



MIRANDA CENTER
FOR DEMOCRACY

A REGIME THAT FAILED TO RESPOND CANNOT REBUILD VENEZUELA

*PRELIMINARY AFTER-ACTION REVIEW
ONE MONTH AFTER THE EARTHQUAKES*

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Executive Summary

Preliminary After-Action Review | A regime that failed its citizens cannot lead its reconstruction

On June 24, 2026, twin earthquakes of magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 struck Venezuela within 39 seconds of each other, affecting at least seven states. The seismic event was a natural disaster, but the response of the interim regime of Delcy Rodríguez transformed it into a tragedy. The regime acknowledges 5,208 deaths (as of July 19), 16,740 injured, 190 collapsed buildings and around 18,000 people who've lost their homes¹. Nonetheless, independent estimates by the US Geological Survey place a 70%+ likelihood of over 10,000 deaths and international organizations (consistent with citizen reports) estimate around 50,000 missing people, up to 9% of Venezuela's current GDP in losses, and almost 59,000 buildings damaged or destroyed.

Official figures, as has been the norm under Chávez, Maduro, and now Rodríguez regime, place the numbers in a fraction of these to downplay the magnitude of the crisis and the inability to properly register it. For Venezuelans, these tragic events are a sad reminder of the 1999 Vargas tragedy, when approximately 30,000 people² died in the region that was most affected today. The current disaster was handled by the same political party and -many of the same individuals- as in 1999 with, sadly, similar ineffective and politicized responses.

This brief is a preliminary After- Action Review by the Miranda Center for Democracy. Its purpose is to document what happened, what should have happened, and why the gap between those two realities was measured in avoidable deaths. A comprehensive framework for disaster preparedness and risk management reconstruction proposals will follow. This review reflects information available as of July 19, 2026.

From the moment the earthquakes struck, the state's response should have been led by a professional authority activating standardized emergency protocols, classifying the emergency on a formal scale, and



deploying a damage and needs assessment to guide the allocation of resources. Instead, the response was led by military officers without disaster management training and experience, leading to no effective deployment of resources nor even minimal coordination of citizens' efforts. The critical 72-hour window, during which the probability of rescuing survivors is highest, passed without a coordinated state-led operation, leaving survivors dependent on family, neighbors, and international teams that could reach them.

On the ground, search and rescue were carried out mostly by citizens, volunteer firefighters, and international teams. Most Venezuelan rescuers worked with sledgehammers, pickaxes, and shovels; no hydraulic equipment, no heavy machinery. In the words of one civil protection rescuer on the ground: *"We don't have the tools, we don't have the technique, we don't have the technology... We're stuck in the Stone Age."*



The regime had long been absent from risk management and disaster response. Civil protection units had been operating at 10% capacity or less for years, without vehicles, tools, or uniforms. When officers publicly demanded better conditions, they were detained by military intelligence and the political police; driving qualified professionals out of the system and causing that when the earthquake came, the remaining apparatus had neither the people nor the equipment to respond. The regime was



unable to manage even basic information. For the first five days, the only missing persons registry was built and operated by citizens and Venezuelan diaspora volunteers, not the government.

In 2014, the Venezuelan state invested over \$1 billion in Chinese surveillance technology and purchased 5,239 Chinese heavy-duty trucks; none of which were deployed in the disaster response. Billions more were spent on the Gran Misión Vivienda social housing program, built by geopolitical allies including China, Belarus, Turkey, and Russia, under contracts marked by corruption and opacity, including \$1.6 billion awarded to China's CITIC Group alone. Many of those buildings, never independently audited for seismic safety, collapsed in 2026. The money was there but went to control and corruption, not to protect Venezuelan lives. And for the second time in 27 years, those lives have paid the price.



Were it not for the outstanding international response, spearheaded by the United States and coordinated by the United Nations, an already dire situation would have been even more critical. Thousands of Venezuelans were rescued and treated thanks to the generosity and support of over 60 international search and rescue teams and over 2,400 international first respondents from 29 different countries³. Venezuelans are grateful and will remember how, in their country's darkest hour, international allies stepped in and saved lives where the state had failed.



Beyond its failure to respond, the regime's security forces turned the disaster zone into a site of extraction. National Police, National Guard, criminal investigations police, and army personnel were filmed looting victims' belongings from the rubble and from buildings with structural damage. Morgue workers charged grieving families between \$400 and \$5,000 to release their relatives' bodies. In at least eight states, regime officials ordered independent citizen aid collection centers shut down, redirecting all donations through the regime's Venezuelan united socialist party (PSUV per its acronym in Spanish) headquarters. For example, seven trucks of aid destined for the main national public university were seized and their whereabouts remain unknown⁴.

The state also actively obstructed rescue efforts. From June 26, access to La Guaira was militarized through a QR-coded credential system, with police blockades turning away volunteers, stopping on-duty firefighters, and holding up humanitarian convoys. International rescue teams from Colombia, Spain, Germany, and Austria, amongst others, were stranded at airports over bureaucratic permits during the most critical hours. Others already on the ground were monitored by military officers who claimed they had "orders to monitor them because they could be spies."

To control the narrative, the regime suppressed media coverage. Intelligence police threatened journalists with detention while they livestreamed from collapsed buildings, and on June 29 the Ministry of Communication suspended all press and NGO access to La Guaira for 48 hours (later lifted). Throughout the emergency, 209 internet domains remained blocked nationwide, including 94 news outlets.

The state has shown, once again, its main characteristics: criminal activity and repression on one side, and complete inability to provide even the most basic services to its citizens on the other. Firefighters jailed for demanding boots; security forces looting the homes of affected families; families charged thousands to recover their dead. Aid seized, journalists threatened, rescuers treated as spies. This is not merely a failed response: it is the product of a system designed to control, censor and repress. Democracy for Venezuela is not a luxury it can postpone until after reconstruction; it is the precondition for reconstruction to happen at all.



Until the regime changes, natural events will continue to become tragedies and the same people who failed La Guaira in 1999 will fail again.

A regime that failed its citizens cannot lead its reconstruction.



A Note on Methodology

This preliminary review draws on three types of sources: semi-structured interviews with Venezuelan civil protection and disaster management experts, including responders to the 1999 Vargas tragedy; first-hand testimony from Miranda Center for Democracy collaborators and volunteers present in the disaster zone beginning June 25; and open-source verification against international press reporting, UN system data (OCHA, PAHO, UNICEF), USGS and NASA estimates, and reports by human rights and transparency organizations. Pattern-level claims are included only where corroborated by at least one independent secondary source. The names and identifying details of those who provided testimony are withheld for their protection. Information is current as of July 19, 2026; casualty and damage figures will be updated in subsequent versions.



Section 1 - The Magnitude of The Crisis

On June 24, twin 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes hit Venezuela affecting at least 7 states, with the metropolitan area of the capital, Caracas and the neighboring coastal state of La Guaira being the most affected.

On that day, Delcy Rodríguez declared a national emergency. The first figures did not come until June 26, when the government issued its first report, which immediately sparked severe contradictions. Delcy Rodríguez announced an official toll of 589 deaths and 2,980 injuries while ordering the militarization of La Guaira. On June 28, Jorge Rodríguez (head of the legislative, head of the national electoral council, former vice president and Delcy's brother) raised the official death toll to 1,450 fatalities. By July 13th, Jorge Rodríguez had updated the number to 4,561 dead, 16,740 injured and 17,907 people without homes. By July 19, the official toll had surpassed 5,000 deaths (5,208 per official reports), while the injured figure has remained frozen at 16,740 since July 13; a sign of a casualty registry that has simply stopped counting.

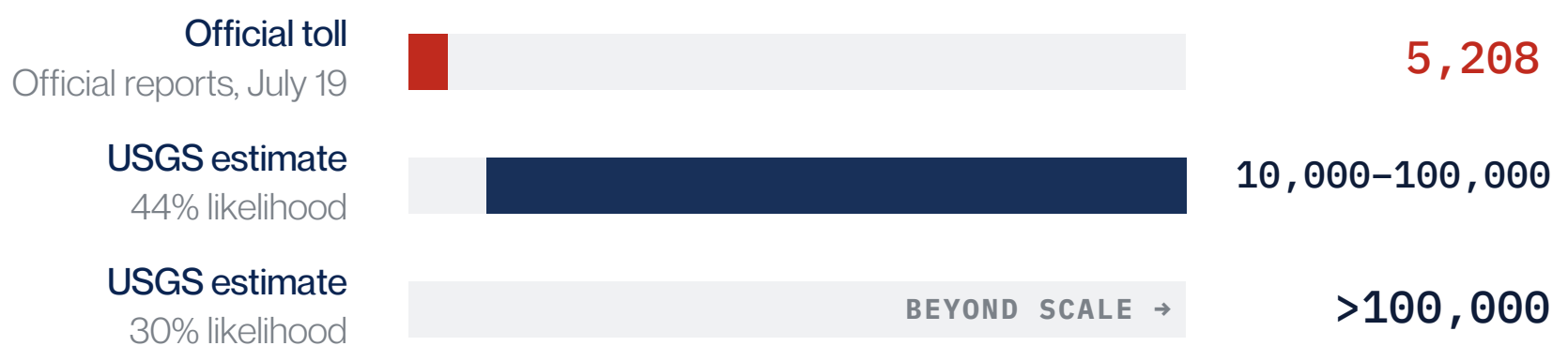




Nonetheless, as has been the norm during the Chávez, Maduro and now Delcy regime, information is manipulated to avoid exposing true figures and trying to block the magnitude of the crisis. The official estimates are distant from international estimates and the magnitude of destruction seen on the ground and reported by citizens, the press and international organizations.

The United States Geological Survey estimates a 44% likelihood that fatalities are between 10,000 and 100,000 and a 30% likelihood that fatalities are greater than 100,000 people⁵. So, according to these numbers, there is a 74% likelihood that fatalities will exceed 10,000 people, almost five times what Jorge Rodríguez has declared and estimated. The set-up of massive graveyards seems to further signal that the government is either lying or incapable of estimating the true damage of the earthquakes and its aftermath⁶.

Deaths



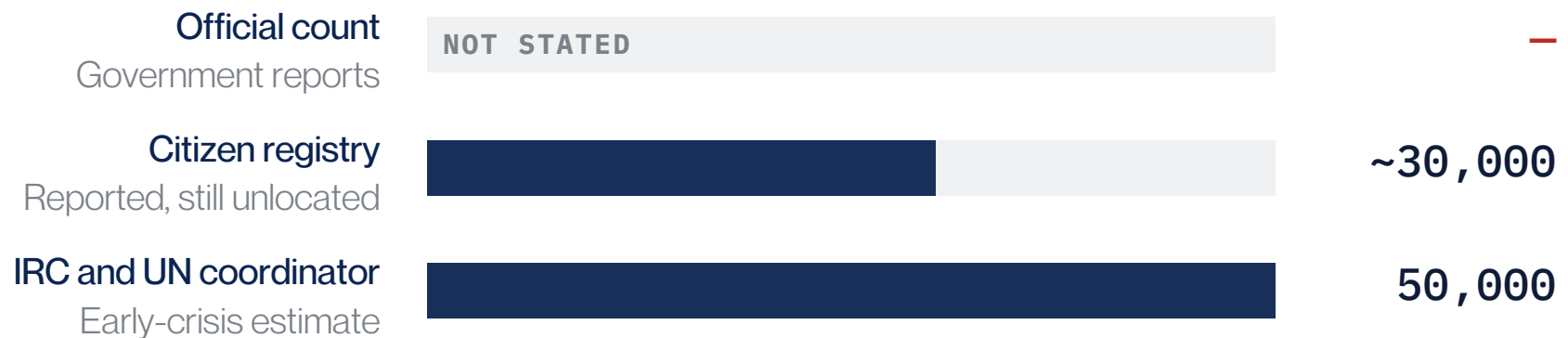
The two USGS likelihoods combine to a 74% likelihood of a toll above 10,000.
Scale 0–100,000.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the United Nations (UN) resident coordinator estimate 50,000 people missing⁷ in early days of the crisis, consistent with the data from citizens' independent reports of missing persons⁸ which amount to around 30,000 missing persons reported and still not located at the time of this brief.

The United Nations estimates that around 680,000 children require assistance and that the need for humanitarian aid reaches up to 1.8 million people.⁹ Moreover, the UN further estimates that up to 6.76 million people



Missing



Not a range. The two figures measure different populations at different moments. Scale 0–50,000.

could be affected by the earthquakes, including 2 million in Caracas alone¹⁰.

As for the physical damage, while Rodríguez reports 1,044 damaged buildings nationwide, NASA estimates that 58,870 buildings were likely damaged or destroyed¹¹; a significant difference from the official figures. As another example of the devastation: UNICEF estimates 432 schools were damaged due to the earthquakes.

Anova, a Venezuelan think tank working in partnership with Microsoft, calculates 73,500 residents of La Guaira affected by damaged structures, with only housing replacement amounting to 2-3% of Venezuela's GDP¹². Also, initial estimates of the economic loss go from \$6.7 billion to \$9 billion or around 8.5% of Venezuela's GDP. The United Nations now estimates that full recovery and reconstruction could cost up to \$37 billion¹³.

Buildings damaged or destroyed



NASA counts buildings likely damaged or destroyed; the official figure counts damaged buildings only. Scale 0–58,870.



Section 2 – The Absence of the State

One of the main demands from citizens in all affected areas was the most basic: the presence of the state. Instead, what they encountered was absence, irregularities, and outright politicization, as described in section 3 of this document.

a. The State's Response: An Assessment of Official Actions

Reports gathered by the Miranda Center for Democracy, corroborated extensively by the international press, share a common finding: the complete absence of, or very precarious response from, the state. Transparencia Venezuela's technical assessment, released on July 14 under the title *"The insufficient state response: the disaster happened before the earthquake¹⁴,"* quantified the same finding: the state deployed only 12.6% of its peak response personnel in the first 24 hours and 34.6% within 48 hours, compared with over 71% deployment achieved by Chile in earthquakes of similar magnitude. The organization also warned that the reconstruction (estimated at \$37 billion) represents Venezuela's largest corruption risk of the coming four years. This happens even though a General Emergency Staff was designated and announced on June 24 at 9pm.





Due to a severe lack of specialized machinery and equipment, search and rescue operations relied heavily on rudimentary tools provided by citizens. This severely limited the reach and effectiveness of the operations, tragically costing lives that could have otherwise been saved. In the words of a civil protection rescuer:

*"We don't have the tools, we don't have the technique, we don't have the technology. Thank God these rescuers from El Salvador, from the USA came (...) It's amazing how they help each other with technology. We're stuck in the Stone Age."*¹⁵

CIVIL PROTECTION RESCUER

The absence of government authority is further reflected in the complete lack of official coordination. Instead, local citizens, volunteers offering food and shelter, and even international rescue teams had to rely on grassroots organization, often channeling urgent rescue requests through WhatsApp groups and social media.

In response to this vacuum, civil society stepped in to perform critical state functions. This includes managing a missing persons clearinghouse¹⁶, distributing aid, and directing international rescue teams based on real-time reports received from the ground.

The evidence makes clear that the state's presence has diminished to the point of near disappearance. Furthermore, where the state has been present, it has only worsened the situation, as detailed in Section 3 of this report. The following section will examine the specific actions taken by the regime that have actively hindered search and rescue efforts, obstructed humanitarian assistance, and impeded an effective response to the crisis.



b. What Was Supposed to Happen: The Legal Framework vs. Reality

The Miranda Center for Democracy interviewed three Venezuelan experts on civil protection/disaster preparedness and disaster management, including responders in the 1999 Vargas landslide. Experts claim that from the moment the earthquake struck, the response should have been led by a professional civilian — the Director of Civil Protection or the Vice Minister of Citizen Security, for example — not necessarily a military officer, unless with specific expertise. Experts are clear on this point: military command structures prioritize order and control over the technical requirements of lifesaving. Within minutes, the National Civil Protection System should have classified the emergency on a formal scale (Grade 1–5) to trigger specific domestic and international mobilization protocols, and act within the critical 72-hour window during which the probability of finding survivors under rubble remains meaningful. A professional damage and needs assessment (EDAN per its acronym) should have followed immediately, providing the baseline data without which international teams cannot operate effectively and resources risk being duplicated or misallocated.

The critical survival window passed without a state-led operation



No formal classification, no EDAN, no coordinated state operation. The window closed with rescue left to citizens and the international teams that could get through.



On the operational side, the government's role was to organize, not replace, the spontaneous citizen response that invariably arrives first; coordinating neighbors so they don't inadvertently mask the sounds of trapped victims. A centralized information hub should manage incoming data, directing specialized teams to high-probability survival zones, and preventing chaotic resource distribution. This did not happen and led to logistical chaos on the ground without a unified voice and leadership.



Moreover, these domestic obligations do not exist in isolation. As a United Nations member state, Venezuela is committed to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the global standard against which any state's disaster response is now measured¹⁷. Two of the Framework's four priorities speak directly to what unfolded after June 24: Priority 2, "strengthening disaster risk governance", and Priority 4, "building back better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Measured against them, the institutional response falls short at its foundation. The bodies created to manage the emergency and its aftermath, a Presidential Commission on habitability and a military-led command for transitional camps were installed without any verifiable, public mechanism of accountability.



2.The Roots of state Incapacity: How Corruption, Politicization, and Persecution Dismantled the Response Infrastructure

The state of Venezuelan emergency response institutions before the earthquake was dire due to a combination of underinvestment, politicization, corruption, and militarization alongside the persecution of rescuers demanding better working conditions.

Over the last two decades, the state shifted its focus from technical excellence to ideological loyalty, leading to the **persecution of professional** officers who were replaced by political appointees or military personnel without disaster management training. Corruption further hollowed out these institutions, as budgets were diverted from equipment and maintenance to political activities and personal enrichment.

Although the government elevated Civil Protection and Risk Management to Vice-Ministry in 2013, the institution has been led by military officers over 70% of the time. This includes the current incumbent, Admiral Juan Carlos Oti Paituvi, whose background is in naval aviation rather than disaster management.

a. Disaster Readiness: Institutional Status and the Fate of Chinese Equipment

As a federation, firefighters and most civil protection units are dependent on the regional and local level, which have been systematically weakened by the Chávez and Maduro regimes as a way of blocking political leadership from rising in states and municipalities where the opposition governed. As a result, these units have been greatly underfunded. On many occasions, operational capacity remained at 10%¹⁸ or less with underpaid, underequipped, and undertrained staff. Some reports from previous years even indicate that firefighters did not have water and even the capital did not have enough ambulances¹⁹. The state abandoned its firefighters and its civil protection many years ago; hence the limited response they had during the current crisis²⁰.



Moreover, while the government heavily invested over \$1bn²¹ in its VEN911 video surveillance system with Chinese technology, there were no significant investments to mitigate and manage natural disasters, although they remain a recurring threat in the country with floods, earthquakes and landslides occurring regularly. In 2014, Venezuela purchased 5,239 heavy-duty Chinese trucks — none of which have been seen in the disaster response.^{22 23} **Where is that equipment now?** Weeks later, citizens are still demanding answers about where that equipment is and waiting for the machinery needed to recover their loved ones from the rubble.

WHERE THE MONEY WENT

SPENT ON CONTROL & ALLIES

VEN911 Chinese surveillance system	\$1B+
CITIC Public Group housing contract alone	\$1.6B
Gran Misión Vivienda (China, Belarus, Turkey, Russia)	billions
Chinese heavy-duty trucks (2014)	5,239

REACHED DISASTER RESPONSE

Heavy machinery deployed	scarcely seen
Chinese trucks in response	scarcely seen
Seismic network	300 → <10
Rescuer equipment	picks & shovels

At every level—local, regional, and national—most units operate entirely without tools, vehicles, or even basic uniforms. Over the years, professionals have repeatedly denounced that they do not even receive boots. Furthermore, when personnel publicly demanded better wages and working conditions, they were met with swift repression, leading to the detention and imprisonment by military counterintelligence bodies and the political police.²⁴ In short, the lack of capacity to respond to the current emergency is not accidental; it has been by design.



Moreover, according to consulted experts, Civil Protection was weaponized as a propaganda tool during natural disasters like floods, only to be abandoned once the media attention faded. More worryingly, some experts reported that Civil Protection motorcycles were loaned out to repress opposition protests.



i. A Foundational Flaw: The Regime's Vision

Beneath these operational failures lies a deeper structural problem: the Venezuelan regime has never treated risk management as a transversal public policy, but rather as a reactive measure activated only after disasters strike. Consequently, urban development has proceeded for decades without a technical vision of the territory, building on floodplains, unstable slopes, and sediment zones without the necessary assessments to guide planners. The most catastrophic example is the government's response to the 1999 Vargas tragedy; a massive series of mudslides and floods that killed roughly thirty thousand people in what is now named La Guaira. This disaster should have led to permanent construction bans on



those collapsed alluvial zones. Instead, the administration built thousands of units for 'Misión Vivienda,' its flagship social housing program, on those exact same geologically unstable grounds. Predictably, most of those buildings did not survive the 2026 earthquake.

The militarization of civil protection compounded this conceptual failure in a specific and underappreciated way. Beyond replacing technical staff with officers lacking disaster management training, the military logic reshaped the internal culture of rescue institutions. Professional rescuers were required to perform "orden cerrado" military parade drills, in place of the technical certifications and operational readiness exercises that had been conducted with US assistance until the early 2000s.



In addition, the regime used civil protection to manufacture dependency rather than resilience. Distributing shelter, water, and emergency supplies as political favors during floods or minor disasters created what experts describe as a “false sense of security”: a population that associates disaster response with a gesture of loyalty to the ruling party, rather than with a fundamental right backed by institutional capacity. This logic is self-defeating by design: it requires the government to be seen responding, rather than building the systems that would make its intervention unnecessary.



Shockingly, the national seismological agency reported that measurement equipment was missing in Yaracuy, the state where the earthquakes originated,²⁵ severely compromising the capacity to monitor and analyze seismic activity. This is another example of the little capacity the government had in preparation for any seismic event.

1999: The Lessons Never Learned

The 1999 Vargas landslide (which left an estimated 30,000 people dead and over 250,000 displaced) forced Venezuela to confront the exact institutional flaws that the 2026 earthquake has now exposed. While the record shows those lessons were acknowledged in principle, the government never operationalized them. Today, the consequences of this negligence are being measured in lost lives and a catastrophic socio-economic collapse of a magnitude that La Guaira (formerly Vargas) should never have been left to face alone.

The tragedy did produce a real institutional response: the 2009 National Law for Integral Risk Management, a framework once considered a model in the region. But experts interviewed by the Miranda Center for Democracy describe its subsequent history as one of deliberate sterilization, steadily stripped of the technical autonomy the law was designed to guarantee.

The failure was not only structural but also a deliberate lack of transparency. Technical evaluations that had already identified the risk of collapse in specific coastal structures were withheld from the public rather than used to guide reconstruction. Experts describe the result as reducing serious engineering recommendations to little more than "opinions in a drawer," leaving the post-1999 recovery, in their words, a pantomime rather than a reconstruction grounded in risk data.

The clearest evidence that the lesson was never absorbed is that construction continued, across the Chávez, Maduro, and now Rodríguez governments, on the same unstable alluvial ground that collapsed in 1999



(see below on Misión Vivienda). Early investments in mitigation engineering and early-warning meteorological stations made after 1999 were progressively abandoned for lack of political support. Meanwhile military spending consistently favored anti-aircraft systems and intelligence capacity over the life-saving monitoring technology the country still lacks. The national seismic network has shrunk from roughly 300 stations to fewer than ten, and Venezuela was still requesting portable seismological equipment from the United Nations days after the 2026 earthquake.

1999

- ~30,000 dead · 250,000+ displaced
- Same state (Vargas, now La Guaira)
- Produced the 2009 Risk Management Law
- Recommendations left as "opinions in a drawer"

2026

- USGS: 74% likelihood > 10,000 dead
- Same alluvial ground rebuilt with Misión Vivienda
- Law "sterilized," placed under political ministries
- Seismic network shrunk from ~300 to fewer than 10

The 2026 crisis is, in this sense, a clone of 1999, not a repetition by coincidence but a consequence by design. Ordinary Venezuelans have shown real resilience, drawing on self-protection techniques passed down informally since 1999. The state's own rescue apparatus, by contrast, has been left what one expert called "a cemetery of inoperative equipment" and its personnel left without technical recertification.

Misión Vivienda: The Genesis Made Concrete

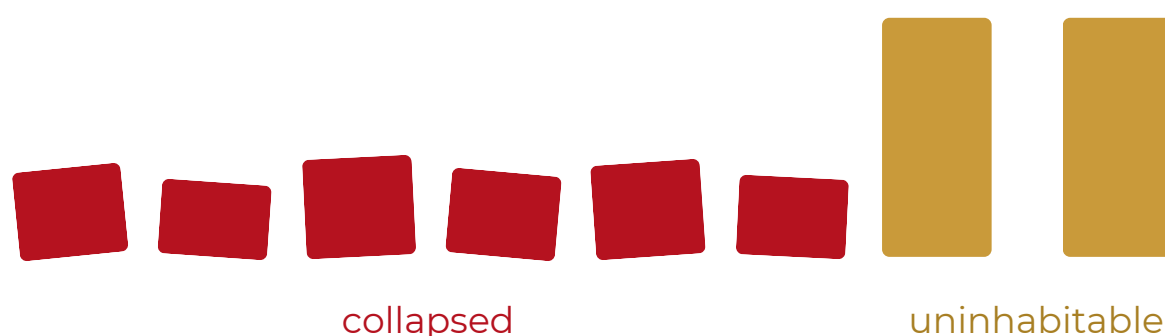
The clearest evidence of the failures described above is Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela (GMVV), the flagship public housing program launched by Hugo Chávez in 2011 and continued under Nicolás Maduro. GMVV was a public housing policy designed, financed, delivered, and politically claimed by the government, which makes its safety a matter of state responsibility rather than private risk.



Large sections of GMVV in La Guaira (formerly Vargas) were built on the same alluvial ground that collapsed in Vargas in 1999 and even served to house families that had lost their houses in that tragedy. Nonetheless, no authority ever audited whether the program's buildings met the seismic standards the state itself had adopted. Many housing projects of the Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela were built by geopolitical allies of Chavismo such as Belarus, Turkey, Russia and China²⁶. Transparency International reported contracts awarded to China's CITIC Group alone totaling \$1.6 billion²⁷; more than 1% of Venezuela's current GDP. This social housing policy has been marked by corruption, opacity and negligence as widely documented by NGOs, international media and researchers.

In 2017, a moderate earthquake on the same coast already raised public concern about GMVV's seismic safety. At the time, the head of Venezuela's engineering association said his institution had no official access to the program's structural calculations, describing the information as a state secret; independent architecture faculty members identified specific construction features, including single-frame bays, cantilevered slabs, and unreinforced infill walls, as unfavorable under seismic stress.

ONE COMPLEX, EIGHT TOWERS



A GMVV complex our collaborator visited: of 8 towers,
6 completely destroyed, the remaining 2 left uninhabitable.



None of this was corrected in the following decade. When the 2026 earthquakes struck, multiple GMVV developments in La Guaira were reported collapsed or left uninhabitable. One of our collaborators visited a complex where 8 towers stood, 6 were completely destroyed and the remaining 2 were left uninhabitable. The pattern is consistent with what engineers and civil society had been warning about since 2017: buildings whose materials, soil studies, and inspections were never made public, built for families who had little choice but to accept a home whose safety the regime was never willing to guarantee. Many videos on the site show the low-quality of materials and inadequacy of construction.²⁸

Corruption and negligence have cost Venezuelan lives; the state failed in the design, the construction, the supervision, and the repairs of its own flagship program.





Section 3 - The regime shows its true capabilities: propaganda, repression and corruption

Rather than facilitating an immediate, agile, and widespread rescue operation, the regime has prioritized centralized political control, bureaucratic restriction, and systematic security clampdowns. This strategy has severely hindered autonomous, civic-led, and international relief efforts at a moment when thousands remain trapped or missing under collapsed infrastructure as has even been denounced by international search and rescue teams.²⁹

The following section documents the regime's active efforts to politicize and monopolize relief or, directly, repress or censor. At the time of writing this brief, reports continue to arise of state abuses in each of the lines described.

01

Militarizing the zone

QR-credential access to La Guaira; blockades turned away volunteers and on-duty firefighters.

02

Threatening the press

SEBIN threatened journalists mid-livestream; 48-hour press blackout on La Guaira, June 29.

03

Blocking rescuers

Teams from Spain, Germany, Austria stranded at airports; others monitored as "possible spies."

04

Looting & extortion

Police, Guard, and army filmed looting rubble; morgues charged families \$400–\$5,000 for bodies.

05

Seizing aid

Citizen centers shut in 8+ states; 7 trucks of aid bound for the public university seized, still missing.

06

Digital censorship

209 domains blocked (94 news outlets); 16 hours to restore X access after the quake.



1. Limiting citizens and state efforts in the disaster zone

The state's near-absence during the first 48 hours left search-and-rescue efforts critically under-resourced. Rather than reinforcing capacity, the government's first major intervention was to militarize the disaster zone. From the evening of June 26, entry to La Guaira required a QR-coded credential -obtainable only through in-person registration in Caracas. A checkpoint system introduced two days later addressed the appearance of control more than the substance of rescue.

This militarization led to deep frustration among volunteers who were turned away at checkpoints. Police blockades stopped even on-duty firefighters heading to La Guaira³⁰, while National Guard units held up humanitarian aid convoys, undercutting the rescue operation and the relief effort it was meant to protect. At a park sheltering displaced families, soldiers tried to block the delivery of food and medicine, and volunteers forced their way in only after a confrontation.³¹

On the night of June 26, volunteers in Tucacas (another affected area in the Carabobo region) overcame police blockades to continue search and rescue operations independently.³²

The obstruction went beyond turning volunteers away at checkpoints: in at least one documented case, a prominent volunteer rescuer was detained by the National Police for nearly 48 hours. It is a damning illustration of the regime's priorities; unable to save lives itself, yet willing to detain those who could. The pattern extends beyond rescuers: Amnesty International reported in July that hundreds of politically motivated detainees remained imprisoned amid the disaster, with reports of damage at the Rodeo I prison, unlawful use of force, alleged torture, and possible enforced disappearances of detainees.³³



2. Threats to local media and citizens and limitations to the international press

As has been the norm for years, public authorities have harassed local media and ordinary citizens documenting the crisis, and in the current emergency, have escalated to open threats of detention. As an example, on June 26, a SEBIN (Venezuela's intelligence police) commissioner, Robinson Navarro, was filmed confronting broadcaster Gabriel Tinoco as he livestreamed from a collapsed building in Caracas, warning him to leave or be "taken to SEBIN" and attempting to seize his phone. The pattern repeated elsewhere: journalist Luis Hugas was arbitrarily held while filming with a drone in Altamira, and a Televen (a national TV) crew was intimidated and photographed by men working for ruling-party figure Daniel Aponte after refusing to frame their coverage around official talking points.³⁴ The national press documented threats of criminal complaints against reporters covering one of the collapsed buildings, as well as harassment by counterintelligence units when covering the morgue.³⁵



Moreover, access to the media and journalists has been limited to avoid showing the reality of the situation on the ground and the regime's response. As examples, military personnel barred a local press from a hospital emergency area, and hospital security stopped an reporters from filming aid deliveries at J.M. de los Ríos Children's Hospital in Caracas.

On June 29, the Ministry of Communication suspended all press and NGO access to La Guaira for 48 hours without explanation. Access that was granted to international media came with conditions built for control rather than coverage. Reporters credentialed at La Carlota air base had to hand over passport numbers, blood type, and contact details for a wristband they were required to wear until leaving the country. Press transportation to the disaster zone was held for hours awaiting a vice minister; crews on the ground had to return to their bus at a fixed hour regardless of what stories they were covering. Moreover, at one official press conference that began five hours late, a foreign correspondent had his microphone cut when he asked about the regime's delayed rescue response.³⁶

Although there has been some progress since January 3rd, the regime continues to show its nature when stressed: censorship, opacity, and repression. The Institute of Press and Society (IPYS per its acronym in Spanish) has made a report public consistent with warnings by international organizations on harassment towards the press.³⁷

3.Interference and limitation of international rescuers

With nearly 30 governments offering assistance through humanitarian aid, search & rescue teams, and financial assistance and the Venezuelan regime accepting it, there have been several cases that show a pattern: politicization, high degrees of discretion and control.

Many international teams have been closely monitored, communications checked by military officers since "they had orders to monitor them because they could be spies"³⁸, interfering with the search and rescue efforts.



Furthermore, several rescue teams faced important bureaucratic delays entering the country³⁹ in the critical initial hours or have not been able to enter due to bureaucratic permits despite being authorized. Teams from Colombia, Spain⁴⁰, Germany, and Austria⁴¹ were stranded at the airports⁴² and could not leave or faced significant delays.



4.Looting by federal officials and corruption

Looting by the security and defense forces deployed to the disaster zone emerged as a recurring pattern in the days after the earthquake. National Police, National Guard, Criminal Investigations Police (an FBI equivalent) and the army have all been reported, filmed, and confronted by citizens.⁴³ Neighbors have repeatedly denounced the looting and sacking of belongings of their properties by regime forces.

The behavior was not isolated. Soldiers clearing debris in another town tried to pocket cash they found among the ruins and were stopped only when residents intervened and destroyed the bills. Members of armed



forces sent to a rescue site were seen taking victims' belongings instead of helping search for survivors. In one building, women searching for their missing relatives confronted an officer of the Criminal Investigations Police as he took a cash box from the site.⁴⁴

And in a related form of extraction, several morgues charged grieving families between \$400 and \$5,000 simply to release the bodies of relatives killed in the earthquake. Looting by security forces has caused anger among affected communities. Officers of the same Criminal Investigations Police were also accused of obstructing the release of bodies to their families, and families were charged as much as \$9,000 to move the heavy machinery needed to reach relatives still buried under the rubble.⁴⁵

This follows a pattern of behavior by police, intelligence, and the military that has been widely documented by civil society organizations throughout the last two decades. Allowance for looting and corruption has been part of the governance model of Chávez, Maduro and now Delcy to ensure loyalty among their security forces.⁴⁶

5. Politicization and persecution of aid collection centers and donations⁴⁷



Volunteer-run donation centers came under sustained pressure from regime and party officials in at least eight states. Ruling-party mayors in



Mérida and Miranda ordered independent collection points shut down, redirecting all aid through the party's own local headquarters. Police in one state banned volunteers from even using the term "collection center" and ordered supplies handed over to security forces rather than distributed directly; in another, officers dismantled centers run by an opposition party. Elsewhere, officials entered citizen-run centers and removed stored donations without authorization.

Individuals who organized relief on their own paid a price: a municipal government fired an employee for turning her home into a donation point, police blocked students from setting up a collection point in Caracas, and intelligence police harassed organizers in a coastal region. At one school serving as a collection center, security and intelligence officers reportedly took control of operations while a tax-authority truck removed supplies already gathered. The pattern reached Venezuela's largest public university too, where student leaders said National Guard troops seized seven trucks of donated aid bound for its own collection center; the whereabouts of those supplies remain unknown.

6.Digital Censorship

Beyond the physical devastation, the earthquake exposed a second layer of state-imposed information blackout. Access to X (formerly Twitter) had been blocked in Venezuela since August 2024, forcing citizens to rely on VPNs for almost two years. In the hours following the quake, this pre-existing blockade compounded the emergency. It took the government 16 hours to restore access to X, and only then to facilitate the search for missing people, not as a general restoration of digital rights.

Even after that partial reopening, digital rights monitor VEsinFiltro reported that images and videos on X still failed to load through some domains. More broadly, VEsinFiltro documented that over 209 domains remained blocked nationwide during the emergency, 94 of them news outlets, cutting off Venezuelans from independent reporting on the scale of the disaster and the government's response to it. The UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela and Amnesty International both publicly called on the government to lift these restrictions, warning that continued blocking of communication channels during a life-or-death emergency "puts millions of people at risk."⁴⁸



Section 4 – The international response

Venezuelans are grateful for the unprecedented international response to help in the aftermath of the earthquakes and fill the massive gap the state left and documented in this report. At its peak, more than 60 international urban search-and-rescue teams, with over 2,400 first responders and nearly 200 canines from 29 countries, operated on Venezuelan soil under United Nations coordination.⁴⁹

The breadth of the response crossed every geopolitical line. Teams and aid arrived from the United States, which deployed some 2,000 military personnel along with naval vessels and heavy-lift aircraft⁵⁰; from across Latin America, including Mexico, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Panama and Cuba; from Europe, including Spain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal and the Czech Republic; and from Turkey, Jordan, India and China, as well as other places such as Syria.⁵¹





The fact that countries as different and as distant from one another as the United States and Cuba worked the same rubble is a measure of both the magnitude of the tragedy and the solidarity it summoned.

Unfortunately, what these teams achieved is the clearest measure of what Venezuela's own state could not do. Some of the most difficult rescues, days after the earthquakes, were carried out by or with international teams. For example, a young boy was pulled alive by a Jordanian search-and-rescue team after six days beneath a collapsed house in Caracas, in a three-hour operation; and a survivor was freed after eight days in a coastal town by a multinational team.⁵² International teams brought the hydraulic tools, sensors, and canine units that Venezuelan rescuers, working, in their own words, in the Stone Age, did not have. Several countries installed field hospitals and mobile clinics in the disaster zone.

Beyond search and rescue efforts, financial commitments have been made, with the United States alone reporting that its total assistance had passed \$386 million by July 8, alongside contributions from the United Kingdom, Spain, the European Union, the Red Cross movement, and multilateral banks. On July 14, the United Nations announced a \$298 million addendum to its Humanitarian Response Plan to address the multisectoral needs of 1.3 million people over the next six months, and on July 18 the IMF released \$346 million of Venezuela's own resources for reconstruction tasks. The US Treasury's General License 60, which authorizes earthquake-relief transactions, expires on October 23, 2026; humanitarian and sanctions experts have publicly urged its extension to cover reconstruction.

The Miranda Center for Democracy wishes to state what the data shows: without the international teams, the volunteers of the Venezuelan diaspora, and the citizens who organized themselves, the state's own capacity would not have been sufficient to keep its people alive, turning an already dire situation into something far worse. To every country, team, and rescuer who came: Venezuelans saw you, and Venezuelans will remember.



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