

DEFIENDE **LAS AMÉRICAS**

Strengthening Human Rights Documentation and Advocacy
in Latin America

FINAL REPORT

2024 - 2025

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CONTEXT

The Defiende Las Américas project was launched as an initiative aimed at strengthening the defense and promotion of human rights in Latin America, with a special focus on countries facing autocratic regimes and severe restrictions on civic space, such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Trinidad and Tobago. Inspired by the legacy of Anthony Lester QC (Lord Lester of Herne Hill), this project seeks to leverage human rights protection systems at both regional and universal levels to document violations, demand justice, and combat impunity, thereby contributing to the reinforcement of the rule of law in the region.

The human rights situation in these countries is characterized by systematic patterns of repression, persecution of dissidents, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the weakening of democratic institutions. In Nicaragua, government repression has resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of arbitrary detentions since the 2018 protests, while in Cuba, the regime has intensified the persecution of activists, journalists, and political opponents, with serious violations of due process and inhumane detention conditions. In Bolivia, the state's response to electoral protests has included excessive use of force, extrajudicial executions, and threats against human rights defenders. Meanwhile, in Trinidad and Tobago, the lack of effective protection mechanisms has led to serious violations, particularly against migrants and asylum seekers, who have been subjected to arbitrary detention and forced deportations.

In response to this context, Defiende Las Américas has developed a comprehensive approach based on three fundamental pillars: strengthening civil society's capacities, documenting human rights violations and advocating before international bodies. Through the identification and submission of cases to the Inter-American Human Rights System and the United Nations, the project has sought to generate international pressure for state accountability. Similarly, through training and mentoring programs, it has empowered defenders and local organizations to effectively use these protection and advocacy mechanisms. Finally, the advocacy strategy has helped to bring visibility to these violations in international forums, promoting concrete responses to improve the human rights situation in the region.

This final case report outlines the results achieved by the project, detailing efforts in documentation and strategic litigation, progress in training human rights defenders, and advocacy actions undertaken. Through this evaluation, the aim is not only to account for the impact of Defiende Las Américas but also to provide insights for strengthening future initiatives in the defense of human rights in Latin America.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This report presents the results of the documentation and strategic litigation carried out within the framework of the Defiende Las Américas project. It includes the training program in human rights documentation and advocacy and the litigation products submitted to international human rights protection mechanisms during 2024 and 2025.

The documented cases and advocacy actions were directed at both the Inter-American Human Rights System (IAHRS) and the Universal Human Rights System (UHRS). The submitted products are classified into three main categories:

1. **Complaints:** Formal communications regarding human rights violations submitted to an international protection mechanism for investigation and resolution. Some of these complaints meet admissibility requirements, including the exhaustion of domestic remedies or exceptions to this requirement. This category also includes other legal instruments such as precautionary measures, allegation letters, reports, and impact reports, all aimed at exposing human rights violations.
2. **Urgent Appeals:** Advocacy tools used to immediately highlight ongoing or potential human rights violations. These alerts are directed at special rapporteurs, international bodies, and human rights protection programs.
3. **Case updates:** Documents that provide information on the progress of cases previously submitted to protection mechanisms. They also serve as responses within judicial and quasi-judicial procedures before these bodies.

For the preparation of this report, all case-related information was compiled into a case matrix. Subsequently, an executive summary of all reported litigation products was prepared, serving as the basis for constructing the final report.

The structure of the report is divided into three main sections, corresponding to the results of the training program, the categories of litigation products and the results and impact of Defiende las Américas project. About the litigation products, in total, the project submitted 17 cases, including 5 complaints, 9 alerts, and 3 case updates. Each section provides a detailed description of the submitted products and their relevance to the project's objectives.

I. TRAINING PROGRAM IN HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION AND ADVOCACY

The training program in human rights documentation and advocacy, developed within the framework of the Defiende Las Américas project, aimed to strengthen the capacities of defenders and civil society organizations in using international protection systems. Below is the detailed process of designing, implementing, and the results of the program.

The process began with identifying human rights organizations in Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Trinidad and Tobago. Using a registration matrix, a total of **96 active organizations working on**



human rights defense in these regions were identified. Subsequently, all organizations were contacted via emails and phone calls, and meetings were held to invite them to participate in the training program.

An informational flyer was designed, and a public call was launched through social media, targeting defenders and organizations interested in strengthening their capabilities in documentation and strategic litigation. As a result of the selection process, **51 individuals were admitted**, including 26 women and 25 men, **from 10 countries** (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Venezuela). **These participants**

represented 27 civil society organizations.

To ensure the program's effectiveness, a training plan titled Training Program in Human Rights Documentation and Advocacy was developed, covering four key thematic sessions: (i) Introduction to the Documentation of Serious Human Rights Violations; (ii) Fundamentals of International Human



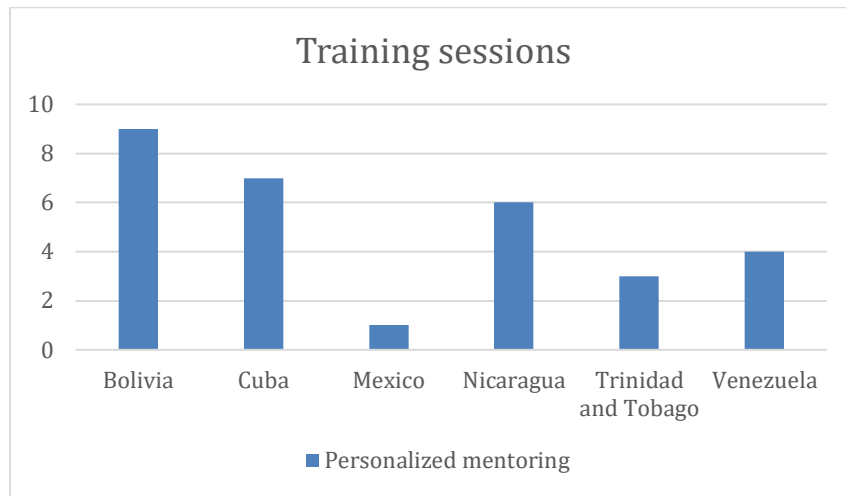
Rights Law and the Inter-American System; (iii) The Universal Human Rights System; and (iv) building an International Advocacy Agenda.

The program was conducted virtually in Spanish, with live sessions that were recorded and translated to ensure accessibility for English-speaking participants.

After the training, attendance was tracked through Zoom reports.

A total of 30 people successfully completed all training sessions, distributed as follows: Bolivia: 9; Cuba: 7; México: 1; Nicaragua: 6; Trinidad and Tobago: 3; Venezuela: 4.

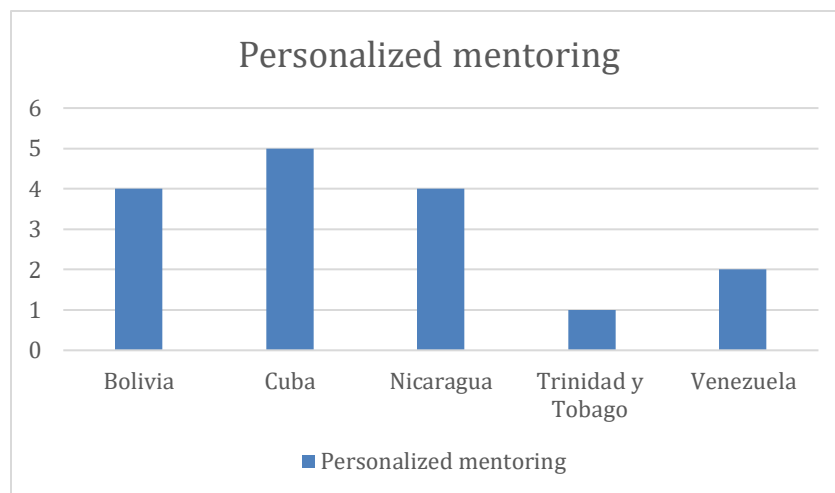




Following the training sessions, a mentoring program was carried out with a selected group of participants. This phase focused on:

- Building international advocacy agendas.
- Identifying and analyzing human rights violation cases.
- Selecting the most appropriate international protection mechanisms.
- Providing support in research and drafting complaints.

A total of 16 individuals received personalized mentoring, representing 12 civil society organizations: Bolivia: 4; Cuba: 5; Nicaragua: 4; Trinidad and Tobago: 1; Venezuela: 2.



In this regard, the program successfully strengthened the capacities of 30 human rights defenders in the region, with a focus on documentation of violations and the use of international protection mechanisms. Mentoring provided specialized support to 16 participants, facilitating the presentation of cases to international bodies.

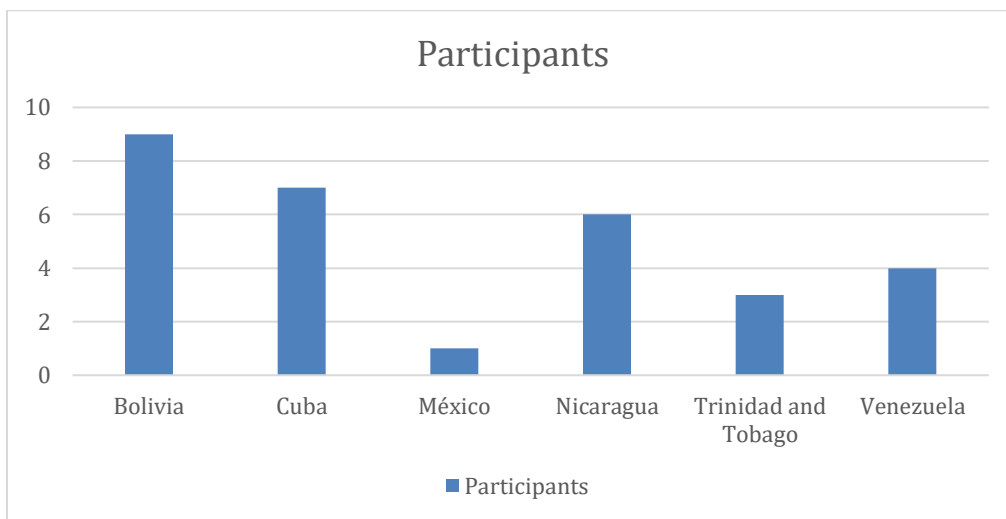
The impact of this program is reflected in the consolidation of a network of trained defenders in strategic litigation, the creation of international advocacy agendas, and the strengthening of civil society organizations' work in contexts of repression and state violence.

II. RESULTS AND IMPACT

The Defiende Las Américas project had a significant impact on the ability of civil society organizations and human rights defenders in Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Trinidad and Tobago to improve their skills in documenting human rights violations and international strategic litigation. Through a training and mentoring program, the project helped strengthen the defense of human rights in contexts of repression and state violence, enabling greater use of international protection systems.

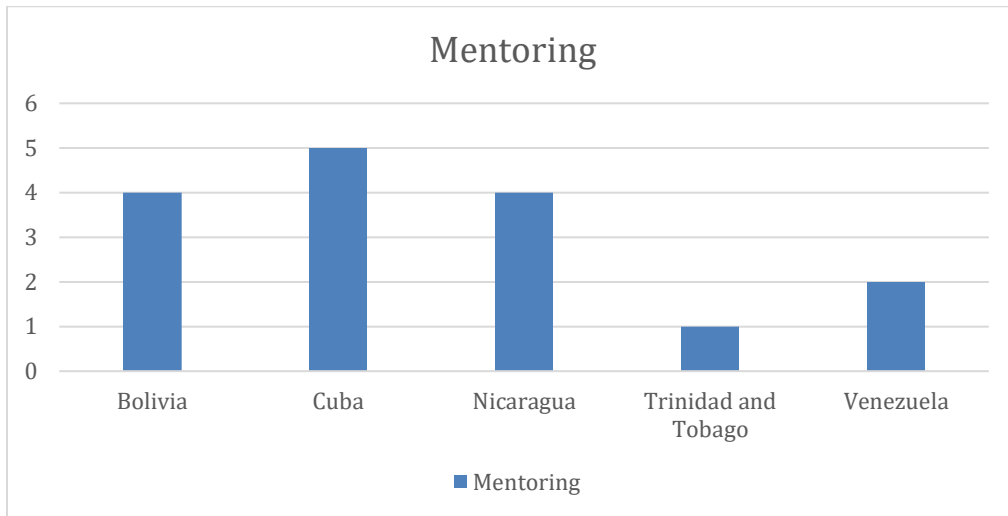
II.I. Training and mentoring

One of the main achievements of the project was the implementation of a virtual training program that reached 51 people from 10 countries: Argentina (2), Bolivia (18), Colombia (2), Costa Rica (1), Cuba (8), Mexico (1), Nicaragua (5), Trinidad and Tobago (4), and Venezuela (10), representing 27 civil society organizations. Through four modules, 30 participants successfully completed the training. The participants gained essential knowledge on documenting serious human rights violations, the Inter-American human rights system, the universal human rights system, and building an international advocacy agenda. This program not only provided theoretical tools but also practical ones to address violations in their local contexts.



After the training, a mentoring program was implemented for 16 participants, distributed as follows: 4 from Bolivia, 5 from Cuba, 4 from Nicaragua, 1 from Trinidad and Tobago, and 2 from Venezuela. All of them were members of 12 civil society organizations. During the mentoring sessions, participants received personalized support in creating international advocacy agendas, case analysis, and filing complaints with international mechanisms. This approach allowed the defenders to acquire

advanced skills to effectively engage with international protection systems, with a particular focus on documenting, analyzing, and reporting human rights violations.



II.II. Documentation and presentation of cases

The project enabled the documentation and submission of cases to the IACHR and United Nations protection mechanisms with a specific focus on serious violations related to arbitrary detentions, political persecution, violations of freedom of expression, the right to association, gender-based violence, violations of the right to life, personal integrity, environmental rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights.

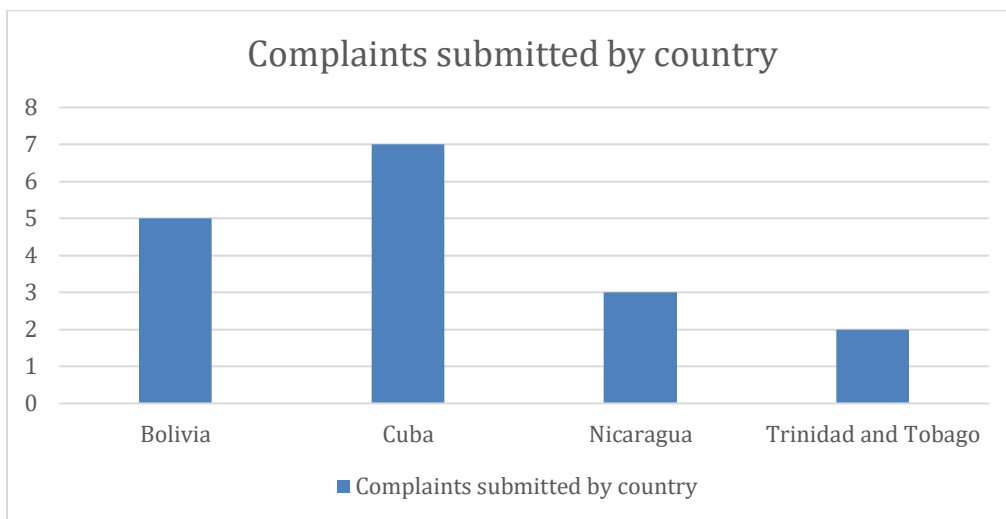
For example, in Bolivia, a human rights violation case was presented regarding the forest fires and deforestation in the Chiquitania region, which severely affected indigenous communities. The mentored organizations filed complaints with the IACHR, requesting the declaration of an environmental state of emergency and the implementation of reparation and protection measures for the affected communities. The mentored organizations were able to participate in a dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of the IACHR during a visit to Bolivia to analyze the damage caused by the forest fires and presented the violations they were documenting. Furthermore, a request for precautionary measures was made for an indigenous community due to the grave threat posed by the fires and the state's inaction.

In Cuba, cases were presented regarding the harassment of human rights activists, the health crisis due to poor waste management, and the increase in femicides. Through urgent requests to the IACHR and other international bodies, the lack of protection for the right to life and physical integrity of activists was highlighted, as well as the inefficacy of public policies to address gender-based violence in the country.

In Nicaragua, the repression following constitutional reforms was documented, focusing on the criminalization of the opposition and the persecution of activists. The program contributed to the mentored organization issuing an urgent appeal to international bodies, denouncing arbitrary detention and forced disappearances as part of a systematic repression policy.

In Trinidad and Tobago, work was done on creating and disseminating early warning alerts on human rights violations. Specifically, the focus was on risks related to police use of force, discrimination and violence against migrants and refugees, as well as the increasing gender-based violence in the country.

During the mentoring and within the framework of the Defiende las Américas project, a total of 17 denunciation actions were developed and directed to international human rights protection bodies, including the IACHR and the UN. These denunciations were strategically crafted to raise awareness and request compliance with international obligations of States through these international mechanisms in response to the grave human rights violations occurring in the region. Specifically, 5 complaints were made related to violations in Bolivia, 7 in Cuba, 3 in Nicaragua, and 2 in Trinidad and Tobago. These complaints' actions reflect the commitment and capacity of the participating organizations to mobilize and use international protection systems in defense of the fundamental rights of victims.



II.III. Regional impact and strengthening of civil society

The project's impact is evident in the consolidation of a network of defenders trained in strategic litigation, enabling civil society organizations in the region to significantly improve their advocacy capacities before international mechanisms. This strengthening is reflected in the increase in complaints and the organizations' ability to effectively present cases, which in turn has led to greater visibility of human rights violations and more effective international pressure on responsible governments.

One of the most notable impacts was the empowerment of participating organizations in developing international advocacy agendas, allowing them to influence the human rights debate and promote protection and reparation measures in their respective countries. Additionally, the project facilitated the creation of a collaborative space among organizations from different countries, fostering the exchange of experiences and best practices in human rights advocacy.

III.IV. Challenges and lessons learned

The project also faced certain challenges, such as coordinating schedules across different time zones due to the diversity of participants from various regions. To overcome this obstacle, we conducted a survey to identify the most accessible time slots for the majority. Additionally, we provided session recordings for those unable to attend live, ensuring that everyone had flexible access to the project's content.

Limited internet access and lack of mobile data in Cuba and other regions also posed a challenge. In response, we facilitated mobile credit transfers to ensure participants' connectivity and optimized materials for low-bandwidth consumption. We also provided downloadable resources so participants could access materials offline.

Another significant challenge was the repression and persecution faced by participants from restrictive environments such as Trinidad and Tobago, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Bolivia. These participants were at risk of being monitored or persecuted for their human rights advocacy. To protect their identities, we implemented enhanced security measures, including encrypted communication channels and anonymized participation options.

Finally, some witnesses who initially agreed to share their testimonies later withdrew their consent due to fear of reprisals. In these cases, we prioritized their safety by reinforcing confidentiality protocols, maintaining open communication with them, and ensuring that any documentation proceeded only with their full and informed consent. These obstacles did not prevent the mentored organizations from acquiring key skills to improve their processes for documenting and filing complaints, which will enable them to continue their advocacy work in the future.

In summary, the Defiende Las Américas project has had a positive and transformative impact on human rights organizations in the region. Through the training and mentorship provided, defenders' capacities have been strengthened, contributing to greater effectiveness in documenting violations and utilizing international protection mechanisms. This effort has led to increased visibility of human rights violations in the region and has strengthened organizations' ability to advocate for justice and the protection of fundamental rights in contexts of repression and state violence.