

[HRC46 | Repeated calls to protect civic space and the independence of institutions in Venezuela](#)

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Defenders in Venezuela promote justice, equality and accountability. Without their work being safeguarded and enabled, the victims of violations are made yet more vulnerable. During three different dialogues on Venezuela, members of the Council repeatedly called for civil society and civic space to be protected.



Following the recent renewal of the mandate of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela and with the ongoing work of OHCHR in the country, the Human Rights Council received three oral updates. The High Commissioner reported on [cooperation between OHCHR and Venezuela](#) and on the human rights situation in the country, and the Chair of the fact-finding mission spoke of accountability efforts for past violations.

‘Oral updates provide members with the opportunity to track cooperation by Venezuela and the implementation of UN recommendations to the country,’ said ISHR’s Eleanor Openshaw.

The High Commissioner’s first update focused on what she considered to be advances made and indications of areas for future cooperation between OHCHR and Venezuela.

This was notable given Venezuela’s President Maduro’s [statement](#) made at the start of the Council session, in which he contrasted the cooperation and technical assistance provided by OHCHR with what he termed the ‘inquisitor’ mechanism – the fact-finding mission – which, he claimed, was established by states seeking to achieve regime change in the country. He seemed to suggest that the drive for accountability put engagement with OHCHR at risk, noting, ‘we will not reduce our cooperation with OHCHR as a result of the ideological push by these states’.

‘The High Commissioner’s approach has commonly been to emphasize dialogue and cooperation over an enumeration of ongoing violations or weaknesses in cooperation, which can be controversial’ noted Openshaw.

‘Of course, accountability should never be sacrificed to secure (limited) cooperation’, she added.

Bachelet was clearer about the need for accountability in her update on the human rights situation in the country, something that chimed with parts of the update from the Chair of the fact-finding mission. The Chair [spoke](#) of ongoing impunity for violations and targeting of protestors. She confirmed that there was no sign of improvement since the presentation of the mission’s report findings in October last year.

Furthermore, she noted that, despite delays in recruiting staff due to the liquidity crisis facing the UN the mission’s work has continued. It has put out [a new call](#) for information and documentation relevant to its mandate.

Concerns about harassment and criminalization of civil society were voiced by OHCHR and the Mission, as well as several states.

Ecuador spoke of the ‘[Law on Hatred](#)’ being used to ‘silence dissent via an non-independent judicial process’ and emphasized the need restore democracy in Venezuela. The UK asked what the international community should do to protect Venezuelan civil society.

[ISHR was pleased to join Cepaz in delivering a statement](#) on the threats and attacks against civil society – including the detention of members of Azul Positivo – and the lack of implementation of the raft of recommendations issued by the UN to date.

In the dialogue with states, questions were asked about cooperation with Special Procedures, as only [one](#)

[Special Rapporteur](#) has so far visited the country since the Council requested 10 be allowed to visit. In addition, some states mentioned the desire for a permanent OHCHR presence in the country to be established with a full protection and prevention mandate.

OHCHR will [provide the Council](#) with a detailed assessment of the implementation of the recommendations made to Venezuela, at the Council session in June, and the fact-finding mission will provide its next report to the Council at the session in September.

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Photo: image from UN WebTv.

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