



DUBLIN
Front Line Defenders – Head Office
Second Floor, Grattan House
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS
Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Venezuela: Attacks and harassment of lawyer and woman human rights defender Raquel Sánchez

On 28 September 2020, the vehicle of woman human rights defender and lawyer **Raquel Sánchez**, which was parked in front of her residence in San Cristobal, Táchira, was hit with stones by unknown individuals, while she was being interviewed by a journalist about police violence.

[Raquel Sánchez](#) is a lawyer, woman human rights defender and coordinator of the Venezuelan Penal Forum Táchira, a non-governmental organisation that provides legal assistance to arbitrarily detained persons. Raquel is also a member of the Grupo de Trabajo Defensoras del Táchira, a group of women defenders who, since 2018, have documented cases of human rights violations in Táchira and provided support for victims.

On 28 September 2020, unknown individuals pelted stones at Raquel Sánchez' vehicle, which was parked in front of her home in San Cristobal, Táchira. The defender was being interviewed by journalist Zulma López from Regional Television of Táchira, about victims she is representing in a recent incident of police violence. The case is related to a peaceful demonstration held on 2 June 2019 protesting against the inadequate infrastructure for the provision of gas. During the demonstration, Táchira Police officers reportedly attacked and opened fire causing multiple injuries to those peacefully protesting, including minors Rufo Chacón and Adrián Chacón. Adrián Chacón was shot by police officers in the face, causing him a total loss of vision in both eyes.

On 12 July 2019, Raquel Sánchez denounced before the Criminal Judicial Circuit of the State of Táchira and the Superior Prosecutor of the State of Táchira, irregularities in the detention of the alleged perpetrators of the shooting, who continued to be held at the headquarters of the Táchira State Police despite the issuing of a transfer order to the Western Penitentiary Centre. Following this, Adriana Parada, mother of the young Adrián Chacón, was told that the case would not progress until she chose a lawyer not associated with the Penal Forum and as long as she did not speak publicly about the irregularities in the transfer of the suspects. In an attempt to further delegitimise Raquel Sanchez' work, an official from the Criminal Judicial Circuit reportedly told Parada that regardless of the outcome, Sanchez would receive 5 000 USD compensation for the case, and Parada and her son would receive nothing. Parada refused to change lawyers and the case is still ongoing.

Raquel Sanchez has filed multiple complaints before the Public Ministry about fears for her safety, however she continues to be the target of attacks and surveillance, which have intensified as the case of police violence progresses. Raquel Sánchez, who is pregnant, is at particularly high-risk given that any physical attack against her not only endangers her life, but that of her unborn child.

Throughout her career as a lawyer, Raquel Sánchez has faced several attacks by unidentified individuals and public officials, who have pressured her to abandon her work in defence of the human rights. These attacks are particularly recurrent in the state of Táchira, where high militarisation has facilitated the exacerbation and intensification of patterns of selective repression of human rights defenders' work.

On 16 March 2020, the Thirteenth Military Control Court of La Fría denied access to Raquel Sánchez and her colleague **Raiza Ramírez** from Venezuelan Penal Forum to attend the hearing of their clients

Robert Joan Maldonado Molina and his brother Robert Daniel Maldonado Molina. Both were arrested on 12 March 2020 while participating in a peaceful protest. The judge also refused to receive the evidence, unless the detainees agreed to change lawyers, because the Court does not accept lawyers from the Penal Forum.

On the night of 6 June 2016, Raquel Sánchez and Oscar Alfredo Ríos Santos, a former lawyer of the Penal Forum, were attacked by three masked individuals while they were driving down a road in the center of San Cristóbal, Táchira State. The individuals struck the front windshield and the front door glass, inflicting wounds to Sánchez' head.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned for the safety and integrity of woman human rights defender and lawyer Raquel Sánchez. On 22 September, Front Line Defenders [expressed concern](#) about the continued oppression of the human rights movement in Venezuela and the context of systematic persecution, stigmatisation and criminalisation of human rights defenders, particularly lawyers. Front Line Defenders reiterates its deep concern that some in positions of authority in Venezuela are intimidating human rights defenders in order to deliberately limit space for their work.

Front Line Defenders urges authorities in Venezuela to:

1. Carry out an immediate, exhaustive and impartial investigation into the harassment of Raquel Sánchez, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice, in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the security and physical and psychological integrity of the defender Raquel Sánchez, in consultation with her;
3. Guarantee that all human rights defenders, including lawyers, in the development of their legitimate activities in defense of human rights, can operate freely without fear of restrictions or reprisals in Venezuela.