



OVERALL SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE STATE OF ZULIA AUGUST 2021 SUMMARY

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

The *August 2021 Summary* on the general situation of human rights in Zulia reports the current status and living conditions of the people belonging to indigenous peoples and communities that inhabit the region. The data described here results from the monitoring and analysis of the news and reports published in regional and national media, between January and July 2021.

The indigenous peoples and communities that inhabit the Zulia region are Wayuu and Añú whose habitat is located in La Guajira (north Zulia, on the border with Colombia), and Bari, Japreria and Yukpa, whose habitat is located in the Sierra de Perijá (western Zulia, border with Colombia). These ethnic groups continue to suffer the habitual institutional and governmental neglect by the governments in power, with the aggravation that in recent years, the neglect has reached such an extreme that minimum subsistence conditions are not guaranteed. This guarantee is an obligation of the Venezuelan State that must be focused in satisfying the needs of public services, food, health, education and security. However, the crisis has intensified since March 2020 due to the pandemic, generating a greater number of restrictions and deprivations for these peoples with their own idiosyncrasies and traditions.

According to the last population census in 2011, the indigenous peoples and communities in Zulia are composed by 443,544 inhabitants: 221,477 women and 222,067 men. According to these official data - not updated - the ethnic groups with the largest population are: Wayuu 404,651 people, Anuñ / Paraujano 20,688 people, Yukpa 10,460 people, Bari 2,784 people, Japreria 156 people¹. It should be noted that these figures may not be adapted to reality, by virtue of the migratory mobility to which these indigenous groups have been forced due to the absence of living conditions in the country.

Just like last year, this August newsletter is dedicated especially to indigenous peoples and communities. On August 9 of each year, the International Day of Indigenous Peoples is commemorated, by virtue of the establishment of the working groups on these peoples within the United Nations Organization in 1982², which has allowed the emanation of a set of international instruments that are intended to promote, protect and defend the rights of indigenous peoples around the world. In 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples³ was approved, and at the regional level in 2016, the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was approved⁴.

On this occasion, relevant data about the Covid-19 pandemic in Zulia are updated, highlighting the vaccination process in the state. The need to speed up and accurately report the progress data of these immunization sessions is urgent, as well as the need to organize the necessary logistics so that this process flows and does not represent another trauma for Zulianos. Likewise, the number of active cases in the region is monitored, which continues to be one of the entities with the highest number of infections and with the highest number of deceased people in the health sector.

1. SITUATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ZULIA

The Venezuelan Constitution recognizes in its article 119 all the rights of individuals who are part of indigenous peoples and communities, in addition to recognizing their existence, customs, worldview, economic practices, social and political organization, languages and religions “... *as well as their habitat and original rights over the lands that they ancestrally and traditionally occupy and that are necessary to*

develop and guarantee their ways of life...” (Article 119)⁵. The Constitution includes a whole chapter, Chapter VIII of Title III, to regulate the rights and prerogatives of the indigenous peoples and communities of the country, further developed, among other instruments, in the Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples and Communities⁶.

Despite this legal recognition, the reality is totally different from it. The Venezuelan State does not comply with its duty to promote and protect the rights of ethnic groups whose main habitat is in the state of Zulia. On the contrary, it repeatedly violates such rights in the face of the various demands and tireless claims made every day by the members of the indigenous peoples and communities of the region.

In this sense, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples stipulates that *“Indigenous people have the right to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of the person”* (Article 7)⁷. In this regard, the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples establishes: *“Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right to the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the Organization of American States and in international human rights law”* (Article V)⁸. It is evident, then, that these are internationally recognized and enforceable rights.

Both in the Guajira and the Sierra de Perijá regions, desolation is evident. Life and personal integrity do not represent a priority, and there has been an accelerated decline in economic, social and cultural rights, all of which inevitably leads to irreparable damage to the wellbeing and existence of these peoples, under government inaction and indolence.

With the limitations imposed in the framework of a messy quarantine, the loss of the livelihoods and income of these communities has been verified. Trading activities on the Colombian border, and scarce crop sales - for example, bananas and cassava - in the Sierra de Perijá, have been reduced to subsistence: there are no alternative paths to follow, hopelessness it is the daily companion in the midst of hunger and restlessness.

To demonstrate this sad reality, as an example, according to The 2020 National Survey on Living Conditions⁹, 71% of households in the Guajira municipality live below the extreme poverty line, 66% of young people between 15 and 24 years old do not study or are unemployed, 100% of households suffer from food insecurity, 94.3% are moderately or severely food insecure, and only 5.4% were able to pay for medical care.

1.1. Guajira

Subsequently, the context of some problems that affect the inhabitants of the Wayuu and Anũ ethnic groups living, mainly, in the Guajira municipality of Zulia is presented. This problem is evident, among other factors, in the lack of provision of public services such as electricity and drinking water, the supply of gasoline and public transport, the inaccessibility of health and education, as well as the dramatic food and citizen insecurity and legal uncertainty that this area of the Zulia region suffers.

Electric service

Currently, in 2021, the suffering caused by power failures also continue in this region of the state. Once again, throughout these seven months the inefficient provision of this public service could be verified, to the extent that there were sectors that had spent over a year without electricity. Such is

the case of the inhabitants of the community of Marichen I in the Guajira municipality, who denounced that the two transformers that supplied them with electrical power had been damaged in January 2020. Until February 2021, they affirmed that they had filed multiple requests to both the state government and the mayor's office, with no response, a situation that harmed more than 120 families who were engaged in fishing and needed refrigerators to preserve food. This situation is so overwhelming that the Human Rights Committee of La Guajira denounced a deficit of 90 transformers in that municipality¹⁰.

This scenario worsened in early March, when 100 communities in the Guajira municipality remained without electricity for 65 hours, implying physical and emotional wear and tear, as well as economic losses in the scarce commercial sector in the region. Repeated complaints point to the lack of maintenance of the service, fallen light poles and wires, which translates into more hours without electricity. Even several communities spend their nights taking care of the electrical wiring given the record of robberies in the middle of the dark¹¹. In some communities, neighbors have replaced stolen cables with barbed wire. When a wire falls, the community itself solves it in this way because for many years Corpoelec has not dealt with complaints¹².

Then, at the beginning of April, more than 100 communities in La Guajira were left without electricity¹³. Subsequently, for the third week of June, these communities remained without electricity for more than 60 hours, due to the fall of two poles without an effective government response to the failure of the service¹⁴.

In mid-July, a fire in a box in the transmission lines caused a blackout in Paraguaipoa and other towns in the municipality in less than 12 hours¹⁵. This blackout lasted for 30 hours, forcing merchants from Los Filuos, Paraguaipoa and Guarero to buy 20 liters of fuel at COP 80,000.00 (Bs. 85,000,000.00, approximately) to turn on power generators and preserve the meat and chicken they had for sale¹⁶. All this in addition to the lack of telephone and internet connection in La Guajira¹⁷.

A more concrete example of this difficult reality is that experienced in Fundo El Carmen community, Guajira municipality, where more than 200 families suffer from the calamities of public services, especially the lack of electricity. Five years ago the transformers of this community were damaged without a solution by government representatives. This forced them to connect to other nearby transformers that, then, are overloaded in their capacity, and therefore can only light one or another light bulb. These families have been sleeping in the dark for years, without refrigerating their food and medicine¹⁸.

Drinking water

Since January of this year, complaints and reports about the water supply problem in La Guajira have also been present. One of the most outstanding was related to the high price of the water pipes sold by tank trucks. The pipe, which only lasts for about two days, was priced in January 2021 at Bs. 2,000,000.00¹⁹ (COP 12,000.00 and USD 1.29 at that time), but there are areas that are not reached by these tank trucks, as is the case of Fundo El Carmen community²⁰. Other families, such as the residents of Guarero, walk up to 10 kilometers to the jagüeyes²¹ (ponds) to find water for their daily consumption, despite the fact that by 2020 the state governor had promised the supply of potable water through pipes for that region²².

In May, this problem worsened, as more people came to the jagüeyes to look for and drink water. These are extensive journeys that they must walk daily and several times the same day, then

carrying heavy buckets and containers on wheelbarrows, donkeys or on their heads. These jagueyes and artesian wells are the only sources of water for most residents of La Guajira, especially those who live in rural areas²³. By mid-July, the drought was inclement, many families dedicated up to 4 hours a day to access artesian wells. In the case of the jagüeyes, their waters are green in color and have a bad smell, but this is how it is used by the inhabitants of sectors, such as the Jiuston community, to prepare food or wash clothes. Many of these families must travel to the Paraguachon border line to receive aid from Colombia²⁴.

Some leaders of the Wayuu and Añú communities have classified this period of drought as millennial thirst, which is intended to be mitigated only with a few tank trucks, in the best of cases²⁵. All this within the framework of promises dating back years, such as 2018, when the mayor of La Guajira and the Minister of water promised to reactivate the El Brillante aqueduct, which stopped operations in 2017 due to constant power cuts and the damage and lack of maintenance of the pipes and motors of the plant. However, in May 2021, a few communities began to receive, in an irregular and discontinuous way, piped water. Despite this, most of the communities depend, as noted, on artesian wells and jagüeyes, but some of the latter are drying up²⁶. This constitutes an obvious obstacle to comply with the necessary hygiene measures in the midst of the pandemic.

The foregoing denotes, once again, the non-observance and non-compliance by the Venezuelan State in guaranteeing one of the most essential rights for the life and health of people, such as access to water as a fundamental natural resource for the human being, vital to live with dignity and a precondition for the realization of other human rights.

Gasoline supply and public transport

For 4 years the situation of the gasoline supply and public transport has worsened throughout the state of Zulia, so the Guajira municipality is no stranger to this dramatic reality. In April 2021, fishermen from several municipalities in the state, including La Guajira, denounced that for every 35 liters of gasoline they had to give 6 kilos of fish to those in charge of gas stations to be sold gasoline²⁷.

These workers stated that for their daily work they require 60 liters of fuel, but that they are greatly affected because they are not a priority for gasoline supply, having to wait up to a month in long queues to be able to access only 35 liters. They assured that many times when they need to fill their tanks they lose around 1,200 kilos of production, having to resort to the black market and pay between USD 20 and 30 for 20 liters of gasoline²⁸.

The smuggling of gasoline from Colombia to La Guajira is a common activity in the municipality. This gasoline enters illegally through illegal crossings to Maracaibo and other municipalities of the country. Also, there are complaints about the little gasoline that reaches Los Filúos gas station, which is then sold in Maracaibo in gas cans, carried secretly in private cars driven by uniformed officials²⁹.

In this context, at the beginning of May, and for 15 days, the mayor's office of the municipality radicalized the quarantine in La Guajira, allowing the transit of transport between 7:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., suspending all types of events that would imply an agglomeration of people³⁰. A week later, the national government relaxed the measure and allowed traffic flow³¹. However, and as part of the institutional disarray, three days later the local government imposed a radicalization of the quarantine until 1:00 pm, and for this reason the Bolivarian National Guard and other security forces ordered the closure of businesses and prohibition of vehicular traffic³². By the end of this month, officials from

the Municipal Transportation Institute of La Guajira (ImtcuGuajira) and the municipal police carried out operations to stop the transit of pirate transports, regulate public transport overcrowding and verify compliance with pre-established fares³³.

Health

The spread of Covid-19 in the Guajira region is among the most worrying issues in terms of health. By mid-March, the mayor of the municipality announced the arrival of 156 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine to be distributed in two comprehensive diagnostic centers (CDI) in Sinamaica and Paraguaipoa, while at that time it was reported that the medical staff of the Sentinel hospital of the municipality had not received any type of immunization³⁴. Meanwhile, in April the entry of the Brazilian variant into Zulia through the border area with La Guajira was already reported³⁵.

On a different note, the lack of waste collection has generated an accumulation of waste that affects more than 400 families in Los Filuos community. Most of this waste comes from the municipal market, where remains of dead animals are also found, so not only dirt reigns but also an unbearable smell for the residents of the community. This situation intensifies in the absence of urban waste management services for two years, which creates a latent panorama for the outbreak of diseases in the face of the indolence of municipal authorities³⁶.

All this is complicated by the complaints about the lack of medicines and supplies in health centers of La Guajira, since there are only few medical personnel, and patients must buy prescribed medicines for their treatments. It was even reported that the Binational Hospital of Paraguaipoa, one of the most visited by the inhabitants of this region, has not even had medical syringes for months. A similar situation is suffered at the Sinamaica Hospital, despite having been reopened by the state governor³⁷.

Education

As we reported last year, the right to education in this area of the state is neglected, especially after the declaration of social and collective quarantine and the replacement of face-to-face learning by distance education through the use of the new technologies. In this regard, according to The 2020 National Survey on Living Conditions³⁸, only 2.7% of households in La Guajira have computers, while 1.1% have access to internet.

In February, in relation to government statements regarding a possible return to face-to-face education, the teachers of La Guajira affirmed that there were no conditions for such return because, among other aspects, at that time the monthly salary they received was Bs. 700,000.00³⁹, which was equal to \$ 0.39. Also, the complaints pointed to the deplorable conditions of educational centers, where there are no basic services such as drinking water, added to the fact that the schools that were enabled as shelters at the beginning of the pandemic are currently deteriorated and were robbed, without any response from official bodies⁴⁰.

Nutrition

The unavailability and inaccessibility of food among the families of the Guajira region is one of the most shocking problems in this area of the state, a situation that is overshadowed by the lack of real and sustainable policies that allow the improvement of food security indexes, which contribute to restoring optimal levels of nutrition and quality of life for people, with special attention to children, adolescents, pregnant and lactating women, the elderly, people with disabilities and people with chronic

diseases, whose daily food intake, in case they can get some food, is based on few carbohydrates, without proteins or vegetables.

Older adults in the region face serious problems to access food. In January they received a monthly pension of Bs. 200,000.00⁴¹ (that is, USD 0.10 by then). Many of these older adults are forced to sell coffee, vegetables, among other things, to cope with their diet in the midst of the pandemic, as some have died from causes related to malnutrition⁴². This pension is derisory if compared to the prices of food and medicine that in most cases are sold in COP.

For their part, the women of La Guajira also face a difficult situation. Many decided to leave their homes to engage in work activities such as reselling gasoline or food, in order to bring home some food and feed their children. Regarding the illegal resale of gasoline, it is mentioned that in the municipality there are many people dedicated to this activity, so the income is very low.

Food purchase is normally carried out in cash in the popular market of Los Filuos, where prices tend to be a little more accessible compared to supermarkets⁴³, although if the payment is made through *biopago*, the price increases up to three times its initial value. Women state that the payment of social monetary benefits that the national government gives are insufficient, "... they are only enough to buy an Andean bread or a small bottle of mayonnaise⁴⁴. All this generates a perennial anguish among Wayuu mothers because of the uncertainty of not knowing how to feed their children. Some say that for a year their children have only eaten once a day due to the serious economic situation they are experiencing at home⁴⁵.

In any case, in April 2021, more than a year after the beginning of the social and collective quarantine, in the midst of the pandemic and institutional chaos by setting radical weeks and flexible weeks according to the government's discretion, the families of the Guajira municipality live in constant concern for not having enough food⁴⁶. Families are often forced to pay fines to pass through illegal crossings to Colombia to buy food. This situation of uncertainty affects more than 80% of the population of the municipality who live from their daily work. In this regard, the coordinator of the Human Rights Committee of La Guajira asserted that the national government does not guarantee food programs in the midst of this health context, and the number of cases of people infected by Covid-19 in the region is not precisely known⁴⁷.

In this sense, the food distributed by the Local Committees for Supply and Production (CLAP) is insufficient and infrequent in its delivery: in some places it is delivered every two months, but it is only enough to eat for three days. These are also poor quality food items that in that area of the state are sold in COP⁴⁸; These bags or boxes contain rice, sugar, pasta, flours and lentils and their sale ranges up to COP 13,000.00⁴⁹. It is even reported that the food contained in these bags or boxes is often resold in informal markets of La Guajira for between COP 9,000.00 and 12,000.00⁵⁰.

On the other hand, in order to cook food, families –especially girls and boys– must travel long distances to collect firewood in the absence of domestic gas, and with this firewood they heat stoves to prepare meals based on flour. This low food consumption leads to malnutrition that affects children between 5 and 9 years of age: on average in each community between 15 and 20 cases of children with malnutrition are reported, newborn children with low weight, whose mothers normally eat a once a day⁵¹.

The food crisis in La Guajira is so extreme that many families travel kilometers to get to Colombia where they are allowed to enter to collect eight bags of food assigned to each family. This takes place within the framework of the provision of food baskets initiated in 2020 by the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) in the communities of the Colombian Alta Guajira given the prohibition, at that time, of the Venezuelan national government to allow the entry of WFP into the country. This implies an excessive expense for the families, because although the food is free and enough for some time, they must pay for transport fares whose price ranges between about COP 30,000.00 and 45,000.00, so not all communities have access to it⁵².

It is unfortunate that the hunger that plagues the communities of the municipality is used by government representatives for their convenience. Thus, at the end of June in the framework of the primary elections of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), complaints were reported by the party's own militants against the mayor of the municipality, who apparently offered bags of food and payment of COP 300,000.00 to the Leaders of Units of Battle Hugo Chavez (UBCH) and popular spokesmen so that in the process of party nominations only the names of those who were part of their political line would appear⁵³.

Security

Security in the border area of La Guajira has always been considered a red alert. It is a space where all kinds of merchandise are trafficked, which has generated the proliferation of mafias and organized crime. Multiple complaints indicate that these groups act under the consent of state bodies who either actively participate in illegal activities, or receive bribes to guarantee silence and non-investigation of criminal acts.

One aspect to highlight is that this border area in recent years has become an almost obligatory crossing point for the millions of people who have left the country and have decided to undertake the journey this way, which is why these people become an easy target for the consummation of various crimes such as homicides, rapes, robberies, human trafficking, kidnappings, among others, before the impassive gaze of the bodies responsible for guaranteeing the safety, life and integrity of the inhabitants or passers-by of the municipality.

In this sense, illegal crossings have become the common path in the face of border closure measures, both on the Venezuelan side and on the Colombian side, amid limitations imposed by the Covid-19⁵⁴. The passage through these crossings even limits the right to food, because there are several families that as a tradition went to Colombia to provide themselves with food or medicine. These are crossings that are not free and are extremely risky. Along these crossings some people are dedicated to placing end-to-end ropes as a form of improvised toll where you have to pay: the minimum payment is COP 1,000.00 one way and COP 1,000.00 return at each toll, but if the person carries a bag or sack, the rate increases up to COP 10,000.00 for each rope that they cross⁵⁵. All this represents an obvious form of both citizen insecurity and legal uncertainty, and an absolute lack of state protection.

Another overwhelming circumstance in the Guajira municipality is the alleged collection made by officials of the Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigations Corps (CICPC) in inspection operations focused on 80s vehicles with the pretext that it will be stung to sell it as scrap. This has generated discomfort among the inhabitants of the region who have to wait in long lines to be inspected every day⁵⁶.

1.2 Perijá

The inhabitants of the indigenous populations located in the Sierra de Perijá present the same calamities in terms of the provision of public services such as electricity, drinking water or domestic gas, which are as scarce as they are unknown. Health, education, food, gasoline supply, public transportation and security represent some of the great ills of this region, practically forgotten by the Venezuelan State.

Health

The guarantee of the right to health of the Yukpa people is one of the great debts that the Venezuelan State has had for years. Government indolence in the absence of the most elementary health and medical requirements transcends time, there are no minimum conditions of hospital infrastructure, or supplies, or drugs to attack diseases that were even considered eradicated from the region, as is the case of tuberculosis, much less to address the impact of the pandemic in these communities.

An example of the above was the death of a Yukpa man detained in the CICPC headquarter in Machiques de Perijá due to complications associated with tuberculosis. He was 32 years old and had been arrested since 2017. He did not receive the necessary assistance to treat the disease that was diagnosed in February 2021 along with six more cases, and died in May⁵⁷.

The health issue becomes even more complicated when natural events such as the flooding of the rivers surrounding Yukpa populations occur, affecting the daily stability of these peoples and, unfortunately, causing deaths and disappearances. Thus, on May 11, the Macoita river rose in Machiques de Perijá, which caused the death of two people, a man and a 9-year-old girl, as a result of a collapse of a nearby hill, in addition to the disappearance of two other people. These overflows also led to more than 15 Yukpa communities being left isolated and, therefore, the precise health status of their inhabitants was not known⁵⁸. For its part, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that several humanitarian organizations managed to mobilize 1,400 people from the Yukpa community affected by these floods and mudslides⁵⁹.

Education

In educational matters, the communities of the Yukpa people have also suffered neglect by the State. However, at the beginning of this year, the Ministry of People's Power of Indigenous Peoples announced the holding of comprehensive assistance sessions aimed at the Yukpa indigenous community located at Kilometer 22, which included assistance in health, food, public services, housing and education, for which working groups were organized with community spokespersons to address Yukpas families. No further information or details were obtained from these announced activities, nor was it known what were the results or benefits allegedly achieved for the Yukpa community⁶⁰.

Nutrition

Malnutrition in the indigenous communities of the Sierra de Perijá is a growing problem, directly associated with the deterioration of purchasing power that prevents them from acquiring food items with high protein and nutritional content, therefore the access and availability of quality and nutritious food, as well as the optimal nutrition of the people of the Yukpa people represents one of the greatest difficulties that these communities suffer. Before the pandemic, informal trading made it possible to pay for at least one of the three daily meals, but with hyperinflation, gasoline and transportation crisis, this is almost impossible.

Most of these communities feed on what they grow, such as bananas and cassava, but they still show signs of malnutrition, due to the almost zero consumption of protein⁶¹. However, this production has served to complement and exchange food between indigenous and non-indigenous areas, but this transfer to areas such as Rosario de Perijá and Machiques de Perijá puts indigenous Yukpas at risk of becoming infected with the virus, given the absence of guidance plans to prevent the spread of the disease⁶².

To try to alleviate this problem, some UN agencies as well as their allies and partners, such as Caritas, undertake actions to address cases of malnutrition and health. This is the case of the first indigenous Caritas in the country, in Los Ángeles del Tukuko in the Sierra de Perijá, made up of people of the Yukpa ethnic group. By mid-February, this organization assisted 15 children with malnutrition, 16 pregnant women and 10 lactating women, where they received nutritional bars and nutrients, and preventive health and orientation workshops⁶³.

Precisely, one of the sectors that requires the most attention is El Tukuko, an indigenous community with 3,500 inhabitants, where El Tukuko Mission operates, which carries out educational, health and nutrition activities for indigenous people of the Yukpas, Bari and Wayuu ethnic groups. In the nutritional field, children under 5 years of age who suffer from malnutrition, pregnant and lactating women are assisted. The nutritional programs of the Ministry of People's Power for Education in the region have not functioned for two years, nor have the National School Food Corporation (CNAE) nor the School Food Program (PAE) reach this indigenous community⁶⁴.

In this context, indigenous women are among the most affected populations: their diet is based on carbohydrates, the most vulnerable being pregnant and lactating women, to the extent that the director of Caritas in the Diocese of Machiques affirmed that the “... *indigenous woman is three times more vulnerable, first for being a woman, then for being indigenous and finally for being poor*”⁶⁵. By July, this organization assisted an average 50 pregnant and lactating women (Wayuu, Yukpas and Bari), 80% of which suffered from malnutrition. For this reason, the assistance required for this group of women must be multidisciplinary because what they experience is multi-problematic. These women have had to work even more in their fields, smallholdings and lands to survive with what they can get from their crops. This also extends to the girls, boys and adolescents of the communities. Other Yukpa women have found it necessary to migrate to Colombia in search of other income for basic food for their children⁶⁶.

Meanwhile, in April the Ministry of People's Power for Indigenous Peoples reported the provision of 20,000 bags of food (without specifying content) to Yukpas, Bari and Wayuu families⁶⁷. In this regard, the director of the Human Rights Office for Indigenous Peoples, Abel Pete, has pointed out that CLAP bags do not contain balanced products, but carbohydrates without protein of any kind instead.

The State must guarantee in a real way production mechanisms that help counteract mortality and illnesses due to malnutrition in indigenous communities and reinforce the prevalence the right to a safe and adequate food. Hence it is necessary for the State to assume its leading and accountable role, and work together with organizations such as Caritas, so that the impact of food aid reaches as many communities as possible⁶⁸.

Gasoline supply and public transport

Gasoline shortages continue to wreak havoc across the state, especially in rural areas such as the Sierra de Perijá, the main habitat of the Yukpa people. The consequence of this serious shortage is the unavailability of transportation for the transfer of the few crops, or worse still, to address health emergencies.

Such is the fact that took place on May 13, when a girl barely 6 months old suffering from malnutrition and dehydration died. The girl could not be transferred to a health center in time because she did not have gasoline. This situation that occurred in the Yaza de la Sierra de Perijá community. This triggered a protest carried out by the indigenous people, among whom was the mother of the girl, who had her body in her arms wrapped in a white sheet. She stated that when they arrived in Machiques, the girl had already been dead for several hours. In addition, they denounced that the government does not address to health cases in this sector, there are no doctors or supplies⁶⁹.

This limited access to fuel has caused a number of complaints. A week after this death, it was reported that several Yukpas, Barí and Wayuu indigenous communities took over a gas station in Machiques de Perijá as a measure to protest against the lack of fuel that they had been suffering with greater intensity for the previous two months⁷⁰.

Security

A quite controversial issue that has generated concern and is the one referred to the safety of the spaces where the indigenous communities of the Sierra de Perijá live. Various situations and altercations, some violent, have occurred between indigenous people and inhabitants of the surrounding areas, especially between indigenous people and agricultural producers in the region.

In February, some yukpas remained in the facilities of a production unit in Machiques (Araguaney ranch) that, apparently, they invaded on January 29 as a demand and form of pressure for the government to finish land demarcation of indigenous lands along the basins of El Tukuko and Yaza that began in 2006. The Venezuelan Army guarded the facilities and the employees performed their duties⁷¹.

This is quite a serious reality, since the territory between the Yaza and El Tukuko sectors each has a chief in command and there is a land dispute between them. The chief Yukpa chief of the Virgen del Carmen sector, in El Tukuko basin, demanded that the national government review the ranches that were paid in the framework of the basin demarcation, and that they account for the money destined for the payment of these land lots, as there are still lots that they have not received any payment. Faced with this scenario, the ranchers in the area waited to meet the Minister of People's power for indigenous peoples, but the meeting did not materialize⁷².

An irregular situation took place on April 27 when two journalists from Zulia were arrested, stripped by National Guard officials, and their journalistic material was erased. These journalists were covering a confrontation between Yukpas and the National Guard in La Villa del Rosario⁷³. The Yukpas protested the lack of attention after the landslides that occurred in 2019, which caused the death of 7 people and destroyed 3 houses. In the face of the passage of time and broken promises they decided to travel to Maracaibo to demand answers, but on the way they found blockades by National Guard officials⁷⁴. These are the officials attached to Detachment 144 of the Machiques National Guard, who prevented the passage through the Rosario de Perijá checkpoint to some 50 people of the Yukpa ethnic group who were walking peacefully towards Maracaibo. In this regard, the

Leading Chief of the pilot center of the Toromo Basin specified that they have been waiting two years for the fulfillment of the commitment of the state governor, in the face of a landslide that left more than 100 families affected⁷⁵.

A similar situation occurred months later, when a group of Yukpa chiefs from Yaza traveled to Maracaibo draw the attention of the state governor to the problems that affect them, ranging from roads, crop losses, access to health and education, public services, food, housing, security and land demarcation⁷⁶. However, it was reported that this crossing was blocked by order of the state governor, and these people were arrested on the Machiques-Maracaibo highway, preventing their arrival in the capital of Zulia⁷⁷. The detention lasted for several hours⁷⁸.

On the other hand, a worrying complaint occurred at the beginning of June when a group of people, presumably belonging to the Yukpa ethnic group, had taken the Troncal 6 highway to set up illegal tolls, where they asked for dollars, diesel or gasoline, and apparently, in case refusal, they threatened and attacked road users⁷⁹.

2. OVERALL SITUATION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ZULIA

By the end of June, in Zulia there were 131 deaths corresponding to the health sector since the pandemic began⁸⁰. At the beginning of July, 25,335 positive cases and 368 deaths⁸¹ were recorded in the Zulia region, leading the number of positive cases.

Between July 1 and 2, the death by Covid-19 of two doctors in the region was reported⁸². By July 3, the Zulia State Nursing Association reported the death of two nurses⁸³. On July 16, the death of a doctor was announced, after two months of being admitted in the Hospital for complications associated with coronavirus⁸⁴. Three days later another doctor died in the San Francisco municipality⁸⁵.

However, the governor affirmed that thanks to the vaccination process carried out in the entity, a decrease in the numbers of infections has been achieved and, at the same time, he guaranteed medical attention and timely treatment in the public health system⁸⁶. This matter was ratified in mid-July, because according to him the trend shows a decrease in positive cases⁸⁷. Despite these statements, by the end of July Zulia once again led the list of positive cases at the national level, in addition to announcing the entry of the delta variant into the country, considered much more contagious and dangerous⁸⁸.

Regarding the vaccination process, for July, extensive queues were reported at vaccination centers⁸⁹, such as the Sports Village⁹⁰. Between 3 and 6 hours is the waiting time for people stationed in these queues, including the elderly⁹¹. At the same time, the state governor announced a vaccination plan for 5,000 carriers in the region, whose starting point would be at the facilities of the Maracaibo metro to administer vaccines to 300 carriers⁹². No further details were obtained regarding the fulfillment of this announcement.

The initiation of the vaccination plan in Los Puertos de Altagracia, Miranda municipality was also announced. However, the inhabitants reported that when they arrived at the vaccination sites they had been assigned, they were told the center had not been informed its status as a vaccination site⁹³. Days later, it was reported that the vaccination would take place in the lake terminal of Los Puertos de Altagracia, where there were extensive queues of people waiting under the inclement sun⁹⁴. It was

reported that in the first 5 days of sessions over 3,000 people were administered vaccines⁹⁵. By mid-July, the Santa Rita municipality did not have a vaccination center⁹⁶.

Regarding the vaccination process in the South of Lake Maracaibo, the reception of at least 38,450 vaccines has been reported for the municipalities of Colon, Francisco Javier Pulgar, Jesus Maria Semprun, Catatumbo and Sucre (33,450 Sinopharm vaccines and 5,000 Sputnik V vaccines). In these municipalities, the process takes from 4 to 11 hours. For this reason, it has been recommended that the sessions should be extended to other centers to avoid crowds and minimize the costs of transporting people⁹⁷.

According to the regional director of epidemiology, until July 20th they recorded the vaccination of 300,000 people in the state. In his opinion, the daily vaccination rates ranges between 17,000 and 20,000 people, and he affirmed that in October 70% of the population of Zulia will be vaccinated against Covid-19. In addition, he affirmed that there were vaccination centers in the 21 municipalities of the state⁹⁸.

In addition to the emergency due to the pandemic, we continue to highlight the precarious condition of people with chronic diseases, such as cancer and kidney patients. Once again, protests and demands made by people with kidney diseases receiving treatment at the Western Dialysis Center have been heard, who stated that the failures in the treatment they receive persist, because the reverse osmosis plant has not been working for almost a month, resulting in the death of two people, as a result of the non-purification of the water at the time of treatment, which causes diarrhea and serious skin conditions. There was a promise by the governor to repair the plant above, but until now, it has not been fulfilled⁹⁹.

By August 3, 2021, the global number of positive cases stood at 199,042,693 infected persons and 4,237,894 deceased persons¹⁰⁰. According to reports published by the national government, 308,452 positive cases and 3,637 deaths took place throughout the country. Meanwhile, in the state of Zulia 27,876 positive cases were recorded¹⁰¹.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The real scenario of indigenous peoples and communities settled in the state of Zulia is identified with a multidimensional reality of poverty and calamity. The intermittency of the electricity service, the lack of potable water, hunger, malnutrition, diseases, the lack of educational instruction, poor housing, public insecurity, legal uncertainty, among other factors, group all these dimensions of poverty and calamity.

All this has forced the customs and traditions of these peoples to take a back seat, as the struggle to survive pushes them into atypical spaces and activities that place them in a situation of vulnerability where there are no guarantees for their human rights, especially amidst these moments of crisis, of border closure and isolation, of exposure to diseases, in the face of an opportunistic action or a convenient omission of the Venezuelan State.

People belonging to indigenous peoples and communities, without discrimination or restrictions, have the right to the full enjoyment of all human rights and freedoms recognized by national and international legal instruments, including receiving priority attention from the competent

governmental bodies, who should strive to guarantee sufficient conditions for the individual and social stability of each of the people belonging to these ethnic groups. In this way, the demand to the Venezuelan State is focused on the need to dictate sustained and impactful measures for the rescue of the life, integrity, traditions and customs of those who have ancestrally inhabited our national territory.

Ignoring this, ratifies what was mentioned in previous reports; the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and peoples is just an unfulfilled promise, an unrealistic regulation that does not correspond to the suffering of daily life.

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