



Re: Securitization, militarization and its impact on human rights

To the leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union,

As you gather in the forthcoming EU-CELAC ministerial meeting, security will be in everyone's minds: security of your populations; international security in the context of a growing number of armed conflicts around the world; as well as transnational security challenges, such as transnational crime and drug trafficking.

This security framing is not baseless. The deterioration of the security situation in the continent results from the complex interplay of state policies, corporate interests, transnational criminal groups, high levels of corruption and geopolitical dynamics. Latin America and the Caribbean remains one of the most dangerous regions of the world to be a human rights defender. According to data from the HRD Memorial, a global consortium of human rights organisations coordinated by Front Line Defenders dedicated to verify and document killings of human rights defenders, [274 human rights defenders were killed in 2025 in the Americas](#).

However, the undersigned organisations share the concern that the securitisation of politics and policies, rather than achieving safer societies and lowering levels of violence, is being misused to unduly target human rights defenders and civil society, undermine the rule of law as well as to push through an economic agenda of extractivism without proper consultation and safeguards nor a popular mandate.

The instrumentalisation of counter terrorism and other security legislation is nothing new and has been extensively documented, including against indigenous communities in the Americas and pro Palestine peaceful protesters in Europe. Human rights defenders have long been accused of being part of "extremist" or criminal organisations; and the finances of leading human rights organisations on both regions have been hit with false accusations of money laundering, financing of terrorism, foreign influence or tax evasion, weaponising the international security and financial normative architecture to cripple their legitimate and peaceful human rights work.

From these trends we are seeing a model emerge and grow rapidly across the Americas. This model, perfected and championed in El Salvador by the government of Nayib Bukele, follows a similar pattern: successive states of emergency justified under guise of security for the population, growing militarisation that enables arbitrary arrests, prolonged pretrial detention, violation of fair trial rights, harsh penalties, high-lethality police, deaths in custody, torture, sexual violence and enforced disappearances in what international jurists and experts have concluded [may constitute crimes against humanity](#).

At the last EU-CELAC summit, on 9 November 2025, both sides jointly recognised “the role of civil society organisations and human rights defenders” and committed to combat “transnational organised crime and drug trafficking [...] in full compliance with international law”. We note with alarm that the reality on the ground seems to be very different, as a slate of punitive measures and restrictive legislation, including foreign agents laws modelled on Russian legislation, is adopted across the region.

Human rights defenders are targeted and stigmatised as pawns of criminal groups – while boundaries between state institutions, private economic interests and criminal networks are often blurred and go unexamined. In this context, securitisation is not only a response to crime, it is used to facilitate economic interests by enabling governments and private actors to gain access to land, suppress resistance to projects, and concentrate power without transparency or oversight.

Security narratives become a justification for militarisation, restriction or closure of civic space and criminalisation of defenders, silencing them and ultimately clearing the path for extractive and infrastructure projects so they can move forward with little to no opposition. Too often, the international community reads this dynamic as a necessary trade-off between human rights and security and progress, which in turn reinforces the narratives used by these governments to sell this choice to their voters.

Respect for human rights and the rule of law have been jointly and repeatedly endorsed by all participants in successive EU-CELAC summits and other forums. The forthcoming EU-CELAC ministerial meeting thus presents an important opportunity for partners from both sides of the ocean to push back on this narrative of security versus human rights and democracy.

As both sides deepen their cooperation on security and strategic investment, through the Global Gateway and partnerships on critical raw materials and other sectors, all cooperation must be firmly anchored in values that both regions share: rule of law, human rights and respect for international norms and standards. To accept restrictions on civic space and attacks on human rights defenders as necessary for security and economic development is a cold and false trade off that betrays those values.

The leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union must be clear: there can be no sustainable security, responsible value chains and sustainable development goals without human rights and democratic institutions. Human rights defenders and civil society are not enemies, but play a crucial role in their societies, and must be allowed to carry out their legitimate human rights work.

Therefore, the undersigned organisations call on EU-CELAC leaders to issue a joint declaration dedicated to protect civic space and human rights defenders, and the rule of law committing to:

- End the misuse of anti-terrorism and financial laws against civil society and publicly reject the criminalisation of human rights defenders;
- ensure the rule of law and human rights safeguards in security and investment frameworks and in region to region cooperation, including under the Global Gateway and in any cooperation on critical raw minerals;
- Condemn the indiscriminate and prolonged use of states of emergencies, and the creeping militarization of multiple aspects of public life, including military ownership of infrastructure and resources;
- Develop policies to combat organized crime that are grounded in human rights, address the root causes of socio economic conflicts, and integrate anti-corruption measures;
- Condemn the adoption of "foreign agent" laws and legal instruments designed to restrict civic space and foreign funding for human rights and non-governmental organisations.

In parallel, we urge you to act for mutual accountability in upholding the international human rights commitments of EU and LAC states by:

- Maintaining continued international scrutiny for violations in EU-LAC exchanges and in multilateral forums, and promoting relevant structural reforms;
- Condition cooperation and technical assistance on issues of security and justice on compliance with human rights standards and judicial guarantees;
- Pro-actively and publicly support human rights organizations, journalists, defenders and families of victims through joint public declarations, robust diplomatic efforts and concrete cooperation; on protection programmes, psychosocial support, legal assistance and sustainable financing;
- Promote effective legislation and policies for the protection of human rights defenders and ensure adequate funding for their implementation.

On behalf of the following organizations:

- ActionAid
- Amnesty International
- Asociación Nacional de Centros (ANC) del Perú
- CELAC – EU Civil Society Working Group
- Coordinadora de la Mujer
- Coordinadora de ONGs Española
- Esquel
- EU – LAT Network
- European Network OIDHACO – International Office for Human Rights- Action Colombia
- International Federation for Human Rights - FIDH
- Foro para las Relaciones CELAC-UE
- Front Line Defenders
- Protection International
- World Organisation Against Torture - OMCT