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# **GENERAL SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ZULIA ACCESS TO BASIC PUBLIC SERVICES**

# GENERAL SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ZULIA

## ACCESS TO BASIC PUBLIC SERVICES

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# GENERAL OVERVIEW

This edition of the bulletin on the general situation of human rights in Zulia describes the realities and obstacles experienced by the inhabitants of the region in accessing basic public services - electricity, drinking water, urban sanitation, fuel supply, and public transportation-, with the understanding that continuous and regular access to optimal and quality services leads to the enjoyment of rights and a better quality of life for people. Precisely, to narrate these realities, Codhez reviewed and took notes of the contexts, testimonies, and vicissitudes on this issue monitored by local, regional, and national media from November 2023 to May 2024.

As part of the complex humanitarian emergency suffered by the Venezuelan population, one of the biggest problems is the deficient provision of public services, which implies activities of public interest, and obligatory compliance by the Venezuelan State. However, the current reality allows asserting that in the country and, therefore, in Zulia, such activity is neither rendered, nor satisfies the general interest, nor is it assumed responsibly by the Venezuelan State.

In general, and according to one of *HumVenezuela's* most recent studies of December 2023<sup>1</sup>, in the state of Zulia, 70.1% of people do not access or report severe failures of electricity<sup>2</sup>; 95% of people report severe restrictions of access to water<sup>3</sup>; 61.3% of people do not access or report severe failures of urban sanitation<sup>4</sup>; and 66.7% of people have a severe lack of public transportation in their community<sup>5</sup>. Just by mentioning these data, the generalized crisis in access to basic public services by the population of Zulia is evident.

There is no doubt that the full exercise of rights is conditioned to the proper functioning of public services, through the satisfaction of common or collective needs. The opposite of this would mean subjecting people to distressing experiences: being a victim of electricity rationing, not having piped drinking water, living with waste and without urban sanitation, having to wait in long gas station lines, not having public transportation to get around are, in broad terms, some of the experiences that the people of Zulia, unfortunately, endure daily.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution 52/8 of April 2023, regarding the promotion of human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals through the transparent, accountable and efficient provision of public services, the following is highlighted: the concern for *"...the negative consequences that widespread corruption has on the enjoyment of human rights and recognizing that corruption weakens institutions, undermines citizens' trust in public administration and is a source of inequality in access to public services, to the detriment of women and girls, people with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations, which constitutes an obstacle to the effective promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms"*; and emphasizes, *"... that non-discriminatory, efficient, accessible, accountable and transparent public service delivery that considers the needs and views of citizens is one of the essential components of creating an environment conducive to the fight against corruption in the public sector and contributes to the promotion and protection of human rights"*<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, it can be noted that the relationship between good management and the guarantee of access to basic public services with the promotion and exercise of human rights, (a responsibility of the Venezuelan State) is a topic of interest that has been addressed and emphasized by international instances, and that requires to be urgently assumed by the national, regional and municipal governmental bodies.

## 1. ACCESS TO BASIC PUBLIC SERVICES: IMPACT ON THE EXERCISE OF RIGHTS

The ultimate purpose of basic public services is the satisfaction of common or general needs, hence the importance of the existence of their basic characteristics: continuity, regularity, quality and efficiency, and obligatory nature. Continuity refers to the fact that the public service must be, in general, uninterrupted, which means that it must meet the need at the time it arises. The regularity of the public service is associated with compliance with the norms, rules, and conditions pre-established for its provision so that they are observed by the competent body. The quality and efficiency of the service have to do with the timely, adequate, and correct fulfillment of the function and purpose for which it was created. And the obligatory nature refers to the competent organ that by normative mandate must attend and guarantee the rendering of the public service, observing the three previous characteristics. In the Zulian context, these characteristics are far from being reality.

### Electric service

Access to electric energy represents an important need that requires continuous and constant satisfaction. It is an essential basic service for the daily life of people (homes, health, work, education, entertainment), and for the development and activation of the socioeconomic processes of the country. Unfortunately, for more than 15 years the country, and particularly the state of Zulia, has been living in uncertainty and limitations in the provision of electric service as a consequence of unwise decisions, which have resulted in violations of the quality of life.

Thus, since the end of last year, it has been observed -once again- the continuous calamity in the provision of electric energy services, which has forced the application of measures and strategies of adaptation and resignation among the people of Zulia, given the magnitude of the deterioration of the electric power industry which cannot be addressed in the short term. For example, according to the Venezuelan Observatory of Public Services, by November 2023, an increase of up to 50% in electrical failures was reported at a national level, making the state of Zulia one of the most affected entities<sup>7</sup>.

By this date, the Minister of Electricity acknowledged that power failures in the Zulian region "will always" exist, and what is being sought is to shorten the times of such failures, considering the disinvestment that exists in this area -receiving 1% of the income that was normally destined-. In addition, he stated that the state of Zulia consumes 17% of the national electricity demand, some 2,254 megawatts per day and, according to his statements, each megawatt has a cost of USD 1,000,000, to which he adds the fact electricity has not been paid in the region since 2017<sup>8</sup>. These statements were made despite the fact that the electricity crisis affecting millions of people has been going on for more than 15 years, even though since 2022 a collection plan has been applied to households -affected by the electricity crisis- called "*Borrón y Cuenta Nueva*" (*Start over with a clean slate*), to demand payment for a deficient and intermittent service.

Likewise, it was announced for January 2024, the execution of maintenance works to the transmission lines that cross Lake Maracaibo, which would restrict the entity of at least 100 megawatts and, according to the information provided at that time by the Minister, such works would extend for 21 days<sup>9</sup>. However, days later, the Minister declared that, for the execution of these works, the partial restriction of the electric service would be extended for at least 60 days, especially in the Western Coast of Lake Maracaibo. Specifically, the works would include the replacement of 60 kilometers of conductor of Line No. 2 of 400 kilovolts, which transmits electricity from the El Tablazo substation

to the Cuatricentenaria substation in Maracaibo, which would allow the transmission of 100 additional megawatts for the state of Zulia<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, according to reports, the national government, through the Budget Law for Fiscal Year 2024, approved Bs.19,784,000,000 -approximately USD 550,000,000 at the exchange rate of the Central Bank of Venezuela for December 2023- for projects related to electric service in the state of Zulia, distributed as follows: Bs 10,960,000,000,000, for the supply and installation of 400 Kv underground cable in Lake Maracaibo; Bs 1,200,000,000,000, for new works in Termozulia II; Bs 5,820,000,000,000, for Termozulia III Plant; and Bs 1,804,000,000,000, for the construction of SF6 encapsulated substations in the Urban Zone of Maracaibo. However, it was recognized that the national government should seek financing for these activities, since none of the projects proposed for the previous year -2023- could be started due to the lack of money<sup>11</sup>.

While this type of announcement is made without becoming a reality, the inhabitants of Zulia continue to suffer the consequences of erratic management. For example, in December in Cabimas, dozens of sectors were without electric service for 8 hours as a consequence of a blackout, followed by 5 hours of rationing, while the Minister of Electricity denounced sabotage to the electric system of Zulia due to a fire in the Cabimas substation<sup>12</sup>.

These events exacerbate the anguish of the families in Zulia, especially since the beginning of 2024 when the region's strong electrical fluctuations and power outages worsened. On average, these power outages or rationing can last from 3 to 4 hours per day, in addition to the usual breakdowns of transformers and distribution lines. Corpoelec does not have the necessary equipment to solve any failure as soon as possible. Therefore, sectors sometimes remain without electricity for up to a month. This situation led to an increase in protests by the communities in areas such as the Guajira municipality -one of the municipalities most affected by the electricity crisis-<sup>13</sup>.

In any case, power outages occur in different time blocks, also at night or early in the morning when people are trying to rest, in the middle of suffocating and hot weather. The uncertainty -for not knowing how long the rationing or blackout will last-, the tiredness -for not being able to sleep the right hours-, and the strong weather -typical of the region-, mix and create an atmosphere of uneasiness and despair among the people who struggle to move forward despite the adversities.

In February, due to the works carried out for the replacement of part of the underground cable in Lake Maracaibo, blackouts and outages became more frequent, in addition to the usual scheme of misinformation to the population: the electricity service is interrupted, without an established schedule, without specifying the duration of the rationing, so that daily life is spent in the middle of waiting for the rationing and waiting for the return of electricity. This is a reality that occurs in all the municipalities of the state. For example, this month in San Francisco, rationing was registered in two daily batches of 4 hours each. In the meantime, the Minister asked for "understanding", since the works would cease in mid-March<sup>14</sup>.

Precisely, a not isolated event left the inhabitants of Maracaibo without electricity during the night and early morning of February 14. The power outage was reported from 11:30 pm on February 13 to 5:30 am in some sectors; in others, the rationing had just started at 4:00 am and ended at 8:30 am<sup>15</sup>. During the following days, rationing and power outages continued without a break. In March, another event occurred - different from the daily rationing and power fluctuations - which again left several municipalities in the state of Zulia without electricity service: Maracaibo, Machiques de Perijá, San Francisco, La Guajira, Mara, La Cañada de Urdaneta, Cabimas, Lagunillas, Santa Rita<sup>16</sup>. This

situation was quite similar to the national blackout of March 7, 2019, when practically the entire country was without electricity for 5 days, which made evident the reality of the unresolved electricity crisis nowadays.

On March 21, the deadline announced by the Minister of Electricity for the replacement of the underground cable in Lake Maracaibo, and one of the supposed reasons for the severe rationing experienced at the beginning of the year, expired. These works were supposed to provide stability and reliability in the electric system; however, after the announced time of 63 days, blackouts, rationing, and service fluctuations persisted. It was even reported the death of an elderly person who, unfortunately, lost his life in a fire caused by an electrical problem when, after rationing, the electricity was restored. In any case, by that date, neither the Minister nor Corpoelec announced any progress or completion of the replacement work<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to the already difficult electricity situation due to deficiencies in the provision of the service, there are also complications generated by the arrival of the rainy season in the region. In May, several sectors of the city of Maracaibo were without electric service for up to 24 hours due to the explosion of transformers, problems in the distribution wires, and fallen electric power poles due to strong winds and rains. In addition, there was a fire at the San Felipe electric substation in the municipality of San Francisco, also affecting the power supply<sup>18</sup>.

Another municipality strongly affected is the insular municipality of Almirante Padilla, where having access to electricity is the exception. Since 1:00 am on May 11, the municipality was left without electricity due to the cutting and theft of 150 meters of the underground cable that connects the Corpoelec tower in El Moján -Mara municipality- with Punta Arenal in Isla de Toas-Almirante Padilla Island municipality-. This event was described by the mayor of the municipality as a "vandalic, premeditated and terrorist act" against the national electric system<sup>19</sup>.

As can be seen, this constant absence of electricity service has a large-scale negative impact, affecting the most elementary tasks in homes, education, health centers, and workplaces in general. Without electricity, societies are paralyzed, they do not advance, and they fall into stagnation, fatigue, and uneasiness for not being able to do *normally* what all people have the right to do: experience tranquility and comfort in their private spaces, attend school and receive education in the full school schedule, have the possibility of being treated with dignity and humanity in public health centers without interruptions or risks of any kind, or just fulfill the productive working day without any inconvenience whatsoever.

### **Potable water**

The crisis of access to potable water is perhaps more serious than the electricity crisis. This is because access to water is a right intimately related to life, health, and well-being. Not having access to water means being on the verge of suffering from disease, malnutrition, and lack of sanitation and hygiene necessary for quality of life.

The lack of drinking water is a historical phenomenon in the Zulian region caused by governmental mistakes in making decisions that do not aim at the coordinated and sustainable use of the state's water resources. Precisely, municipalities such as Machiques de Perijá, surrounded by numerous rivers, have repeatedly suffered from potable water shortages, qualified as a water crisis or emergency. For example, in November 2023, there was a high-water level in the rivers due to heavy

rains experienced in the Sierra de Perijá, which forced the closure of dikes -such as the *Toma Panayo Dam*-, limiting access to water in some areas of the municipality<sup>20</sup>.

In December 2023, it was estimated that approximately 75% of San José de Perijá's population in this municipality was without piped water service, a situation that had been going on for more than four months<sup>21</sup>.

It was learned that of the 49 wells that supply water to the municipality, only 24 are active, and the Municipality's Mayor's Office does not have tanker trucks to transport water. Some groundwater wells were dismantled and are inoperative: they do not have electric poles, transformers, submersible pumps, or electric boards<sup>22</sup>. In May 2024, the public outcry of the inhabitants of Machiques de Perijá continued due to the absence of water, apparently for the same reason: the closing of the gates of the deteriorated dike at the *Panayo Dam* due to heavy rains, which requires dredging, cleaning and channeling works. This has led to the suspension of school classes, and the population has had to invent and manage ways to get water<sup>23</sup>.

In other localities, specifically in the municipality of San Francisco, the communities have also been forced to reinvent themselves and self-manage access to drinking water. Indeed, one of the main problems afflicting this municipality has to do with the problems of access to potable water, which is being mitigated through the construction of community artesian wells. Thus, in the community of *El Manzanillo*, some 150 people benefit from the construction of an artesian well, from which they can get 600 5-gallon water bottles per week. The community has a team in charge of managing the well, and each household must contribute USD 1.00 per week to have access to one hour of water<sup>24</sup>.

In this context, a special report published by *Efecto Cocuyo* in December 2023, in the Guajira municipality (north of Zulia state), highlighted the differentiated suffering experienced by Wayuu women due to the scarcity of drinking water and the multiple strategies they must implement daily to find the vital liquid. The women have to make long walks of up to 15 kilometers to collect water in an area that is going through one of the most difficult droughts in the last three years, known as the millenary thirst. For most of the women living in Guajira, buying water is practically out of the question. The price of a 5-gallon water bottle is about COP 7,000.00 (USD 2.00) and is only enough for one day<sup>25</sup>.

The search for water is concentrated in the *jawei* - ponds that naturally store water from rain or from water that springs from the ground - but given the drought, most of them are dry or have limited water, which is also taken directly by the animals. Normally, the water deposited in the *jawei* is untreated and unfit for human consumption<sup>26</sup>.

The destination of the little water they manage to collect is to bathe the children and wash their clothes; women sacrifice their hygiene and leave it for later, especially their menstrual hygiene, which increases the risks of the reproductive system and urinary tract diseases, worsened by the fact that none of the three public health centers located in the municipality have obstetrician-gynecologists. In addition to this, the risks multiply for women, who have to lift heavy water bottles -of about 18 kilograms each- to carry them, and some say that every time they lift them, they involuntarily urinate. Wayuu girls must also endure the negative effects of not having access to potable water. Girls between 7 and 12 years old walk up to 5 kilometers, three times a day, round trip, hungry, tired, under the harsh sun, exposed to multifactorial dangers, just to collect water in the *jawei*<sup>27</sup>.

At the Eastern Shore of Lake Maracaibo, the water shortage situation is similar. At the beginning of 2024, in the municipality of Cabimas, it was reported that more than 780,000 people had been affected by water shortages for more than 60 days, with water sales by tanker trucks that charged between US\$1.50 and US\$2.00 for each 5-gallon water bottle<sup>28</sup>. By April, the situation persisted in several areas of this municipality, especially in the northern zone, where neighbors denounced that they had been without potable water for more than 40 days, for which they requested, among other things, the activation of a project to recover and rescue the system at the *La Misión* Pumping Station<sup>29</sup>. More dramatic realities were reported in other sectors of the Ambrosio parish of the Cabimas municipality where people have been without potable water service for more than 15 years. Inhabitants must buy water every three days, and on average they spend up to USD 80.00 per month to buy water, sacrificing other essential needs, such as food<sup>30</sup>.

Households in the Simón Bolívar municipality of the Eastern Shore of Lake Maracaibo are also strongly affected by the water crisis since there are sectors that have not had piped drinking water for a decade. Once again, the manufacture of artesian wells, the speculative purchase and sale of water, and the long walks in search of water<sup>31</sup> are the solutions that emerge from the communities given the lack of governmental response.

Also, by February 2024, several sectors of Maracaibo were reported to be without piped water, an adversity they have had to endure for more than five years. Thus, the inhabitants of the urbanization La Paz, one of the most populated sectors of the municipality located in the Cecilio Acosta parish, apply the same practices already common throughout Zulia: carrying and transporting 5-gallon water bottles, and paying tanker trucks to do the daily tasks of hygiene, cleaning, and food<sup>32</sup>.

More to the southwest of Zulia state, in Casigua El Cubo in the Jesús María Semprún municipality (south of Lake Maracaibo), the lack of piped drinking water has also been a reality for more than five years, when an aqueduct stopped providing service due to the breakdown of the intake tower -hydraulic structure to divert water- which connects to the river, and the inexplicable disappearance of the pump, affecting about 10,000 people in around 10 sectors of this parish. Those affected proceeded to build artesian wells, but due to the high temperatures many of them have already dried up, and a good part of the inhabitants do not have enough money to buy water by 5-gallon water bottles or water tanks<sup>33</sup>.

It is emphasized that access to water is an internationally recognized right, but in Zulia it is violated and neglected every day: the Venezuelan State must guarantee to all people *"... access to a sufficient amount of safe drinking water for personal and domestic uses, defined as water for drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation, and personal and household hygiene. These obligations also require States to progressively ensure access to adequate sanitation, as a fundamental element for human dignity and privacy, but also to protect the quality of drinking-water supplies and resources."*<sup>34</sup>.

### **Urban waste collection**

The impact of the absence of concrete and lasting public policies regarding solid-waste collection in the state of Zulia continues to be notorious and worrisome. The municipalities do not have enough machinery, implements, or personnel to meet the demand of the thousands of sectors that daily accumulate garbage from homes, commercial activities, industrial activities, among others. Despite isolated efforts by some to keep public spaces clean, the absence of serious and real plans means that the race against garbage and disorder is lost.



For example, in the municipality of San Francisco, the accumulation of garbage is reported to produce bad odors, difficulty in walking on the streets, and proliferation of insects. This is a long-standing problem, which has been going on for more than 10 years without decent urban sanitation: neighbors of sectors such as *Adán Sthormes*, *Juan Pablo II*, and *Negro Primero* suffer these consequences due to the accumulation of garbage in La Cañada de Silva, in the Francisco Ochoa parish, which flows into the Maracaibo Lake. Repeated complaints have been filed, but by November 2023, the response was State inertia. However, the *Municipal Institute of Environment and Urban Cleaning* reported that, by the end of 2023, they only had seven garbage collection trucks, one for each parish of the municipality, when the actual requirement is about 35 units to meet the demand, and expressed the intention of defining a management system that involves several environmental processes<sup>35</sup>. Many point to the lack of citizen awareness that, although it is a determining factor in this problem, the fact is that the competent authorities do not propose solutions, and in desperation, the communities' hands are tied.

Precisely, one of the most serious consequences of the accumulation of garbage and its disposal in the municipalities' waterways is that at the end of the day, this garbage ends up in Lake Maracaibo -as well as the oil spilled by old pipes that rest on its bottom, and the influx of sewage-, increasing its contamination and affecting productive activities such as fishing. Despite attempts by government agencies and civil society organizations to clean up and collect waste along the coasts, high levels of waste - plastics, logs, garbage bags, and debris in general - persist and can extend up to five meters into the lake<sup>36</sup>.

In this regard, the people truly affected in the exercise of their rights, such as the group of inhabitants and fishermen who live on the shores of Lake Maracaibo, in November 2023 claimed that the shores of the Lake in the municipality of San Francisco were not 100% cleaned up, as was stated by the then Minister of Electricity, Vice President of Public Works and head of the Presidential Commission for the Rescue of Lake Maracaibo, since only 4 of the 16 beaches had been cleaned up. Even the cleaned beaches showed traces of crude oil, an issue that will persist until the oil leaks in the lake pipes are repaired. As a consequence of this, some 500 fishermen and 19 processing companies demanded that the national government and *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.* (PDVSA) pay compensation for the damages caused by the oil spills to their productive activities, which have been reduced by up to 80%, and the loss of equipment such as boats, engines, and fishing nets<sup>37</sup>.

In March 2024, progress in waste collection in Lake Maracaibo was announced. According to statements made by the president of the *Institute for the Control and Conservation of the Maracaibo Lake Basin* (Iclam), more than 156,000 tons of solid waste had been collected on the shores, of which 120,000 tons corresponded to oiled waste - waste impregnated with hydrocarbons - and 36,000 tons of garbage thrown on the shores or in the streams that end up in the Lake. Likewise, the national government announced the work called *Cayapa para las Cañadas*, aimed at an integral and systemic approach to the network of streams and natural watercourses that cross Maracaibo<sup>38</sup>.

In any case, since 2022 it has been warned that Venezuela is one of the 20 countries that throw more plastic into the oceans. This is according to a study by *The Ocean Cleanup*, in addition to the little incentive of policies for recycling and solid waste management. According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the country generates 14.88 million tons of solid waste per year, making it the fourth most waste-producing country in Latin America and the Caribbean. Using satellite images and artificial intelligence, in the absence of official information, 47 areas with large concentrations of plastic in Venezuela were identified, and it is the state of Zulia that has the most areas with large accumulations of plastic, with seven open-air sinkholes. In addition, the presence of microplastics in

Lake Maracaibo is also visible, which should be considered a serious State problem due to the negative repercussions they generate on people's health and biodiversity<sup>39</sup>.

Following these studies, in 2022 a concentration of 200 items of microplastics per kilogram of sand was detected on the shores of Lake Maracaibo. Already in 2023, the average was 500 items per kilogram of sand at four points on the western shore of the Lake: Las Palmeras beach in the municipality of Mara, and the Isla Dorada, Vereda 2, and Las Palmeras beaches in the municipality of Maracaibo. In addition, 4 of the 11 most polluting Venezuelan rivers flow into Lake Maracaibo<sup>40</sup>.

Therefore, and undoubtedly, the streams that cross some sectors of Maracaibo also require immediate cleaning, such as the stream located in Barrio San José of the Cacique Mara parish - extension of the Morillo stream- which, according to neighbors, is not taken into account for cleaning by the competent authorities, accumulating considerable amounts of debris dragged by the dirty waters or deposited there by people who even belong to other sectors<sup>41</sup>: *"Maracaibo is geographically structured by 10 streams that discharge their waters into the Lake. These streams are not included in the urban planning and are invaded..., which leads to the accumulation of waste, together with industrial discharges"*<sup>42</sup>.

At the end of 2023, there were reports of garbage piles on the road that connects Maracaibo with San Francisco, without any of the municipal authorities taking charge of its collection. This forced the commercial businesses in those sectors to pay to have the garbage taken away, while some neighbors decided to burn the garbage at night to avoid the proliferation of crawling animals<sup>43</sup>. Regarding the incineration of garbage, the Mayor's Office of Maracaibo informed that it monitors these types of events, making a call of conscience among the people of Maracaibo to respect the schedule of waste collection and avoid burning garbage that can generate health and environmental affections<sup>44</sup>.

In any case, the scenario of garbage accumulation was repeated in every corner of the city at the beginning of the year. Popular sectors such as Sabaneta and Pomona were flooded with garbage: every corner, street, land, is favorable for the uncontrolled deposit of garbage. According to information, the garbage collection truck had not passed through these sectors for more than 25 days, in addition to the reckless actions of some people who leave the garbage on the sidewalks and roads. This situation is so alarming that sometimes, neighbors cannot even open the doors or windows of their houses to avoid being invaded by flies and other insects<sup>45</sup>. The same situation is verified in another point of the city, Caracciolo Parra Perez parish, where neighbors report failures in garbage collection<sup>46</sup>. As is well known, this perennial accumulation of garbage leads to the proliferation of different diseases that affect children, adolescents, the elderly and people with chronic diseases.

By November 2023, according to studies conducted by the *Venezuelan Public Services Observatory* (OVSP), the municipality of Maracaibo -together with San Fernando de Apure, State of Apure, and Barquisimeto, State of Lara- is one of the cities with the worst ratings regarding solid waste collection and urban sanitation services in the country. In fact, for the aforementioned date, 50.5% of negative opinions placed Maracaibo as one of the cities with a high percentage of dissatisfaction regarding this public service. This study focuses on citizen perception of the frequency of collection<sup>47</sup>.

Specifically, there was announced a modification of the waste collection schedule among the parishes of the municipality of Maracaibo -a municipality with a large and extensive territory- for the month of February, due to the acquisition of 14 new garbage compactor trucks, distributed between weekly and bi-weekly collections<sup>48</sup>. However, according to the president of the *Municipal Council of*

*Maracaibo*, the city needs 125 garbage compactor units to achieve optimum cleanliness, of which there are only 56 units, and urged the payment of taxes for the purchase of these trucks that cost about USD 200,000 each<sup>49</sup>. According to calculations of the *Municipal Institute of Urban Cleaning of Maracaibo* (Imau), in the month of March 2024, 26,378 tons of waste were collected in the city, almost 850 tons per day, compared to 553 tons per day collected during the month of February. The goal is to collect the 1,200 tons of garbage produced daily in the municipality<sup>50</sup>.

On the other hand, in the municipality of Lagunillas, the respective Mayor's Office decided to apply a reduction in the calculation adjustment factor for the collection of the urban sanitation commercial rate in response to the commercial activity of the companies that operate in this locality<sup>51</sup>.

### **Public transportation and fuel supply**

The fuel crisis is pendular, affecting transportation in general, but especially public transportation. Undoubtedly, it is a problem of national magnitude, and its attention and solution must also be of great importance. In some areas, such as the Metropolitan Area of Maracaibo, the supply of gasoline has had a notorious progress, although eventually there are some lines of vehicles in the gas stations waiting for their turn. However, in other regions of Zulia the limitations to access fuel persist. For example, in February 2024 it was reported that in the *Fabricio Ojeda* sector in the municipality of Lagunillas only 40% of the public transportation units were operative, the rest were paralyzed due to the lack of diesel and gas.

The instability in the supply of gasoline translates into difficulties for the drivers of the urban and extra-urban routes to provide their service in a timely manner, who are severely affected in their work activities, in addition to the discomfort caused to the users who are forced to wait for hours to be able to move from one point of the city to another. Another of the problems that the drivers of the extra-urban routes must endure is the assault to their units: on the interstate highways such as the Lara-Zulia highway, the so-called *miguelitos* are placed, which are instruments with metal spikes that damage the tires, or by objects thrown against the car windows, which force the drivers to stop, and when they do so, they are approached by alleged criminals who proceed to rob the users and drivers of the unit. The clamor is for vigilance and State presence to guarantee the safety of drivers and users during the entire trip<sup>52</sup>.

At the end of last year, Fedecámaras Zulia showed its concern about the gasoline shortage, expressing the need for a continuous and reliable supply of gasoline that guarantees and facilitates the mobility of people, the transportation of basic necessities such as food, and contributes to the development of productive activities in the state<sup>53</sup>.

In any case, in May 2024, there were again closed gas stations in Maracaibo -due to lack of fuel supply- and lines of vehicles in the few that were open<sup>54</sup>, which awakens anxiety, concern, and anguish among the inhabitants of the state as they feel that the nightmare is still present. Many are the factors that affect the instability of fuel supply, thus, for this date, it was reported a delay in the arrival of imported fuel to the country, which comes to compensate the deficiencies of production that does not support the national demand -for May the production of some 800,000 barrels of oil per day was estimated when the national record was of 3,000,000 barrels per day-. Before the crisis, PDVSA was able to attend the chain of exploration, production, refining and export of domestic crude oil and its derivatives. The country's refineries work partially, and the dynamic is already known: they are damaged and then repaired, they are reactivated for a while, and then they break down again<sup>55</sup>.

Another worrying aspect that has worsened is the illegal sale of gasoline by members of the Yukpa indigenous people -although it is also an activity carried out by other people on public roads in different sectors of the state-, which has led to fires and protests by other communities<sup>56</sup>.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The complex situation of access to public services means that people must make additional efforts and cover with their own resources the State's inactivity, as a result of disinterest, disinvestment, and lack of sense of responsibility and compliance with constitutional mandates: from losing electrical equipment due to electrical fluctuations, sleeping with suffocation due to the overwhelming heat of the nights without electricity -situation also endured by children, elderly people or people with chronic diseases-, running after the water truck to buy water -when possible-, carrying heavy bottles of water to fill the tanks at home, running the risk of contracting diseases due to the accumulation of garbage, paying private companies for the collection of garbage due to the lack of garbage trucks, paying a high price for a liter of gasoline to avoid long lines of vehicles in the gas stations, and even walking long distances due to the lack of public transportation, are sacrifices and strategies applied by Zulian families to survive in the middle of the chaos and State neglect.

It is insisted that the enjoyment of basic public services characterized by their proper functioning is a determining factor in the full, free, and complete exercise of human rights, since they are articulated and related notions: the possibility of enjoying freedom, integrity, health, education, enjoyment, among others, is not conceivable without the generalized, common or general interest needs being satisfied and attended by the competent organs of the Venezuelan State.

In this sense, it is once again demanded that the Venezuelan State must assume its constitutional and international obligations regarding the provision of sufficient conditions, both for access to services and for their optimal functioning, generating equal opportunities for all Zulians, with a human rights approach, which emphasizes and materializes the aforementioned relationship between basic public services and the realization of human rights.

# NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Hum Venezuela (December 2023), "*Complex Humanitarian Emergency Data and Indicators (update through December 2023)*," at <https://humvenezuela.com/tabla-de-datos-2023/>.

<sup>2</sup> People in households that do not have or report severe electricity failures (daily or for weeks or months), based on the total population for the corresponding territorial scope and year of measurement (Hum Venezuela, December 2023, "*Complex Humanitarian Emergency Data and Indicator Reference*," at <https://humvenezuela.com/tabla-de-datos-2023/>).

<sup>3</sup> People in households not connected to the aqueduct system, adding those connected who report severe failures or restrictions of access to the water supply by aqueducts, based on the total population for the corresponding territorial scope and year of measurement (Hum Venezuela, December 2023, "*Complex Humanitarian Emergency Data and Indicator Reference*," at <https://humvenezuela.com/tabla-de-datos-2023/>).

<sup>4</sup> People who do not have urban sanitation service in their community or neighborhood, or who face service failures for weeks or months, based on the total population of the year of measurement and corresponding territorial scope (Hum Venezuela, December 2023, "*Complex Humanitarian Emergency Data and Indicator Reference*," at <https://humvenezuela.com/tabla-de-datos-2023/>).

<sup>5</sup> People reporting severe lack of public transportation in their communities, based on the total population for the corresponding territorial scope and year of measurement Hum Venezuela, December 2023, "*Complex Humanitarian Emergency Data and Indicator Reference*," at <https://humvenezuela.com/tabla-de-datos-2023/>).

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<sup>9</sup> *Idem*.

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<sup>12</sup> COL first edition (December 12, 2023), "*Almost 8 hours without electricity for dozens of sectors in Cabimas this December 11*," at <https://primeraedicioncol.com/casi-8-horas-sin-electricidad-tuvieron-decenas-de-sectores-en-cabimas-este-11-diciembre/>.

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