along the border with Colombia, Protestant leaders report that the groups have placed a ban on the construction of churches and prohibitions on meeting in private homes for religious purposes. Religious groups in these areas are not permitted to appoint leaders or pastors from outside the immediate community, and in many cases they are not allowed to receive visits from co-religionists from other areas. Religious leaders are expected to turn over a proportion of donations given by members of the religious group to the illegal or criminal armed groups. Religious leaders who refuse to cooperate or who simply try to remain neutral often receive threats to them or members of their family, and many have been forcibly displaced as a result.

15 Provea: 'Solidarity statement in the face of the emergency caused by the earthquakes in Venezuela', 6 July 2026, <https://provea.org/actualidad/derechos-sociales/organizaciones-de-derechos-humanos-exigen-acceso-humanitario-tras-terremotos-en-venezuela/>

16 Comité des Familiales de Victimas de los Sucesos (COFAVIC), 'Report on religious freedom 2001-2023', 13 May 2024 (Spanish) [https://cofavic.org/cofavic\\_informe-sobre-libertad-religiosa-2001-2023/](https://cofavic.org/cofavic_informe-sobre-libertad-religiosa-2001-2023/)

17 *Ibid*, Recommendation from Canada, 31.139

18 *Ibid*, Recommendation from the United States of America, 31.128

## Conclusion

47. Religious organisations in Venezuela face serious administrative and judicial restrictions, such as revoked permits and heavy fines, limiting their operations. Religious leaders are subjected to persecution, including threats, arbitrary arrests and violence, aiming to control freedom of expression and complicated engagement on social and humanitarian issues. This fosters a culture of self-censorship and reinforces social control, reducing FoRB. Repression intensifies dramatically during elections, although the government's repressive machinery remains a constant threat.

## Recommendations to the government of Venezuela:

48. *Amend the constitution and civil, administrative and criminal codes to include strengthened provisions for FoRB and other human rights in line with international law and norms on FoRB, including Article 18 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the American Human Rights Convention.*
49. *Repeal or substantially amend laws used to criminalise dissent and restrict freedom of religion or belief, including the Law Against Hatred, the NGO Law and the Simón Bolívar Law.*
50. *Reform the registration process for religious groups to ensure transparency and equitable treatment, including by eliminating the requirements for an endorsement from neighbourhood councils and the provision of intrusive information.*
51. *End state surveillance, harassment and intimidation of religious leaders, including by SEBIN officers and other state-aligned actors.*
52. *Guarantee the rights to FoRB, freedom of expression, opinion, association and peaceful assembly are respected and protected, including for human rights defenders, Indigenous leaders, religious leaders, humanitarian workers, journalists, and political opponents.*
53. *Restore civic space and allow religious organisations, human rights groups and independent civil society to engage in social work and operate freely without arbitrary registration barriers or restrictions on foreign funding.*
54. *Allow all religious groups to engage in and to hold peaceful public events free from interference and*

*intimidation.*

55. *End the targeting of religious leaders and their families, and ensure they are able to conduct their activities safely, free from harassment, threats, intimidation, surveillance and reprisals.*
56. *Investigate allegations into the use of lethal force by security forces and armed groups against civilians in the context of the post-election protests and ensure those responsible are held to account.*
57. *Cease the practice of arbitrary detentions and release all those who are arbitrarily detained or disappeared.*
58. *Cooperate meaningfully with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and with the United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures.*
59. *Issue a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures, ensuring they have unhindered access to all areas of the country and ensure that members of civil society, including religion or belief communities, can freely meet with these independent experts without reprisal.*

**CSW everyone  
free to believe**

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