

VENEZUELANS ARE AT THE MERCY OF CRIME AND POLICE OFFICERS

The killing of african-american George Floyd at the hands of Minesotta Police officers has reopened the debate on police brutality and racism in the United States. But while the eyes of the world are placed on the North-American nation, in Venezuela its people not only witness how criminals threaten their properties and lives, but also those who are precisely there to protect them.

This the conclusion at which Acceso a la Justicia arrived in its report *The Venezuelan police service. Between reality and perception (2000-2019)*, in which it denounces that of the more than 16.000 Venezuelans that were murdered last year, almost a third lost their lives in the hands of men in uniform.

In the document it is read that:

“In year 2019, Venezuela stays as one of the countries with the highest number of violent deaths in the region, with a balance of 16.506 dead and a rate of 60.3 violent deaths per each one-hundred thousand inhabitants, way above any of the other countries deemed as violent in Latin America”

Besides, it is explained that the number of killings is discriminated as follows:

“6.588 homicides perpetrated by criminals, with a rate of 24 victims per each one-hundred thousand inhabitants; 5.826 deaths due to resistance to authority; as per the official denomination, but that in essence are homicides perpetrated by the security forces due to excessive use of force or extrajudicial killings, with a rate of 19 killings per one-hundred thousand inhabitants; and, 4.632 deaths of undetermined intentionality, officially registered as deaths being investigated, but who in reality are homicides or whose situation remain unsolved at the end of the given year, and whose estimated rate is 17 victims per each one-hundred thousand inhabitants”.

For this investigation there were used, among others, data made by civilian organizations like the Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV). This, in light of the lack of information from the Ministry of Interior, Justice and Peace, of the Public Ministry and of the own security organism evaluated.

From bad to worse

The so-called extrajudicial killings are not something new in Venezuela. For decades members of the police forces have been involved in this type of crimes, being cases like El Caracazo one of the most emblematic. However, over the years the situation has but worsened and so clearly states the report.

“Between 2010 and 2017, there were 18.041 people registered as dead at the hands of police forces. In year 2010 the death rate at the hands of the State security forces was of 2.3 per each one-hundred thousand inhabitants, in 2016 it reached 19, this is an alarming increase of 726%. The 60% of these deaths have occurred between 2016 and 2017”.

The document adds:

“It can be clearly appreciated the increasing trend of deaths by resistance to the authority that increases on average in something more than three points per year. This sustained increase contrasts with the homicide decrease to end up almost meeting in year 2019 (18 deaths under investigation per each 100.000 people versus 24 homicides per each 100.000 inhabitants)

Also, it is warned that almost no security force is free of perpetrating this crime against the human rights.

“On the term 2015-2018 the CICPC (Scientific, Penal and Criminal Investigations Body), that always had the first place with almost half of the deaths due to resistance to authority, was displaced by the BNP (Bolivarian National Police) in year 2019 as responsible of 36% of the cases of resistance to authority. Another body that shows a growing trend in that term is the BNG (Bolivarian National Guard) that increased up-to an 8% in 2019.”

The state and municipal police forces, themselves, were in the fourth and fifth place in this horrible ranking.

The extra-judicial killing problem in Venezuela has reached such seriousness that international organization like the Human Rights Inter-American Commission (IAHRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for the Human Rights have referred to it numerous times.

This study is the continuation of another recently presented by Acceso a la Justicia, under the title *Panoramic Vision of the police system (2000-2018)* and in which it was warned that in the country there are more police officers than necessary, but that they are neither well trained nor equipped to efficiently perform their function; and that the recommendations of the Police Reform Commission (Conarepol by its acronym in Spanish), among which there was the professionalizing of the security forces and its demilitarizing, have not been implemented, which explained why crime indexes had not dramatically decreased and why citizens did not feel safer.

¿And how does this affect you, Venezuelan?

This new report confirms that the police forces in Venezuela do not comply with their main legal function: protect the rights and offer safety to citizens. On the contrary, instead of being a solution, the police forces are part of the problem of public safety in Venezuela.

But as if it wasn't enough that the State security forces are neither effective nor efficient with regards to the compliance with their functions, the fact that only in 2019 they have been responsible for taking life away from more than 5.000 citizens reveal what is the size of the impunity in Venezuela.