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Venezuela: Smear campaign against organisation PROVEA and its members, by high level authorities

During two consecutive days, on 4 May and on 5 May, 2020 the organisation **PROVEA** and its members were attacked by the president of the National Constituent Assembly Diosdado Cabello and by President Nicolas Maduro himself, both on social media and on a TV show. This is the last in a series of attacks and false accusations that the organization has been subjected to.

Programa Venezolano de Educación y Acción en Derechos Humanos (Venezuelan Programme for Education and Action in Human Rights) - [PROVEA](#) is a non-profit organisation with over 30 years' work in the promotion of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCRs) in Venezuela. It was created in 1988 to promote ESCRs, educate and provide legal support to vulnerable sectors, victims or potential victims of human rights violations. It has documented and investigated their situation and denounced abuses of power and violators of human rights. PROVEA is well known and well regarded throughout the region, pioneering many aspects of human rights protection. It is also one of the most targeted and stigmatised organisations in Venezuela, and consequently its members are [beneficiaries](#) of precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) since 2015.

On 4 May, 2020, the president of the National Constituent Assembly Diosdado Cabello accused PROVEA members of “vindicating the armed incursion in Venezuela” and referred to them as “nation traitors” and “destabilising agents” “serving foreign interests” “paid by the CIA” or the “US State Department” on the [twitter account of his television programme *Con El Mazo Dando*](#) broadcast by the state channel, Venezolana de Televisión (VTV). [The aforementioned tweet](#) contains a photo of the PROVEA members Rafael Uzcátegui, General Coordinator and Marino Alvarado, Media Coordinator, with the hashtag #FuriaBolivariana. Earlier that day, PROVEA had tweeted calling for peaceful, democratic and constitutional solutions to the political crisis in the country, as well as for the [respect of the human rights](#) of 13 people detained between 3 and 4 May.

Similarly, on 5 May, 2020, during an address broadcast to the country on national television President Nicolás Maduro accused PROVEA of being a CIA-funded organization, while Diosdado Cabello commented again on PROVEA's tweet during a special edition of his TV show. The false accusations and attacks by Nicolás Maduro and Diosdado Cabello are the most recent in a series of stigmatisation campaigns, harassment and false accusations against PROVEA and other civil society and human rights organisations, often portrayed as enemies of Venezuela. Previously on the 2nd February 2020, Diosdado Cabello accused PROVEA of destabilizing the country's regime financed by the United States, and threatened with “applying the full force of the law against any NGO that receives support from the United States to lash out against the country.” Additionally, other public officials including the [ambassador to the European Union, Luxemburg and Belgium](#), as well as [Deputy Minister of International Communication of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs](#) supported on twitter the defamation and stigmatization campaigns against PROVEA.

The fact that PROVEA's members and pictures are routinely displayed on State-owned media and social media channels along with content suggesting they are a threat to the nation constitutes an incitement to violence and hostility against them. Front Line Defenders condemns the spread of false accusations against PROVEA and its members, as well as all the defamation and stigmatization campaigns and other intimidation tactics against civil society organisations in Venezuela.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Venezuela to:

1. Refrain from defaming, harassing and threatening PROVEA, its members and all human rights defenders and NGOs in Venezuela.
2. Publicly acknowledge the valuable contribution in a democratic society of the peaceful and legitimate work carried out by human rights defenders;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety and physical integrity of PROVEA members;
4. Ensure that NGOs and human rights defenders in Venezuela can continue their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and without any restrictions, including criminalisation.

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