

Venezuela: Concern regarding the obstruction of lawyer Luis Aguilera's professional duties

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) and the International Observatory of Lawyers at Risk (OIAD) express their profound concern regarding recent actions by Venezuelan judicial authorities and the Public Prosecutor's Office that have obstructed the professional duties of human rights lawyer Luis Aguilera, preventing him from acting as legal representative of a victim of human rights violations in criminal proceedings.

Luis Aguilera is an *ad honorem* lawyer with the Human Rights and Justice Commission of the State of Aragua, an organisation through which he provides legal assistance to victims of human rights violations both nationally and before the Inter-American Human Rights System.

Obstacles to the exercise of the right to defence

According to information received, Mr Aguilera has been subjected to a campaign of stigmatisation by judicial authorities and representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office, who have publicly described him as an "official complainant". He has also reported repeated obstacles to carrying out his work as a lawyer representing victims of human rights violations.

In the most recent incident, while acting as legal representative of a victim in criminal proceedings, Mr Aguilera's power of attorney was accepted and added to the case file, but he was subsequently prevented from being formally recognised as the victim's representative and from participating in the proceedings. He was denied access to the case file and was not notified of procedural acts, limiting his ability to effectively defend his client's interests.

On 27 May 2026, the judge refused to recognise his representation on the grounds that the power of attorney had not been notarised, despite it having previously been accepted by the Public Prosecutor's Office and despite the impossibility of obtaining notarisation due to the victim's enforced disappearance by State security agents. Without issuing a reasoned decision, the judge verbally informed him that she did not recognise him as the victim's legal representative and, consequently, prohibited him from intervening in the proceedings, compelling him to leave the courtroom.

A concerning pattern

Our organisations observe with concern that this incident is not an isolated occurrence. For years, we have [documented](#) numerous acts of harassment and obstruction targeting Luis Aguilera in connection with his work representing victims of human rights violations.

Furthermore, information gathered by our organisations demonstrate that numerous lawyers representing persons detained on political grounds and other victims of human rights violations face similar obstacles. These include reports by lawyers who have been prevented from taking the required oath or from being formally recognised as legal representatives in proceedings due to administrative barriers imposed by the authorities, despite the fact that the applicable legal framework does not require additional formalities for the exercise of legal representation; denial of access to case files and procedural acts; restrictions on meetings with clients; and acts of

intimidation, surveillance, and harassment connected with the exercise of their professional duties.

Such practices seriously undermine the independence of the legal profession and jeopardise victims' right to legal representation of their choice.

Venezuela's international obligations

The right to defence constitutes a fundamental guarantee recognised under both Venezuelan domestic law and international law.

Article 49 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela establishes that defence and legal assistance are inviolable rights at every stage and level of proceedings. Furthermore, Venezuela is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14 of which guarantees the right to a fair hearing and to the assistance of legal counsel of one's own choosing.

The United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provide that governments shall ensure that all persons have effective and equal access to legal assistance (Principle 2); lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment, or improper interference (Principle 16); and authorities provide lawyers with timely access to the information, files, and documents necessary to enable them to provide effective legal assistance (Principle 21).

Call for action

Our organisations call upon the Venezuelan authorities to:

- immediately cease any acts of harassment, intimidation, or obstruction against Luis Aguilera in connection with the legitimate exercise of his profession;
- guarantee that he is able to freely represent his clients, with timely access to case files and judicial proceedings;
- adopt effective measures to ensure that all lawyers in Venezuela are able to perform their professional duties in accordance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, free from intimidation, obstacles, or reprisals.