

23 January 2020

Venezuela: Targeting of humanitarian NGO Prepara Familia

In the early morning of 12 January 2020, three unidentified persons illegally entered one of **Prepara Familia's** collection centers. They left hours later, after threatening members of the organisation to "report them to the FAES" (The Special Actions Force of Venezuela), for allegedly keeping expired medications and other supplies in the collection center. In addition, the invaders stole non-perishable food and dairy formulas that were stored in the building.

[Prepara Familia](#) is a non-governmental organisation whose main objective is to generate tools to prevent domestic violence and violence against women, through education and by providing legal, psychological and spiritual support to families, especially women. Since 2018, the organisation has faced various incidents of harassment and intimidation due to its work denouncing violations of the right to health, and accompanying children and their relatives in hospitals.

On 12 January 2020, three unidentified persons illegally entered one of the collection centers of Prepara Familia. Members of Prepara Familia were notified by neighbours that unknown people were jumping over the walls and breaking the entrance to the collection center. Some members of the organisation arrived shortly after, at around 8pm. After negotiations, the three individuals finally left the premises. Before leaving, they threatened the members present that they would "denounce them to the FAES", for allegedly storing expired medications and other supplies in the collection center. The Special Actions Force of Venezuela (Fuerza de Acciones Especiales, FAES) is a branch of the Bolivarian National Police created in 2017. Various national and international organisations, [including the OHCHR](#), have documented and denounced FAES' involvement in serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, with impunity.

In addition, the three individuals stole non-perishable food and milk formulas from the premises. When the director of Prepara Familia, Katherine Martinez, went to the local police station to file a complaint, the officers in charge refused to accept it stating that she should address other entities, such as the Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC). In the end, a police officer went to the collection center, where they took photographs of the supplies and asked if the organisation was associated with the opposition leader Juan Guaidó.

On 14 January 2020, at approximately 4pm, the director of Prepara Familia was notified that the same individuals came to the collection center again, this time accompanied by officials from the Bolivarian National Police (PNB). The police tried to carry out a raid, without presenting a warrant, claiming that "donations would be taken as they had to conduct an investigation". The officials attempted to seize the donations stored in the collection center, and threatened to arrest the director of the organisation. Finally, following negotiations and pressure from several human rights organisations, the police returned the seized donations and left.

During 2019, Prepara Familia documented a number of security incidents and obstruction to its work. In February 2019, its director was prohibited from entering the hospital where many children she accompanies receive treatment. This occurred in the context of the one-year anniversary of the issuance of precautionary measures of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights for the benefit of the children hospitalised in the abovementioned health center. In May 2019, the government portal Misión Verdad, associated with the television program Con El Mazo Dando, published a statement against NGOs that defend the rights of children receiving treatment in this

hospital, specifically accusing Katherine Martínez of inflating figures and having links with US officials and the blockade imposed by the United States on the country. The attack in May came after complaints made by Prepara Familia concerning the death of several children in the hospital due to the lack of timely treatment. Prior to the attack, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ombudsman had publicly declared that the deaths of children in the hospital were a product of the sanctions imposed by the United States. Finally, in October 2019, during her regular activities in the hospital, Katherine Martinez was approached by a hospital official who said that she could not be present in the hospital anymore. This was reiterated by several other hospital workers, who indicated that higher orders had been made to prohibit her from entering the premises.

Front Line Defenders has previously denounced the escalation of attacks against organisations performing humanitarian work and promoting human rights in the context of the complex humanitarian crisis Venezuela has been facing for the past few years, such as in [the case of Fundacion Mavid](#). Front Line Defenders condemns the attacks against Prepara Familia and expresses further concern that these acts are intended to have an intimidating effect on the human rights defenders' community in Venezuela, particularly on those who continue to denounce the humanitarian crisis and who promote humanitarian aid.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Venezuela to:

1. Stop all acts of harassment against human rights defenders and organisations providing humanitarian support, in particular members of Prepara Familia;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of members of Prepara Familia, in consultation with them;
3. Ensure that reports of attacks and threats against human rights defenders are promptly registered by state authorities;
4. Carry out immediate, thorough and impartial investigations into the security incidents against Prepara Familia, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
5. Take measures to ensure that government officials or other public figures refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders and organisations providing humanitarian aid;
6. Ensure that human rights defenders in Venezuela can continue their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including police harassment.