



Foro Penal

REPORT ON REPRESSION IN VENEZUELA

FEBRUARY 2019

SPECIAL REPORT ON POLITICAL REPRESSION IN VENEZUELA BETWEEN
FEBRUARY 22 AND 23 2019, AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE ATTEMPT TO
INTRODUCE HUMANITARIAN AID IN VENEZUELA



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This report was elaborated and coordinated by Alfredo Romero and Gonzalo Himiob Santomé, with the collaboration of Mariela Suárez, Patricia Velázquez and based on information provided by the Foro Penal regional coordinators and lawyers.

Foro Penal is an NGO that has worked in defense of human rights since 2002, providing pro-bono assistance to victims of state repression, including arbitrary detentions, grave human rights violations, torture and cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment. Foro Penal currently counts with more than 200 volunteer attorneys and more than 5000 activists throughout Venezuela and the world who provide legal and humanitarian aid to victims. Foro Penal has been awarded with multiple human rights honors, nationally and internationally, for its work in defense of human rights.

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Special report on political repression in Venezuela between February 22 and 23 2019, as a consequence of the attempt to introduce international humanitarian aid in Venezuela

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the period between 22 and 23 February 2019, a group of the civilian population demonstrated in support of efforts to receive international humanitarian aid. With that objective, a group of constituents rallied toward the Venezuelan borders with Brazil and Colombia, while street demonstrations took place in several cities throughout the country.

The steepest political repression took place in Venezuelan communities in Tachira state bordering with Colombia like San Antonio and Urena; as well as in the city of Santa Elena de Uairen, in Bolivar state, bordering with Brazil. The repression produced the blockade of the humanitarian aid through a series of systematic actions of repression against the demonstrators, carried out by state security forces and armed groups of civilians (known as “colectivos”) that acted in connivance or with the acquiescence of formal security forces. The balance is as follows:

- **107** people were arbitrarily arrested throughout the country and a significant number of people were reported disappeared.
- **7** people killed have been confirmed. They are all in Bolivar state and **4** of them belong to the indigenous Pemon people.
- **58** people reported as wounded by bullets.
 - 15 of them were reported in San Antonio del Tachira;
 - 43 in Bolivar state, and at least 17 of them belong to the indigenous Pemon people.
- A significant number of wounded people was also reported. The injuries were produced by rubber pellets, tear gas canisters, marbles (glass spheres), concussions and injured by knives in several states throughout the country.

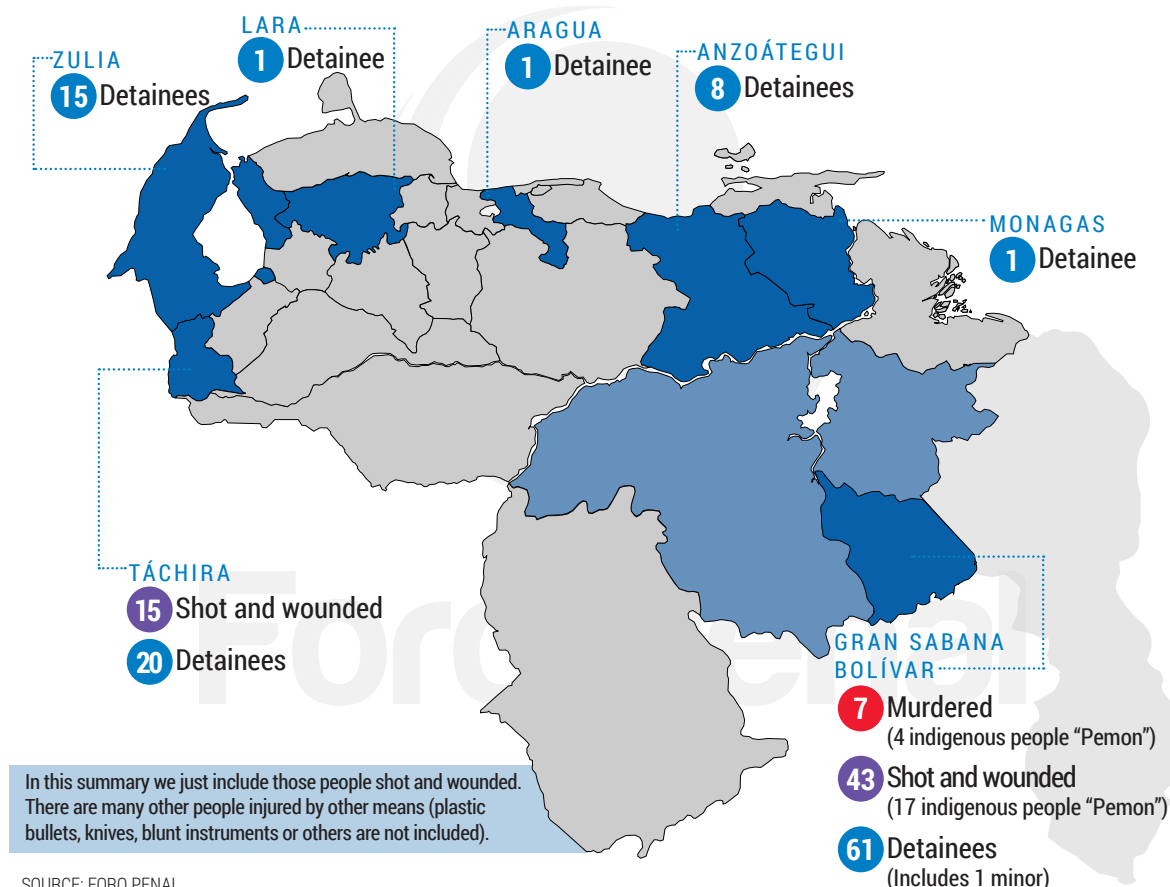
The intervening security forces were: National Bolivarian Guard (GNB), Bolivarian Army, National Bolivarian Police (PNB), and National Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN).

In the Gran Sabana municipality, Bolivar state, the sharpest forms of repression were reported, pointed against the indigenous communities of the Pemon people in Kumaracapay, in the area of San Francisco de Yuruani.

We must highlight that by the time of concluding this report, March 4, 2019, additional raids and deliberate persecution by security forces continue in the aforementioned border

states. In particular, at the Gran Sabana municipality in Bolivar state there is an emergency situation as many among the indigenous Pemon people have fled from their homes and, in light of the closure of the border with Brazil, have been forced to walk for days, with children and elderly people, through trails and informal footpaths to preserve their lives in Brazilian territory.

On February 28, 2019, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission decided to request the Venezuelan state to adopt protection measures in favor of the indigenous Pemon people.¹



SYSTEMATIC AND GENERALIZED ATTACK AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

It has been noted that, as of February 22, the border states of Tachira and Bolivar compiled the largest sum of acts of aggression and persecution against civilians in those areas. The repression was carried out by the National Bolivarian Guard, Bolivarian Army, National Bolivarian Police and unlawful groups of armed civilians known as "*colectivos*."

Specifically, the systematic aggression against the indigenous Pemon people lodged in the indigenous community of Kumarakapay, also known as San Francisco de Yuruani, in Bolivar state, was noted. As of February 22, 2019, this community suffered a brutal attack with fire-

¹ Ver: <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2019/056.asp>

arms, in what is interpreted as an act of aggression or intimidation against their demonstrations in favor of humanitarian aid and their attempt to allow its access through the border.

The recurring practice of violent breaking in people's homes and other establishments without a search or arrest warrant was also verified. Foro Penal has reported and documented this practice. Regarding this issue, we observed the violent breaking and entering of homes in San Cristobal and Urena, in Tachira state, as well as in the Gran Sabana municipality, in Bolivar state, directly within indigenous communities of the Pemón people, where the inhabitants had to abandon the town based on the brutal, systematic and generalized repression suffered since February 22. The breaking and entering by assault of armed civilians at the Anaconda Hotel in Santa Elena de Uairen was also reported, where the Foro Penal team and some journalists were lodged. The guests had to flee, fearing for their physical integrity and life.

The attacks suffered by these populations, mostly in border states, were verified as perpetrated by army officers and irregular groups of armed civilians, leaving at least 7 people killed, 58 wounded by gunshot, and a large number of people wounded by rubber pellets, hit by tear gas canisters and marbles (glass spheres), as well as people injured by concussions and knives.

KILLINGS

It has been confirmed by the Foro Penal team disseminated throughout the country and in particular in the areas where the repression took place, that 7 people were killed between 22 and 23 February in Bolivar state. Four of them were indigenous of the Pemón people: three of them belonged to the indigenous community of Kumaracapay and received bullet wounds on February 22, during the attack against that community, while the remaining people were killed in Santa Elena de Uairen.

Melanie lives with her family in the indigenous community of the Pemón people known as Kumaracapay or San Francisco de Yuruani in the Gran Sabana municipality in Bolivar state.

Early morning on February 22, 2019, (between 5:30 and 6 AM), Melanie witnessed how the indigenous community was attacked by members of the Venezuelan Army, who mobilized in convoys through the town of Kumaracapay to, presumably, intimidate the local indigenous people that have expressed their support for the humanitarian aid that was promoted by some members of the Venezuelan opposition and some members of the international community.

Utterly unarmed, a group of indigenous people, among them Melanie's husband, 24-year-old Kliber Pérez, and her neighbor, 52-year-old Zoraida Rodríguez, left their homes to verify what was happening. Shots and screams were heard. Melanie describes that the group of people, among them her neighbor Zoraida, asked the Army officers that were shooting, indignant, what was the motivation for the shooting and the aggression. In return, they received an onslaught of rifle bullets, killing Zoraida Rodríguez on site.

Rolando, Zoraida's husband, ran to her help and was also shot and wounded, just like Kliber, Melanie's husband. Rolando and Kliber, like 13 other indigenous people, were gravely injured and

Four of the six people killed died on the same day of being shot, whereas two others died in subsequent days. That is the case of the indigenous Pemon man Kliber Perez, who was shot on February 22, 2019, and died on February 27, 2019. It is also the case with Rolando Garcia, another member of the indigenous Pemon people, who was shot on February 22, 2019, and died on March 2, 2019. Their names and dates of death are as follows:

Name and Surname	Date of the aggression	Date of death
1. Zoraida Rodríguez (Pemon people, 45 years old)	02/22/2019	02/22/2019
2. José Elsy Pérez Márquez (Pemon people, 20 year old)	02/23/2019	02/23/2019
3. José Hernández (24 years old)	02/23/2019	02/23/2019
4. José Barrios (22 years old)	02/23/2019	02/23/2019
5. Kliber Pérez (Pemon people, 24 years old)	02/22/2019	02/27/2019
6. Rolando García (Pemon people, 52 years old)	02/22/2019	03/02/2019
7. Jorge González (41 years old)	02/23/2019	03/03/2019

some were transported to the hospital in the Venezuelan city of Santa Elena de Uaiyén and others to the city of Boa Vista, in Brazil.

With a shaking voice, as her husband was in the intensive care unit of the hospital in Boa Vista, she provided us with her testimony: "all the people were attacked with rifles, those were not rubber pellets." Melanie also describes, torn in her cry, how she saw that in front of her own house Zoraida Rodríguez was knocked down with a point-blank shot, and she saw how others were shot as well. Melanie says: "the town of Kumacapay is a quiet town, nothing like this had ever happened, I saw how they shot at everyone, they wanted to kill us all. I was on the ground, thank

God my children were sleeping, this is a nightmare.

Kliber, Melanie's husband, with a bullet wound in his thorax that punctured several organs, died on February 27, 2019, a day after we recorded her testimony in video. Rolando Garcia, Zoraida's wounded husband, died on March 2, 2019. They both died in the hospital in Boa Vista in the state of Roraima, Brazil, and were buried also in Brazil out of fear of the persecution against the entire Pemon people, perceived in opposition to the government of Nicolás Maduro and in support of the humanitarian aid that they demanded on 22 and 23 February, 2019.



Zoraida Rodríguez, indigenous woman of the Pemón people, killed on February 22 2019



Kliber Pérez, indigenous man of the Pemón people, received bullet wound on February 22, 2019 died on February 27, 2019



Rolando García, indigenous man of the Pemón people, received bullet wound on February 22, 2019 died on March 2, 2019



José Elsy Pérez, indigenous man of the Pemón people, received bullet wound on February 23, 2019 died on March 2, 2019

WOUNDED

A large number of injured people was reported during the referenced period, both in Tachira and in Bolívar state. It must be highlighted that the people registered in this report on those shot and wounded by firearms, in particular bullet wounds. However, there were also many people wounded by pellets, tear gas canisters that impacted directly on demonstrators, marbles (glass spheres), concussions and wounded by knives in several states of the country.

Regarding those receiving bullet wounds, the reported national number is 58 people. 15 of them were reported in San Antonio del Tachira; the remaining 43 were reported in Bolívar state, in the Gran Sabana municipality, including 3 minors. It must be noted that some of the wounded in Gran Sabana municipality received multiple shots.

Ernesto (we changed his name to preserve his identity), a 22-year-old, received 8 bullet shots in Santa Elena de Uairen. This took place after his friend had been shot and killed. Ernest was detained and taken to the Escamoto Fort, in the border with Brazil, at approximately 2:00 PM, where, according to his testimony, the military officers said that they would leave him to die “like a damn animal.” He said he was beaten until 9:00 PM, when “a Sargeant took pity of [him]” and was transported to a hospital in Boa Vista, Brazil.

- During February 22, a total of 17 people wounded by bullets was verified: it should be highlighted that 14 of them were at the town of Kumaracapy and 3 others in Santa Elena de Uairen.
- During February 23, 26 people were reported as wounded by bullet, all in Santa Elena de Uairen.

Nineteen (19) of those wounded by bullets are in a delicate health status. Among them, 8 indigenous people were transported to the general hospital of Boa Vista, in Roraima state, Brazil, as this hospital is provided with the supplies and minimal conditions to handle the needed care that do not exist in the Venezuelan side. The remaining injured people are receiving care in the “Rosario Vera Zurita” Hospital in Santa Elena de Uairen.



People with multiple bullet wounds in their bodies



Person with multiple rubber pellet wounds in his face

As has been indicated, during the referenced days, a large number of wounded people was reported in the states of Tachira and Bolívar, and we have been able to account for them with more precision.

However, a significant number of wounded people was reported with injuries that were produced by rubber pellets, tear gas canisters, marbles (glass spheres), concussions and injured by knives, not only in the states referenced but also in several demonstrations that took place throughout the country.

In Carabobo state, for example, on February 23, a person was wounded by a marble that was shot by a shotgun. The injured person's name is Moisés Cordero, a volunteer activist with Foro Penal. Moisés lost his right eye and sustained multiple fractures in his face. He was surgically intervened. Another case, also in Carabobo, was that of José Alejandro Bolívar, who suffered a skull fracture by the direct impact of a tear gas canister shot with a shotgun by an National Guard.



Moisés Cordero, wounded in the eye by a marble, on 23 February in Carabobo state



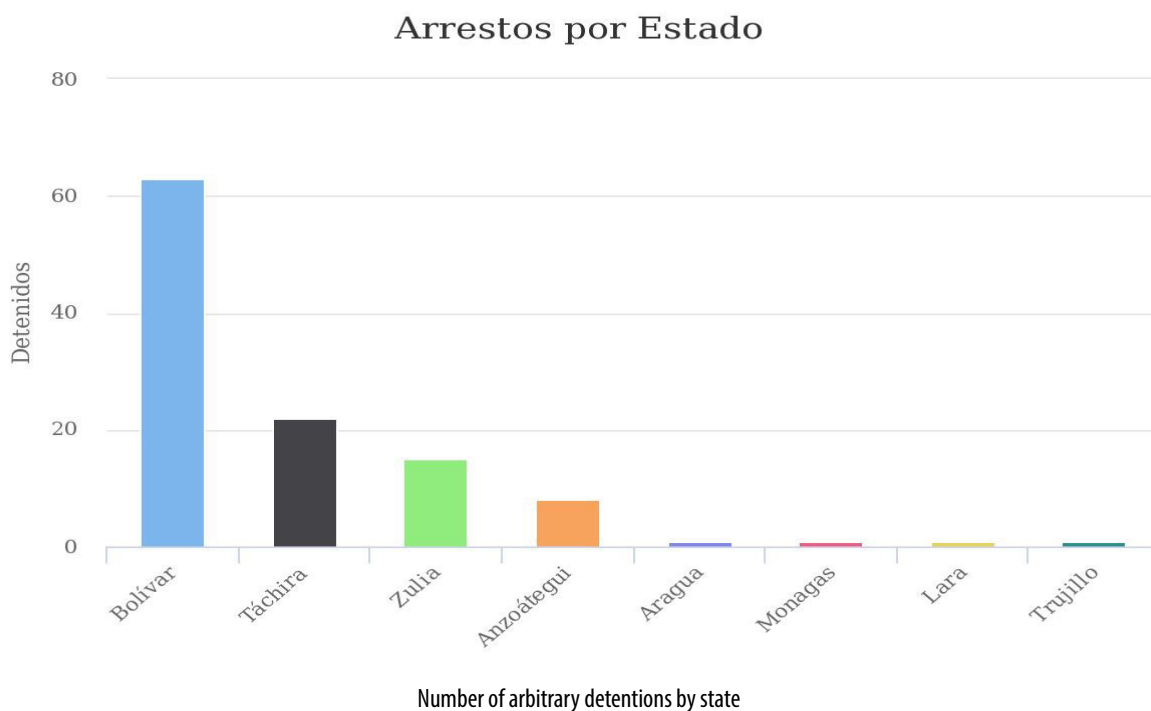
José Alejandro Bolívar, wounded by the impact of a tear gas canister, on 23 February in Carabobo state

ARBITRARY DETENTIONS

Between February 23 and 25, 2019, at least 107 arbitrary detentions were registered in the context of demonstrations for the introduction of humanitarian aid, as confirmed by Foro Penal:

State	Numbers of Arrests
Anzoátegui	08
Aragua	01
Bolívar	61
Lara	01
Monagas	01
Táchira	20
Zulia	15
Total arrests 02/23/2019	107

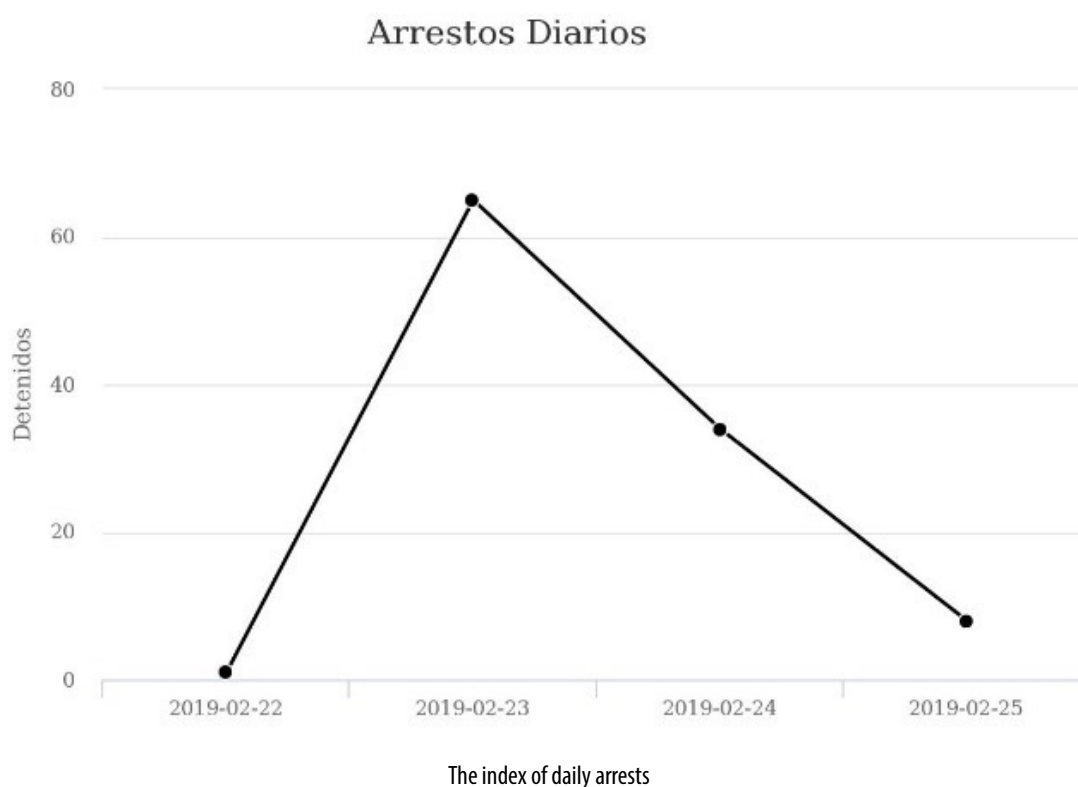
The states with the biggest number of arbitrary arrests were: Bolívar (Gran Sabana municipality), where 57% of the arrests took place; Tachira state with 18.7% of the arrests; followed by Zulia with 14% and Anzoátegui with 7.5% of the arrests.



As has been noted, the largest number of detentions took place in the Gran Sabana municipality, in Bolívar state. At least 16 of the detainees belong to the Pemón people.

Among these arrests in Bolívar state there are 4 minors between 14 and 16 years old and one indigenous woman. All the detainees were taken to the Escamoto Fort and on the date of this report there were at least 30 people who had been formally deprived of liberty and remain under detention.

The day with the largest number of arbitrary detentions was on Saturday February 23, when **65 arrests were registered throughout the country**, that is, 60.8% of the arbitrary detentions in the period covered by this report took place that day.



The referenced arrests took place in diverse street demonstrations convened for that day and related to the attempt to transport humanitarian aid from the border areas of the country. Arbitrary arrests were also verified by the abusive breaking and entering of security forces, with no search or arrest warrants, within the domiciles of the arrestees, in violation of the domestic home of those individuals. Some detentions took place in the days after February 22, 2019, in a selective manner.

The security forces intervening were: National Bolivarian Guard (GNB), Bolivarian Army, National Bolivarian Police (PNB), and National Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN). Additionally, the cooperation of armed civilians was reported, acting along the aforementioned security forces, in particular in San Antonio del Tachira, the border town of Ureña (in Tachira state) and in Bolívar state.

Regarding the forcibly disappeared people, at least 9 were from the indigenous Pemón people in Bolívar state, who were later located at the Escamoto Fort. We are currently updating this data. It has proven challenging to access the border areas due to sharp repression and blocked or failing communications, selective detentions continue.

PERSECUTION AND INTIMIDATION OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

As has been observed in this report, repression has increased in general terms at the national level, in particular in border states. However, we note with concern the deliberate attack against indigenous peoples, specifically the Pemon people, established in the Gran Sabana municipality in Bolívar state, where 4 people in that community have been killed and 17 suffered bullet wounds. Currently, persecution persists against this indigenous community. For example, during the early morning of February 27, 3 indigenous of the Pemon people were detained during the taking of the Santa Elena de Uairen airport, under the command of the National Bolivarian Guard:

1. George Leonardo Gómez Martínez;
2. Nicodemo Martínez; and,
3. Boris Bolívar.

Seemingly, as this report is completed (02/27/2019), the following people are fleeing from attempts of detention, and they have been forced to migrate to Brazil:

1. Ricardo Delgado Pérez;
2. Richard Alcides Fernández (Chief of the Kumaracapay community);
3. Ernesto Pulido Rodríguez (2nd. Chief of the Kumaracapay community, who was deprived of liberty on February 23, 2019, and is being persecuted again);
4. Jorge Valentín Gómez (General Chief of the Pemon people on the Sector 6 of Santa Elena de Uairen);
5. Emilio González, indigenous Pemon Mayor of the Gran Sabana municipality of the Bolívar state;
6. Darcy Sánchez, Chief of the indigenous Pemon Manak-Krü community.

Additionally, it is noted that on February 27 there was a first-appearance court hearing of at least 40 of the 60 people detained between 23 and 25 February 2019 in Kumaracapay and Santa Elena de Uairen. Among the detainees there are 16 members of the indigenous Pemon people, 4 of whom remain deprived of their liberty. In this regard, irregular tribunals were instituted in the Escamoto military fort, in Bolívar state. It is noteworthy that all the detainees were forbidden from choosing their defense representatives among the lawyers of their choosing and were forced, against their will, to accept public defenders. None of the attorneys that were present were allowed to carry out their legal functions, therefore, at the time of closing of this report, we are still awaiting the results of that hearing.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

The data indicated in this report could be eventually adjusted, considering that there have been significant issues with communication and access to some border areas where people have fled seeking protection from the generalized attacks that they were a target of and continue to take place.

Foro Penal categorically rejects any act of violence and does not include as political detainees or political prisoners those who have committed acts of violence.



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