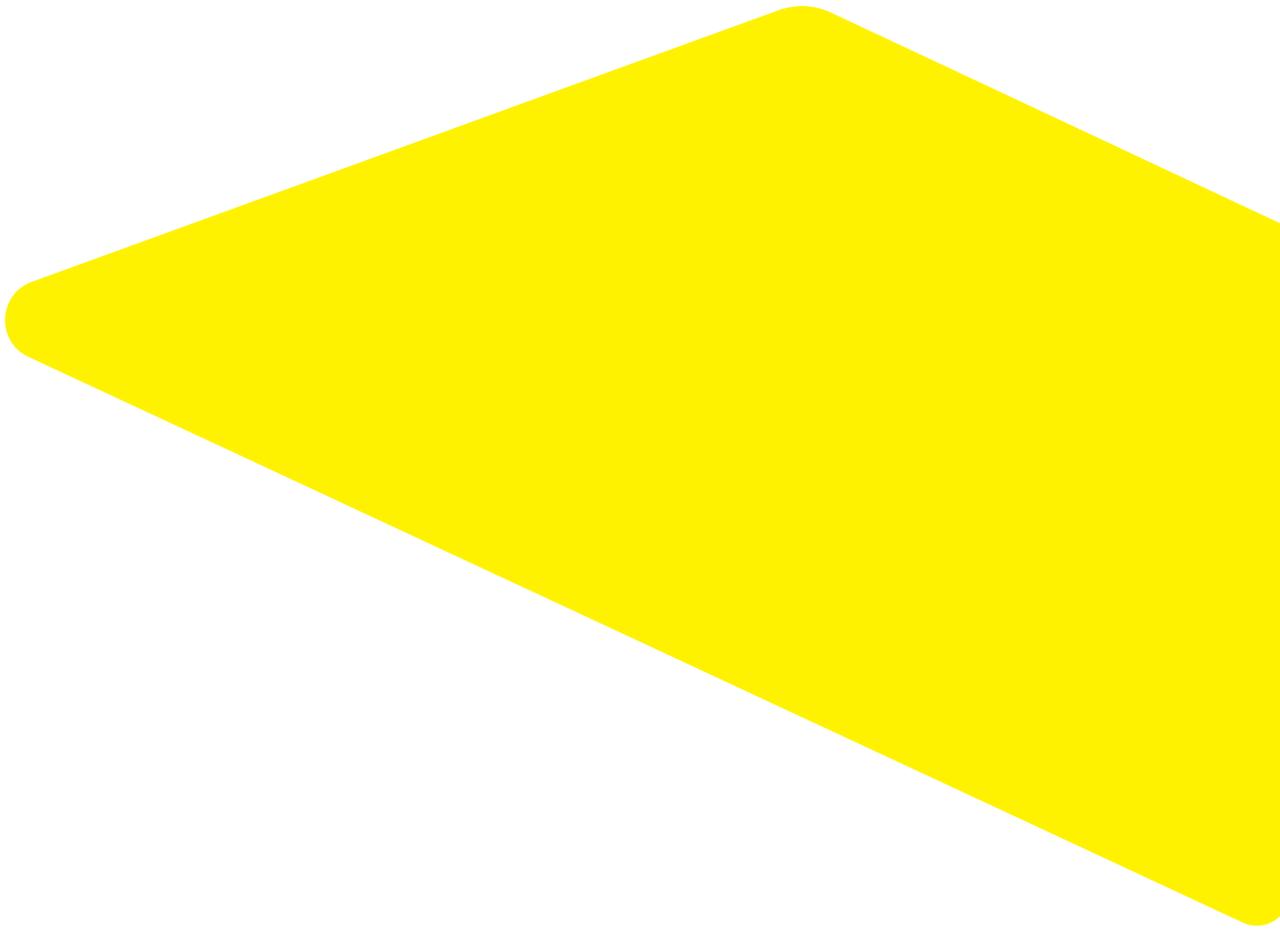




Miguel Rodríguez Torres Dossier

Command Responsibility,
Human Rights, and
Democratic Transition in
Venezuela



Laboratorio
de **Paz**





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Institutional Profile and Public Career

1.1 Military Training and Career

1.2 Career in State Intelligence and Security Agencies

1.3 Appointment as Minister of People's Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace (2013–2014)

1.4 Political Break with the Government, Detention, and Exile

1.5 Subsequent Recognition as a Victim of Political Persecution

Institutional Responsibility in the Context of the 2014 Protests

2.1 The 2014 Protests: Context and Documented Patterns

2.1.1 Official Discourse and Criminalization of Social Protest

2.2 Repression of the May 2014 Student Encampment

2.2.1 Analysis under Inter-American Standards and Command

Responsibility

2.3 Official Narratives and Delegitimization of Victims

2.3.1 The Case of Génesis Carmona

2.3.2 The Case of Massiel Pacheco

2.3.3 Pattern of Stigmatization and Criminalization of Victims

2.4 Militarization of Citizen Security as State Policy

2.4.1 Institutional Responsibility in the Pattern of Militarization

2.5 Criminalization and Persecution of Human Rights Defenders

2.5.1 Pattern of Stigmatization and Ministerial Responsibility

The Voice of the Victims

Conclusions



INTRODUCTION

In recent weeks, various political actors and opinion sectors have publicly raised the possibility that Miguel Rodríguez Torres could be appointed Minister of Defense or once again occupy a position of high responsibility within the Venezuelan State. In light of that scenario, it is legitimate and necessary to undertake a civic analysis of his institutional trajectory and its compatibility with international human rights standards and with the principles that must guide any eventual democratic transition in Venezuela.

Transition processes are not limited to changes of names or political reshuffling. They require a critical review of the institutional past, especially in sensitive areas such as defense, intelligence, and internal security. In contexts where international bodies have documented patterns of serious human rights violations, the public evaluation of the suitability of those who may assume strategic functions constitutes a legitimate exercise of civic oversight and a basic condition for rebuilding public trust.

This report does not seek to exhaustively reexamine the events that occurred during the 2014 protests — widely documented by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, and various national and international organizations — at a time when Miguel Rodríguez Torres held the position of Minister of Interior and Justice, but rather to analyze the institutional responsibility derived from the exercise of high-level leadership functions in the security sector during that period.

In democratic transition processes, the guarantee of non-repetition entails assessing continuity or rupture with doctrines and practices that prioritized treating social conflict as a security threat over the protection of fundamental rights. A person's later condition as a victim of political persecution does not eliminate the need to examine their prior conduct in positions of authority, particularly when that conduct coincides with periods under investigation by international mechanisms.

This document by **Laboratorio de Paz** is therefore framed within a perspective of public responsibility: to provide elements so that the debate regarding potential appointments in the defense or security sector is guided by human rights criteria, the fight against impunity, and a verifiable commitment to a sustainable democratic transition.

2) INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE AND PUBLIC CAREER OF MIGUEL RODRÍGUEZ TORRES

1.1 Military Training and Career

Miguel Eduardo Rodríguez Torres is a retired officer of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), trained within the Venezuelan Army and specialized in areas linked to intelligence and State security. Throughout his career, he performed functions in the sphere of internal security, counterintelligence, and public order control.

During his military career, he held positions of responsibility within State intelligence structures, which enabled him to acquire influence in the design and implementation of security and political control policies. His career developed within the context of the transformation of the State security apparatus initiated during the government of President Hugo Chávez, characterized by growing centralization of intelligence and security functions.

His professional profile was primarily associated with strategic security, internal defense, and the management of threats considered by the State to be risks to political stability.

1.2 Career in State Intelligence and Security Agencies

Prior to his appointment as minister, Rodríguez Torres held relevant functions in Venezuelan State intelligence bodies, including responsibilities within the Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services (DISIP), later transformed into the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN).

In these roles he performed functions related to:

- » Internal intelligence operations,
- » Counterintelligence,
- » Institutional security,
- » Political risk management,
- » Monitoring of actors considered threats to State stability.

His participation in intelligence structures placed him within the core group of officials responsible for the architecture of State security in the period following 1999. These functions granted him operational knowledge and influence over mechanisms of social control, internal security, and the management of political conflict.

His trajectory in intelligence bodies preceded his incorporation into the executive cabinet and constitutes a central element for understanding his subsequent role in the management of public order policies.

1.3 Appointment as Minister of People’s Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace (2013–2014)

In April 2013, following the presidential election of Nicolás Maduro, Rodríguez Torres was appointed Minister of People’s Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, the office responsible for leading internal security policy, maintaining public order, and coordinating the State’s police and security bodies.

As head of this ministry, he exercised authority over:

- » Public order control,
- » National police forces,
- » Internal intelligence mechanisms,
- » Citizen security policies,
- » Coordination with the Bolivarian National Guard in inter-

nal control tasks.

During his tenure, the mass protests that began in February 2014 took place, in the context of which international organizations and human rights groups documented serious human rights violations by State security forces, including excessive use of force, arbitrary detentions, and ill-treatment of detainees.

His ministerial position entailed hierarchical authority and institutional responsibility over security policies and the actions of the bodies under his coordination.

1.4 Political Break with the Government and Subsequent Detention

After leaving the ministerial position in October 2014, Rodríguez Torres initially maintained ties with the ruling party but later expressed critical positions toward the government of Nicolás Maduro.

In March 2018 he was detained by Venezuelan authorities under accusations related to alleged conspiracies against the government. His detention was questioned by human rights organizations and political sectors, which pointed to the absence of procedural guarantees and the possible political motivation of his imprisonment.

Various national and international actors denounced irregularities in the judicial proceedings against him, including restrictions on the right to defense, lack of procedural transparency, and absence of judicial independence.

1.5 Recognition of His Subsequent Condition as a Victim of Political Persecution

Human rights organizations and political actors have considered that Rodríguez Torres's detention constituted a case of political persecution within the broader context of the criminalization of dissent within the ruling sector itself.

Recognition of his situation as a person deprived of liberty for political reasons reflects the dynamics of internal conflict within the Venezuelan political system and the use of the judicial apparatus as a mechanism of political control.

However, this recognition does not exclude analysis of his prior institutional responsibility in the formulation and execution of security policies during his tenure as a high-ranking State official. From the perspective of international human rights law, the subsequent condition of victim of political persecution is independent of the evaluation of responsibilities derived from the prior exercise of public functions.

After remaining deprived of liberty for nearly five years, Miguel Rodríguez Torres was released on January 21, 2023, within the framework of a process of releases of persons detained for political reasons announced by Venezuelan authorities in the context of negotiations between the government and

opposition sectors. His release occurred through judicial measures whose terms were not fully transparent, in a system characterized by persistent concerns regarding judicial independence and procedural guarantees. Subsequently, Rodríguez Torres left the country and relocated to Spain, where he began residing in exile. Human rights organizations noted that his release fit within a pattern of selective releases linked to political dynamics rather than ordinary judicial processes fully aligned with international due process standards



2) RESPONSIBILITY OF MIGUEL RODRÍGUEZ TORRES FOR SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

During the period in which Rodríguez Torres led the Ministry of Interior and Justice, from April 22, 2013 to October 25, 2014, his role made him responsible for the following human rights violations.

2.1 The 2014 Protests

The protests recorded in Venezuela beginning in February 2014 constituted one of the most significant cycles of social mobilization and political conflict in the period following Nicolás Maduro's rise to power. The demonstrations, initially driven by student movements and social sectors in different regions of the country, rapidly expanded nationwide in a context marked by high levels of political polarization, economic deterioration, shortages of basic goods, high rates of citizen insecurity, and allegations of restrictions on civil rights. The State's response to this cycle of protests involved the deployment of security forces and military forces to control public order, which resulted in clashes, political violence, and serious allegations of human rights violations documented by national and international bodies. Between February and June 2014, dozens of people were killed, hundreds were injured, and thousands were detained in connection with the demonstrations, marking a turning point in the evolution of Venezuela's contemporary political conflict.

According to international human rights reports produced by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, the main patterns of human rights violations recorded during the 2014 protests were:

- » Excessive and indiscriminate use of State force: use of firearms against demonstrators and "less-lethal" weapons at close range; abusive use of tear gas; deaths and serious injuries; attacks against residential complexes.
- » Mass arbitrary detentions and criminalization of protest
- » Torture and ill-treatment during detentions
- » Systematic due process violations against detained persons
- » Tolerance of and encouragement for the actions of pro-government armed civilian groups

- » Attacks on journalists and defenders, and violations of the right to freedom of expression and information
- » Structural impunity for violations
- » Militarization of public order control

The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (hereinafter, the UN Mission) investigates human rights violations in the country starting in 2014, which coincides with MRT's tenure at the head of the Ministry of Interior and Justice. In that regard, it states:

"The Mission has reasonable grounds to believe that both the President and the Ministers of the Interior and of Defense ordered or contributed to the commission of the documented crimes (...) and, having effective authority to do so, did not take measures to prevent and repress them."

The UN Mission's statement establishes a framework of institutional responsibility at the highest levels of the State security apparatus in relation to the human rights violations documented since 2014. By indicating that the Ministers of the Interior ordered, contributed to, or failed to adopt measures to prevent the crimes despite having effective authority over the security forces, the body applies the principle of command responsibility recognized in international human rights law and international criminal law.

This standard implies that hierarchical superiors may be responsible not only for direct orders, but also for the failure to prevent, control, or punish violations committed by forces under their authority. In the Venezuelan context, the Mission concludes that the documented violations corresponded to patterns of State conduct rather than isolated acts, which places responsibility at the level of political and institutional leadership within the security sector.

Consequently, given that Miguel Rodríguez Torres held the position of Minister of People's Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace during the initial period investigated by the Mission, his management falls within the

framework of institutional responsibility identified by this international mechanism, by virtue of his position of authority over the bodies responsible for public order control and internal security.

This framework of responsibility is independent of any eventual determination of individual criminal responsibility and is particularly relevant for assessing suitability to hold high public office in contexts of democratic transition and guarantees of non-repetition.

2.1.1 Official Discourse and Criminalization of Social Protest by Minister Rodríguez Torres

As reported in the 2014 country report produced by the IACHR:

“The Ministry of Interior, Justice and Peace, in a press conference on February 13, announced that after the first investigations it could be concluded that the violence recorded in Caracas was due to students having been ‘without a doubt manipulated,’ and that ‘student mobilization’ had been used to introduce infiltrators, a trained vanguard, instructed and prepared to generate acts of chaos and violence [...]. In subsequent days, the Minister also stated on his radio program ‘A toda Vida Radio’ that although the February 12 demonstration had been called peacefully, opposition leaders Leopoldo López and María Corina Machado, among others, had brought ‘violent groups prepared to generate a violent vanguard that borders on “terrorism.””

Stigmatizing statements about the demonstrations were a constant during Rodríguez Torres’s ministerial tenure. The pro-government outlet Alba Ciudad reported on March 14, 2014:

“These are insurrectional actions and it is in a phase of subversion. It is already clearly subversive,” Rodríguez Torres affirmed, as he explained the structured action of these violent enclaves that seek to apply a fourth-generation war.

‘Venezuela has been subjected to a form of violence that has already been practiced in other parts of the world with the sole purpose of overthrowing governments,’ the minister explained, underscoring that there are sufficient elements to prove it.

The minister specified that for that anti-democratic aim, the far right uses vanguard groups that undergo a process of paramilitary preparation and

then initiate violence and destabilization, events in which some 28 people have lost their lives and more than 300 have been injured.

'They come mentally and physically prepared to confront the security forces; they have foreign elements using paid criminals, with weapons and equipment,' Rodríguez denounced."

This report by the region's most important human rights body added an additional statement by Rodríguez Torres as minister:

"In May 2014, high-ranking government spokespeople made public allegations about the existence of an alleged plan of 'conspiracy and hostility by the United States toward Venezuela.' In that context, the Minister of Interior and Justice and Peace, Rodríguez Torres, in a press conference, stated that he had information about 'alleged national and international insurrectional plans against the Government of Nicolás Maduro' and presented a list of the people who would be involved, including opposition and student leaders such as Leopoldo López and his wife Lilian Tintori, David Smolansky (mayor of the Municipality of El Hatillo), Diego Arria (former presidential pre-candidate for the Democratic Unity Roundtable), Antonio Ledezma (Metropolitan Mayor of Caracas), Gaby Arellano (student leader), María Corina Machado, Humberto Prado, among others."

These statements by the Minister of the Interior must be analyzed in light of the State's duty to guarantee the right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression in accordance with international human rights standards. Characterizing demonstrations as the product of manipulation, infiltration, and actions close to "terrorism" contributed to the public delegitimization of the exercise of the right to protest and to framing demonstrators as threats to public order and State security.

From the perspective of international human rights law, this kind of official discourse can create an enabling effect for repressive responses by security forces, by justifying the use of exceptional measures against those exercising fundamental rights. The IACHR has indicated that the stigmatization of demonstrators and opponents by public authorities can foster contexts of violence, increase the risk of abuses, and weaken safeguards protecting the rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and political participation.



In the context of the 2014 protests, these statements were made in parallel with the implementation of public order control operations that resulted in serious human rights violations documented by international bodies. In this sense, the official discourse portraying demonstrators as violent actors or terrorists contributed to constructing the political and operational framework in which the State response unfolded, reinforcing the institutional responsibility of the authorities in charge of security policy.

2.2 Repression of the Student Encampment

In the context of the 2014 protests, sectors of the student movement organized a peaceful encampment in public spaces in Caracas as a form of protest and political expression, aimed at demanding institutional responses to the country's political and social crisis. The encampment took the form of the installation of permanent camps in urban areas, with predominantly student and youth participation, who were exercising their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. On May 8, 2014, officials from State security forces proceeded to dismantle these camps in an operation coordinated by the Ministry of People's Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, which resulted in the detention of 243 people. Human rights organizations questioned the legality and proportionality of the measure, pointing to possible violations of the right to peaceful protest and due process guarantees in the treatment of detainees.

In the report “Venezuela 2014. Protests and Human Rights,” produced jointly by several Venezuelan human rights organizations, it is stated:

“During a broadcast on the State channel Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), the Minister of People’s Power for Interior, Justice and Peace, Miguel Rodríguez Torres, stated that the camps were ‘organized by Voluntad Popular and other far-right youth organizations,’ and that there was ‘evidence that from these camps the most violent groups were leaving to commit terrorist acts.’ The minister added that drugs, weapons, explosives, mortars, alcohol, and tear gas grenades were seized in the camps. The actions of the security forces and the statements by the minister and other State officials were described by NGOs and social activists as the staging of a massive false positive to criminalize demonstrators participating in the camps and to justify repressive actions against students and youth.”

That day, Minister Rodríguez Torres himself endorsed the indiscriminate use of force, issuing a public congratulation through the media to the officials *“for the impeccable work that was done in this operation.”*

The dismantling of the student camps in May 2014 and the public statements of the then Minister of People’s Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace must be analyzed within the framework of the State’s obligation to guarantee the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and political participation. The official characterization of the camps as hubs of “terrorism,” “violence,” or conspiracy, as well as the public presentation of alleged evidence without independent judicial verification, contributed to the stigmatization of demonstrators and the criminalization of the exercise of the right to protest. Under Inter-American standards, this kind of official discourse can create an enabling effect for disproportionate use of force and repressive measures by security forces.

As the highest civil authority responsible for internal security policy and the coordinator of public order operations, Miguel Rodríguez Torres exercised hierarchical authority over the bodies responsible for the raid and the mass detentions, which places his conduct within the realm of institutional responsibility for formulating, directing, and legitimizing the State response to dissent. Politically, the State intervention against the encampment reflected a security approach oriented toward coercive containment of social protest, with direct effects on the shrinking of civic space and the weakening of democratic safeguards in the context of the 2014 protests.

2.3 Official Narratives and Delegitimization of Victims

2.3.1 The Case of Génesis Carmona

On February 19, 2014, Génesis Carmona, 22, was killed in the context of demonstrations in Valencia, Carabobo state. Carmona was a university student in marketing and a model who had held the title of Miss Turismo Carabobo 2013. At that time, she was the sixth fatal victim of the authorities' repressive response.

In a report on the case, Amnesty International stated:

“The march was proceeding peacefully with a cordon of the Bolivarian National Guard preceding the demonstrators. At one point, the guards reportedly moved aside to allow a group of armed civilians on motorcycles to pass through, who began shooting at the demonstrators. Most demonstrators reportedly threw themselves to the ground to avoid the bullets, but Génesis reportedly ran in the opposite direction when she was struck by a bullet in the head.”

One day after the events, alongside Nicolás Maduro, the then Minister of the Interior participated in a press conference in which he stated:

“However yesterday in Altamira a National Police officer was wounded by gunfire. That is, it is no longer only that they shoot at them with molotov bombs, with marbles, they are using firearms against the security forces. We also have national guards wounded by gunfire. And a very regrettable case: the case of the young woman who died in Valencia. A very beautiful young woman. That young woman died from a bullet that came from her own ranks. It is regrettable that we reach these extremes of violence. There are already witnesses who say so, witnesses from the same group she was with who know her. And undoubtedly they are human beings. And they must be in great pain over the death of their companion, and they saw who it was who killed her. So that is not the path, ladies and gentlemen: death, blood. That is not how crises will be resolved. Problems, differences, are resolved with politics at a high level, with dialogue, with the search for joint solutions to the problems that are common to all Venezuelans.”

2.3.2 The Case of Massiel Pacheco

The report “Venezuela 2014: Protests and Human Rights” describes the case of Massiel Pacheco as follows:

“Massiel Pacheco is a 21-year-old young woman who lives in the Villa Zoila sector in Cota 905, in the Libertador municipality of Caracas. She is the mother of a child and works selling arepas at the entrance to Parque Generalísimo Francisco de Miranda, known as Parque del Este.

On April 1, 2014, Massiel Pacheco found a package that she thought someone had forgotten and decided to deliver it to officers of the Guardia del Pueblo. The package turned out to be a bag full of explosive devices. This led to her detention.

Immediately after the detention, the Minister of People’s Power for Interior, Justice and Peace, Miguel Rodríguez Torres, stated that Massiel Pacheco was a terrorist and had been arrested while transporting ‘three highly lethal nipples’²⁸.

Dreimi Miranda, Massiel Pacheco’s mother, rejected the arbitrary manner in which her daughter was detained by officers of the Guardia del Pueblo. She denounced that, in addition to the injustice committed with her daughter’s detention and accusation, the confiscation of her means of work further affected the economic stability of the entire family. ‘My daughter is not a



terrorist; we have many witnesses who are willing to testify in her favor. I want justice to be done; we are humble people; we are not criminals,' Ms. Miranda stated in testimony provided to Provea. Dreimi Miranda also reported that her home was raided on April 4, 2014, without officials finding any evidence to accuse Massiel Pacheco."

2.3.3 Pattern of Stigmatization and Criminalization of Victims

The cases described above are not isolated events; rather, they reveal a pattern of public stigmatization and criminalization of victims and detainees in the context of the 2014 protests. The use of official statements to assign responsibility without an independent judicial investigation, to label demonstrators as “terrorists,” or to publicly present alleged evidence before any judicial review, constituted a narrative-construction mechanism designed to shift State responsibility and delegitimize the exercise of the right to protest. Under standards of the Inter-American Human Rights System, the stigmatization of victims by senior authorities can aggravate the harm suffered, violate the right to honor and the presumption of innocence, and generate an inhibiting effect on civic participation.

Politically, this kind of official discourse contributes to consolidating a logic of the securitization of dissent, in which social conflict is reinterpreted as a criminal or terrorist threat, enabling disproportionate coercive responses. In terms of institutional responsibility, when such statements come from the highest authority responsible for internal security policy, they are not merely expressions of political opinion, but can constitute elements of direction, legitimization, or cover-up of subsequent State actions. In the context of the 2014 protests, the repeated use of this kind of pronouncement by the Minister of the Interior reinforces the existence of a discursive framework that accompanied and justified the State’s repressive response, with direct implications for assessing responsibility in a process of democratic transition and guarantees of non-repetition.

2.4 Militarization of Citizen Security as a Response to Social Mobilizations

The measure of “taking military control” of San Cristóbal following the presidential announcement on February 19, 2014 — with the active participation of the Minister of Interior and Justice, Miguel Rodríguez Torres — is part of an approach that places the armed forces and military elements on the front

line of public order control, beyond the public security functions that constitutionally correspond to civilian forces.

The report “Venezuela 2014: Protests and Human Rights” documented:

“Maduro announced on a nationwide television broadcast the measure of taking military control of the city of San Cristóbal, stating in advance that he was ready to apply a special state of exception if necessary and to ‘... bring in the tanks, the troops, the aviation, bring in all the military force of the homeland...’ in this city because, according to information from the high government, the ‘fascist attack’ was operating with the backing of the mayors of San Cristóbal and San Antonio del Táchira and was coordinated with paramilitaries and criminal gangs from Colombia.

The Minister of Interior and Justice, Miguel Rodríguez Torres, participated in this announcement, and from Táchira he reported that the measure included a Special General Staff to restore public order, army units on the main access roads into the city, a Bolivarian National Guard team specialized in public order operations brought from Caracas, military engineers to collect trash that, in his words, was being used to make barricades with the mayors’ ‘plot,’ and the suspension of carrying weapons throughout the state. He also reported that he had activated a paratrooper battalion to reinforce the main roads in the city, ‘because Colombian personnel have been detected coming to carry out paramilitary missions,’ adding that, in addition to smuggling problems, violence was also present.”

2.4.1 Responsibility of Rodríguez Torres in the Pattern of Militarization of Citizen Security

The information presented makes it possible to identify the militarization of citizen security as a structural pattern of State response to the 2014 protests, characterized by the substitution of — or reinforcement of — police functions by military units, the activation of exceptional devices without adequate civilian controls, and the discursive construction of social conflict as a threat of a war-like or terrorist nature. The decision to “take military control” of cities, deploy Army battalions, and use command structures typical of armed conflict scenarios to manage civilian demonstrations reflected a shift from a citizen security approach toward a national security logic. Under international human rights standards, this kind of militarization increases the risk of excessive use of force, weakens safeguards for peaceful assembly, and shrinks civic space. In this con-

text, the active participation of the Minister of the Interior in planning, announcing, and executing these measures places his conduct within the sphere of institutional responsibility for adopting and legitimizing a security policy incompatible with the principles of proportionality, necessity, and civilian oversight that must govern democratic public order management.

2.5 Criminalization and Persecution of Human Rights Defenders

Different human rights reports documented statements by Minister Rodríguez Torres in which the work of human rights defenders was criminalized.

In its 2013 country report, the IACHR recalls:

“The IACHR became aware that on May 5, 2013, General Miguel Rodríguez Torres, Minister of Interior and Justice, appeared on a nationally broadcast television program accusing Mr. Humberto Prado of being part of ‘a right-wing movement that seeks to destabilize the State’¹⁰⁵². According to the information received, General Rodríguez Torres accused Mr. Prado of being involved in a conspiracy, together with other Non-Governmental Organizations, to radicalize youth and ultimately carry out a coup d’état.”

“The IACHR became aware that on July 22 General Miguel Rodríguez Torres, Minister of Interior, Justice and Peace, allegedly accused Rocío San Miguel of being an operator of the U.S. secret service, stating: ‘People like Rocío San Miguel, whom I was hearing these days (sic) talking about human rights and the Armed Forces. About her I can tell you that she is an operator of the CIA in Venezuela; I can prove it.’”

In its country report the following year, 2014, the IACHR includes other criminalizing statements by Minister Rodríguez Torres:

“On May 2, the Minister of Interior, Justice and Peace, in a press conference broadcast on nationwide radio and television, pointed to Humberto Prado, Director of OVP; Rocío San Miguel, President of Control Ciudadano and beneficiary of precautionary measures granted by the Commission; as well as Gonzalo Himiob and Tamara Suju, lawyers for Foro Penal Venezolano, as actors in an alleged insurrectional and conspiratorial plan against the government.”

“The IACHR became aware that on May 5, 2013, General Miguel Rodríguez Torres, Minister of Interior and Justice, appeared on a nationally broadcast television program accusing Mr. Humberto Prado of being part of ‘a right-wing movement that seeks to destabilize the State.’ According to the information received, General Rodríguez Torres accused Mr. Prado of being involved in a conspiracy, together with other Non-Governmental Organizations, to radicalize youth and ultimately carry out a coup d’état.”

In May 2014, the Minister’s statements had concrete effects. The IACHR documented it as follows:

“On May 7, officials of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) reportedly detained the president of the human rights-promoting NGO ‘Un Mundo sin Mordaza,’ Rodrigo Diamanti, at Maiquetía airport, near Caracas, on May 7 (...). The detention reportedly occurred following statements by the Minister of the Interior, Miguel Rodríguez Torres, in which he allegedly accused Diamanti of supposedly financing and supporting protests against the government of President Nicolás Maduro. In previous days, on May 1, the headquarters of this NGO and of ‘Humano Libre’ had reportedly been raided by alleged SEBIN officials, who, after searching the premises, detained a young man who was guarding the place. Diamanti reportedly remained detained until the night of May 9. The 27th Control Court of the Caracas Metropolitan Area reportedly granted him release under precautionary measures and prohibited him from leaving the country. The Public Prosecutor’s Office reportedly charged him with two offenses provided for and sanctioned under the Criminal Code: obstruction of a public roadway and possession of explosive devices (which were reportedly found during the raid of the NGO’s headquarters).”

2.5.1 On the Pattern of Criminalization and the Minister’s Responsibility

The repeated public statements linking human rights defenders and organizations to alleged conspiratorial or insurrectional plans — or even to foreign intelligence agencies — makes it possible to identify a pattern of criminalization and stigmatization of human rights defense work from the highest authorities responsible for internal security policy. This pattern did not remain at the level of discourse, but translated into concrete actions — raids, detentions, criminal charges, and judicial restrictions — against people previously singled out in official statements.

Under Inter-American standards, stigmatization by senior officials can create an enabling effect for reprisals, increase the risk of attacks, and affect the rights to honor, freedom of association, and the defense of human rights. As Minister of People's Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, with hierarchical authority over bodies such as SEBIN and direct competencies in internal security, Miguel Rodríguez Torres not only issued statements that publicly delegitimized defenders, but also headed the institutional structure that carried out subsequent coercive measures.

In political and human rights terms, this constitutes institutional responsibility in adopting and legitimizing a policy aimed at shrinking civic space and treating human rights defense as a threat to State security, in clear tension with international standards that require protecting — not persecuting — those who carry out this work.

3) VICTIMS OF RODRÍGUEZ TORRES SPEAK ABOUT HIS POTENTIAL RETURN TO HIGH OFFICE

Below we publish the testimony of people who participated in the 2014 demonstrations and who, after being victims of repression, became human rights defenders:

Andrés Colmenárez Farías:

I do not view the figure of Luis Rodríguez Torres from a distance, but from my own story: in 2013 I was a victim of repression, I experienced an arbitrary detention, and I was tortured inside military facilities in Barquisimeto, and I know what it meant to use the security apparatus against citizens.

That is why my indignation is profound when I see him today living a comfortable exile in Madrid — the same city where I went through real hardship as an exile, rebuilding my life from zero.

For me, this is not an abstract debate, but an open wound among those of us who suffered the consequences of that ruthless power, sanctioned by this infamous figure.

The possibility that he could return to positions of power — with Delcy Rodríguez's acquiescence and under the political calculations of figures such as

Donald Trump or Marco Rubio — would be a terrible setback and a grotesque message.

It would mean that the victims' memory is worth less than political deals, and it would reinforce the dangerous idea that power in Venezuela is decided outside the country and without accountability.

From my position, that would not be transition: it would be the confirmation of impunity.

Diego Casanova

Terrible. Remember that this man was responsible for that operation where a whole bunch of National Guard troops surrounded the entire area of Las Mercedes, near Alfredo Sadel, where we had the camp. I remember they pulled us out of the tents at dawn — a bunch of guards with rifles. They woke us up with a rifle, they put it right in our faces in an aggressive, violent way, the guards, to make us leave because supposedly we were violent. That night was terrible, and he was the Minister of the Interior at that time, when they carried out that operation and treated us like highly dangerous criminals. It was an unusual deployment of officials for fifty-eight people — people who had no weapons, had nothing, we simply had the camp there. Most of us didn't even get out — in flip-flops, barefoot, without shirts... I remember we were taken to CORE Five, where they had to give us shoes and clothes because they took us out at dawn with only what we had on — horrible. And now imagine: they want to bring that man back as minister again.

Ehisler Vásquez

There cannot be democracy while the architect of the most well-known torture center in Venezuela returns to the country.

In Barquisimeto, even together with Marino Alvarado, we reported the use of marbles inside the cartridges that the National Police fired to repress the protests. All of this under the command of Miguel Rodríguez Torres. It would be a blow to the transition for him to be able to return to Venezuela.

Anonymous

Miguel Rodríguez Torres was an important part of the repression apparatus during the 2014 protests. No one should come and sell him to me as a moderate or a conciliator. Those of us who remember him from those days — because we were his victims — know that his style was the same as Diosdado Cabello's.





4) CONCLUSIONS: THE INCOMPATIBILITIES OF RODRÍGUEZ TORRES'S RETURN TO HIGH OFFICE WITH A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

Democratic transition processes require not only political alteration, but structural transformations aimed at guaranteeing the non-repetition of serious human rights violations. Among these measures are accountability, security sector reform, and the assessment of suitability of those who hold positions of high State responsibility. International law recognizes that the guarantee of non-repetition implies reviewing the institutional continuity of authorities associated with periods characterized by documented patterns of abuses.

In this context, the potential appointment of Miguel Rodríguez Torres to a senior position in the defense or security sector would raise significant tensions with the international standards applicable to processes of democratic reform. During his tenure as Minister of the Interior, international bodies documented patterns of excessive use of force, criminalization of dissent, militarization of public order, and persecution of human rights defenders. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission established institutional responsibility at the highest levels of the security apparatus for the commission of — and failure to prevent — crimes documented since 2014.

Although Rodríguez Torres was later a victim of political persecution, that circumstance does not nullify the evaluation of his prior institutional trajectory. Bringing into the highest defense or security posts officials who exercised leadership during periods under investigation by international mechanisms can affect victims' trust, weaken security sector reform processes, and send a signal of continuity in doctrines that prioritized treating social conflict as a security threat over the protection of fundamental rights.

During his tenure, this official is responsible for:

- » Excessive and indiscriminate use of State force
- » Mass arbitrary detentions and criminalization of protest
- » Torture and ill-treatment during detentions
- » Systematic due process violations against detained persons
- » Tolerance of and encouragement for the actions of pro-government armed civilian groups
- » Attacks on journalists and defenders, and violations of the right to freedom of expression and information
- » Structural impunity for violations
- » Militarization of public order control

A sustainable democratic transition requires strengthening civilian oversight, rebuilding institutional legitimacy, and ensuring that those who lead security structures represent a clear break with practices associated with the repression of dissent. In this sense, suitability assessments for holding high office must consider not only the applicant's current political situation, but also their compatibility with international human rights standards and guarantees of non-repetition.



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