

20 June 2019

## Venezuela: cyber attacks against human rights organisation PROMEDEHUM

On 17 June 2019, a number of attempts were made to hack social media and email accounts of the human rights organisation **PROMEDEHUM**. This is not the first time that the organisation has faced cyber attacks.

The **Promoción, Educación y Defensa en Derechos Humanos – PROMEDEHUM** (Promotion, Education and Defence of Human Rights) was founded by human rights defender [Rigoberto Lobo](#) in 2017. The organisation assists victims of human rights violations, mainly in Mérida, and helps organise workshops and lectures for civil society on the use of lawful and peaceful means to denounce human rights violations.

On the morning of 17 June 2019, members of PROMEDEHUM noticed that a number of [attempts](#) had been made to hack their social media pages and email accounts. They received repeated messages with long sequences of numbers and verification requests for password changes. After a careful digital security analysis, the possibility of an error was excluded, leading the human rights defenders to believe that this had been an orchestrated attack.

This is the latest in a series of digital security incidents that members of PROMEDEHUM have faced over the past months. They have been receiving suspicious messages on their work phones, allegedly sent from a delivery company asking them to verify their numbers and click on links to receive packages, even though the organisation was not expecting any deliveries. Moreover, the human rights defenders received a number of unexpected requests to change passwords to their email and social media accounts.

The organisation's digital security has been severely affected by the latest electricity blackout in Venezuela. During the blackout, there were no phone connections, which made it impossible for members of PROMEDEHUM to verify logins to their email and social media accounts through text messages. As a result, they had to temporarily switch off this additional security setting.

Front Line Defenders condemns the cyber attacks against PROMEDEHUM, and remains concerned about the vulnerability of Venezuelan human rights defenders to cyber attacks, which have increased as a result of their limited access to electricity amidst the current political and social crisis in the country.

### Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Venezuela to:

1. Strongly condemn the cyber attacks against PROMEDEHUM;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the cyber attacks against PROMEDEHUM, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;

3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of all members of PROMEDEHUM, in coordination with them;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Venezuela are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson  
Executive Director