

Situation of Human Rights in Zulia

GUAJIRA -

TOAS ISLAND



CODHEZ
COMISIÓN PARA LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS
DEL ESTADO ZULIA
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This report documents the human rights situation of the inhabitants of the Guajira municipality and Toas Island, which is one of the islands that are part of the Almirante Padilla island municipality. It is noteworthy that the Guajira municipality is an indigenous territory.

La Guajira and Toas Island are two areas of Zulia State that have been neglected and abandoned by governmental bodies. Their inhabitants suffer from multiple needs translated into a progressive deterioration of their general wellbeing and quality of life, and a constant disregard for their most fundamental rights.





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Guajira - Toas Island

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Situation of Human Rights in Zulia

Guajira - Toas Island

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M A R A C A I B O , V E N E Z U E L A

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

This report documents the human rights situation of the inhabitants of the Guajira municipality and Toas Island, which is one of the islands that are part of the Almirante Padilla island municipality. It is noteworthy that the Guajira municipality is an indigenous territory¹.

The source of information for the data described in this report was obtained through a visit to the Guajira municipality (January 25, 2022), a visit to Toas Island (January 20, 2022), and the compilation of news items highlighted in national and regional media, from October 2021 to January 2022.



During our visit to the Guajira municipality, we were able to make contact in 14 of its communities, specifically in the foreign axis of the Sinamaica parish. These communities were Los Puertecitos (300 families), Mamoncito (20 families), Karaipia (30 families), Los Cardoncitos (200 families), La Rita (160 families), El Botoncillo (140 families), Alewajirrawa (100 families), Caimare Chico (280 families), Bloque 6 (60 families), Los Campiones (50 families), Los Hermanitos (50 families), Arizona (40 families), Campo Alegre (150 families), and Campo Alegre II (80 families). These reviews were shared by the social leaders of the communities, given the number of families targeted for the delivery of Mercal bags and CLAP boxes.



There is limited information on Toas Island, but the vulnerability of its communities is evident. The information in this report is based on the testimonies of people from Toas Island, specifically from the communities of El Hato and Las Playitas, which we interviewed. It was found that Toas Island is a sector with poor dissemination of information, and official data are nonexistent. Some of the data found correspond to years ago and, therefore, only a visit to the community allowed us to capture the harsh reality experienced by its inhabitants.

It will be shown some specific data –more technical– taken from the Inso Encovi 2021, carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB) both about the Guajira municipality and the Almirante Padilla island municipality.

La Guajira and Toas Island are two areas of Zulia State that have been neglected and abandoned by governmental bodies. Their inhabitants suffer from multiple needs translated into a progressive deterioration of their general wellbeing and quality of life, and a constant disregard for their most fundamental rights.





SITUATION IN LA GUAJIRA

► Context of the current situation ◀

The Guajira municipality is in the northwestern part of Zulia State, with a surface area of 2,370 km² - that is, 4.70% of the total surface area of the Zulia region. The municipality's capital is Sinamaica and it has four parishes: Sinamaica, Elías Sánchez Rubio, Guajira and Alta Guajira².



Source: Corpozulia, 2011

As mentioned above, the Guajira municipality is considered an indigenous territory. According to official data provided in the last population census of 2011, the municipality had a population of 65,545 inhabitants distributed among its four parishes: Sinamaica, 13,951; Alta Guajira, 4,050; Elías Sánchez Rubio, 8,526; and Guajira, 39,018³.

According to the most recent data, published in *Inso Encovi 2021*⁴, the Guajira municipality has a total population of 67,194 inhabitants –34,377 women and 32,817 men– and is mostly inhabited by the Wayuu and Añú indigenous peoples. Sixty-one percent of its inhabitants are between the ages of 15 and 64.



La Guajira is an area with high temperatures and low rainfall almost all year round. The predominant type of housing is the *palafito* of Añú origin and the *rancho guajiro*.

Of all the households in this municipality, 72.5% are headed by a woman⁵. 98% of the population of the municipality of Guajira is below the poverty line, while 86% live below the extreme poverty line; these families do not have enough income to satisfy their most basic needs. 97% of the households headed by women are in the same condition⁶.

► **Livelihoods and food security**

The Guajira municipality is a strategic zone for commercial and cultural exchange between Colombia and Venezuela. A few years ago, it was a reference for binational trade, as it had formal networks of land transportation –buses, cars, heavy transport– whose principal axis is the so-called Troncal del Caribe (Maracaibo-Maicao) that crosses centers such as Sinamaica, Guarero, and Paraguachón. River traffic was frequent through the Limón River and the Sinamaica Lagoon, and allowed the transportation of products and people, even to the Gulf of Venezuela.

Because of the topography and arid climate, La Guajira grows cassava, corn, coconuts, guava, and papaya, among other crops. Most of this production is consumed by the households that harvest it, and some of it is marketed. In the livestock sector, La Guajira raises sheep and goats, and to a lesser extent, cattle, and pigs. There is also fishing, depending on the season.

The production of handicrafts is also a source of income for the inhabitants of this municipality: weavings (*chinchorros* and fishing nets) and works with bulrushes (hats, fans, basketry). There are some carpentry workshops and, more recently, there have been some pastry-making workshops.



However, most families must work daily to be able to feed themselves. For example, there are no sources of employment in Potrerito, and the few people who do work say they must risk at the Paraguachón border (controlled in some areas by mafias and organized crime). Some are wheelbarrow drivers, and many women sell water and *chicha* to subsist⁷.

La Guajira has an economic activity rate⁸ of 28%. The employment rate⁹ is 25%, and 27% of the population are salaried workers¹⁰, while 82% are self-employed and family helpers¹¹. Specifically, 17% of women are economically active, 37% of working women are considered "salaried", while another 69% are self-employed and family helpers¹².

Meanwhile, 62% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are neither studying nor employed¹³. Most young people between the ages of 18 and 24 are outside the educational system. Only 15.2% attend educational institutions¹⁴.

Most of the visited communities are engaged in sheep and goat raising, fishing, motorcycle transportation, and firewood cutting.

People of La Guajira depend on the national government's food programs –Mercal bags or CLAP boxes–, distributed irregularly and with poor dietary variety of healthy and nutritious food. The delivery of these programs usually takes two to three months, and despite being advertised as a free program, families are required to pay at least COP 10,000.00. The food commonly found in these bags or boxes is 2 kilos of corn flour, 4 kilos of rice, 1 kilo of pasta, 1 kilo of mayonnaise, 1 coffee, and 1 pasta sauce, without any type of protein. This amount of food only yields about four days per family.



Grains and rice are the most consumed foods throughout the weeks; there is no consumption of beef or chicken, and people can consume fish in specific seasons. However, their prices range between COP 4,000.00 and 5,000.00, which is not affordable for most families.

La Guajira municipality is the Zulian entity with the highest rates of food insecurity. It is estimated that 99.8% of households are moderate to severe food insecure. In 2020, 10% of children under 5 years of age were underweight¹⁵.

▶ Access to basic services

Access to public services has been a critical problem for many years in La Guajira; however, it has become more acute in recent months since the declaration of the social and collective quarantine due to the pandemic. By 2021, 72.3% of households suffered from a lack of public services, while 29.8% lived in inadequate housing¹⁶.





▶ Electric service

According to Inso Encovi 2021, 49.5% of households have access to electric service¹⁷, with a significant irregularity due to constant power outages and fluctuations.

By the last quarter of last year, 89 communities remained without electric service¹⁸ for more than 44 hours in La Guajira. The situation was repeated in mid-October when a massive failure also affected the municipality¹⁹. By mid-December 2021, power outages and power fluctuations were daily in the community of El Libertador. Also, 25 families had been without electric service for 4 months because the power transformer that supplied electricity was damaged. Therefore, they decided to sell the damaged pieces to raise money and buy another one, but they could not. This situation was denounced to the authorities, but the families never received a response²⁰. In Potrerito they have been without electric service for 4 years, they do not have electrical cables or the resources to buy them²¹.

At the beginning of 2022, it was reported that 30 sectors of La Guajira municipality had 72 hours without electricity due to a power failure caused by the fall of poles and wires, unable to be reconnected because Corpoelec did not have supplies²².

The communities of Caño Pajaima and Cardoncito –with a total of 265 families– have been without electricity for two years after the explosion of the main power transformer, and without any response from Corpoelec. *"When it is hot, we have to put up with it because there is nothing to do. We are used to sleeping in the heat, to living in the dark. Drinking cold water is a luxury, sometimes we buy ice"*, says one of the residents, resigned.

" ... They have been without electric service for four years, they do not have electrical cables or the resources to buy them."



▶ Potable water

By 2021, only 33% of households had potable water service irregularly²³.

Families in the community of El Libertador have not received water service through pipes or water trucks for more than 3 years. Therefore, they have had to buy water from water vendors who transport it in wheelbarrows from house to house for COP 5,000.00, which is equivalent to Bs. 10 or USD 2.00 per pipe. Other families have decided to build their artesian wells²⁴.

Potrerito is a sector with 236 families who have been living without water for 5 years. The families buy water in 250 ml sachets for COP 1,000.00, in homes where up to 7 people live and only have an income of COP 4,000.00. Sometimes they have to drag the tanks or pipes to the main avenue because the few government or private water trucks do not enter the sector, but a 1,500-liter tank can cost between COP 18,000 or COP 20,000. The other option is to fetch water from the ponds²⁵.

In sectors such as the Caño Palaima hamlet, families must travel up to one kilometer from their homes to the water source. In other places, the trips are much longer. Families travel for up to 40 minutes to fetch 100 liters of water from the main freshwater pipelines that cross the area, which are only enough for their basic needs (food and hygiene). For the past two years, water trucks have not passed through this community due to the difficult access to the foreign axis of Sinamaica parish, located between unpaved roads and dunes. When a water tanker does manage to reach the community, its high prices prevent most people from having access to it. A water tank can cost between COP 12,000 and 15,000 and must be paid in foreign currency (COP or USD) and cash. The Bolivar is not accepted in this part of the country.



▶ Garbage collection

Los Filúos is one of the principal markets in the municipality in decay. For more than 7 years its streets have been in deplorable conditions with water overflowing around them and holes filled with construction debris; this has made the roads impassable and decreased the few sales. Another issue is the lack of garbage collection and waste accumulation. The merchants are forced to pay private individuals to take away the garbage since no garbage truck has ever passed through the area²⁶.



▶ Natural gas

There is no piped natural gas in the visited sectors. Therefore, the inhabitants cook with firewood. Their days begin with a whole process of collecting sticks and wood to have them available for cooking. The collection of firewood is one of the livelihoods of the inhabitants of these communities.

There is no natural gas in the educational institutions either, neither by pipelines nor by gas cylinders. Some schools have asked children to bring a stick of firewood so they can enter the institution.



► Right to health

The health situation was already difficult before the pandemic. Since then, the health and sanitary experience in La Guajira has become more complex. An example of this is the current state of the Binational Hospital of Paraguaipoa, where the few personnel who work there are constantly exposed to the absence of biosecurity measures, infrastructure, and supplies. Part of the hospital has become a dumping ground for used supplies with no sanitary control whatsoever. It is denounced that many medical supplies and medicines were hoarded and hidden, and more than 30% of them were expired²⁷.

The Binational Hospital "Dr. José Leonardo Fernández" of Paraguaipoa is the health center for the Wayuu population in Venezuela. Previously, it also served the Wayuu population in Colombia, hence its designation as "binational". It can attend 35 thousand people and is the only hospital in La Guajira.

This hospital has been one of the most affected by the complex humanitarian emergency ravaging the country. Despite being an essential hospital in this area of Zulia, it suffers from constant and long power outages. The first week of 2022 it was without electric service. These power failures last two to three days and extend to all the adjacent indigenous communities, from Paraguaipoa to the Rabito and Moina hamlets.

Blackouts are more frequent in this health center during May, June, and July, due to the season of strong winds, and the lack of maintenance of the wires, poles, and power transformers, which are not able to withstand these weather conditions. *"If they did maintenance every 15 days, the failures would be less. The poles wash themselves in October, when it starts to rain"*, said the health center administrator.



This situation limits the health personnel from attending to emergencies due to the long power failures. "We cannot attend deliveries when the power goes out, and if an injured person arrives at night, there are no options because there are no emergency lights, nothing," said the hospital's human resources manager. There is a power station that should supply the entire hospital, but it has not been working for three months, and the hospital does not have the resources for its maintenance.

Of five air conditioners, only one is fully functional, two are half working and the rest are damaged; the general services have no bags, bleach, brooms, or gloves for cleaning. For now, the new administration managed to activate an artesian well to have water, but the pipes have deteriorated due to inoperability. The personnel draw water from the storage tank for water supply.

On the other hand, the lack of supplies in this hospital is approximately 90%. The medical personnel can only indicate to the patient the supplies and medicines they need to treat him. There is no alcohol, masks, or gauze in the emergency room. The personnel must even pay for their own biosafety equipment, and there are no reagents in the laboratory.

There are no supplies or medicines for emergency care. The imaging unit is not functioning either.

It also does not have ambulances for the transfer and referral of cases. With the change of administration in the Zulia state government (after November 2021), the past mayor's office took away the two specialized ambulances the health center had. According to the new director of the hospital, given the transition of the regional government, they are waiting for resources that depend on the national budget.



The backyard of the health care center serves as a garbage dump because the municipal garbage and waste collection service is deficient.

“There is a bunch of accumulated garbage because the garbage collection service does not come. We haven't seen it in the town for a long time, since before the pandemic, therefore garbage accumulates, and what we do is burn it a little at a time” - says the hospital personnel.

There is only one ambulatory care center among the visited communities. This is the Rural Ambulatory Type 1 La Rita, built in 2003, which initially served the inhabitants of 7 communities –Botoncillo, La Rita, Cardoncito, Mamoncito, Karaipia, Puertecito, and Los Hermanitos–, but has been closed for 6 years due to the lack of electricity, supplies, and doctors.

In 2007, fifteen years ago, there were two hospitals in La Guajira municipality (Paraguaipoa Binational Hospital and Sinamaica Hospital), 8 rural ambulatory care centers, and two comprehensive diagnostic centers (CDIs)²⁸.



▶ Right to education

Education is another right in total neglect. In 2007, there were 151 educational centers . Currently, in sectors such as Potrerito, sixth graders cannot read, teachers can only attend once or twice a week, and schools are without paint or desks³⁰.

In the foreign axis of the Sinamaica parish, there are seven basic education schools, all of them in a state of abandonment and deterioration, despite the efforts made by parents, representatives, and teachers. The deterioration in the quality of education is due, among other reasons, to the lack of electricity, potable water, and difficulties in feeding the children. This panorama was darkened after the pandemic because the national executive, in an improvised manner and without technological or academic support, imposed a virtual mode of education, impossible for these communities given the constant electrical failures, the lack of internet, and the absence of the necessary technological equipment.

By the end of 2021 and with the return to face-to-face classes, the lack of resources has prevented children from having quality education. Transportation is also a problem for Wayuu households. The children began to walk an hour each way to and from school.

The schools have no water, no bathrooms, and no feeding programs. Families make significant efforts to take their children to school, but often do not have enough money to feed them at home, so children miss up to two days a week of school until there is food at home.

In this regard, the school feeding program is the responsibility of the National Food Corporation. Before the pandemic, some educational institutions received CLAP bags every 15 days for food preparation. Currently, such delivery is very sporadic. By October 2021, each school reported receiving 10 CLAP bags, but by the last week of January 2022, they had only received two of these bags.



The food bags delivered by the national government to schools bring carbohydrates such as corn flour and rice, and sometimes mortadella. *"The bags only bring carbohydrates. We don't have protein,"* said one of the teachers. Those in charge of each school sometimes barter with fishermen parents and exchange rice or flour for fish. *"If not, we have to make lucky rice with sausage or mortadella".*

Although the student population is 200 children at Los Puertecitos school, daily attendance is only 50%. When there is a snack, the attendance rate rises to approximately 70%. *"This happens because the children often do not have any of the three meals at home, so they walk up to a kilometer to get to school to eat,"* said one of the teachers.

Generally, the schools do not have access to basic services. Almost all of them are in a state of absolute deterioration and abandonment by competent governmental bodies. This implies a violation of the right to education of thousands of boys and girls in these communities.

There is also no natural gas service. Therefore, the preparation of food depends on firewood or charcoal. As mentioned above, teachers ask representatives for a stick of firewood for the kitchen. The same happens with the potable water service in educational institutions: each school must manage its own potable water supply. Previously, it was distributed free of charge by the municipality's mayor's office. The collaboration of teachers and representatives is necessary so that a 200-liter pipe can be purchased for the hygiene of the youngest children. Since bathrooms are out of service, older children must go outdoors.



► **Communications and technology**

By 2021, only 0.8% of households in La Guajira had internet access and 2.2% owned computers³¹.

The communities in this municipality are deeply affected by the lack of means of communication. There are persistent and continuous failures of services such as mobile telephony and the internet -almost nonexistent-. On occasions, residents can go for several days without any connection to information networks. This situation leads to chaos and uncertainty since people are limited and cut off from communication. The Movilnet signal, the state-owned mobile network operator, has been out of service for nearly 6 years.

► **Public transportation**

Motorcycle taxis are the only means of transportation to reach Sinamaica. Access to these communities for motor vehicles is difficult because the streets are not paved, and the roads are sandy and overgrown.

Motorcycle fares are between COP 5,000.00 and 6,000.00. Those who do not have money enough have to walk for kilometers. There used to be two Toyota cars that served as public transportation, but over time they deteriorated.





▶ Political pressure and intimidation

Political pressure and intimidation also distress the inhabitants of La Guajira. In the recent elections of November 2021, multiple complaints were made in this regard, as well as for the lack of information about the process. The complaints pointed to the prohibition of witnesses to enter the voting centers and constant threats by the pro-government sector³².

Another example of manipulation and political retaliation is associated with the distribution of national government food programs. The bags of food do not reach the communities directly. During the last week of January, the inhabitants of Caño Paijana, Cardoncito, and Los Puertecitos had to walk 12 kilometers to reach the town of Sinamaica where they were sold the bag that corresponds to each family. The mayor's office of La Guajira took away the benefit of delivering the food in the community.

According to the inhabitants of these communities, this is a retaliatory measure because of the denunciations they made for using these food programs as an instrument to control their vote during the primary elections of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in August 2021. For these reasons, households in these sectors must walk to Paraguaipoa to pick up their Mercal bags, while some communities receive them in their territory.





SITUATION IN TOAS ISLAND

► Context of the current situation ◀

The Almirante Padilla island municipality is bounded by the Gulf of Venezuela to the north and has a surface area of 151 km², that is, 0.28% of the surface area of the Zulia region. It is composed by Toas Island, San Carlos, Zapara, Pescadores, Pájaros, Pedro Colina, San Bernardo, Los Islotos de Maraca, Bajo el Frío, Los Bajos, Los Gusanos, Juan Zenón, Camargo and Zaparita. Its capital is the town of El Toro, located in the parish of Toas Island³³.



According to the 2011 population census, the Almirante Padilla island municipality had a population of 11,929 inhabitants, distributed in its two parishes: Toas Island with 7,678 inhabitants and Monagas with 4,251 inhabitants³⁴.

More recently, according to data from the *Inso Encovi* 2021³⁵, the island municipality has 12,476 inhabitants (6,253 women and 6,223 men). 64% of the population is between 15 and 64 years of age. 50% of the households in the municipality are headed by a woman.



In the Almirante Padilla island municipality, 99% of the population lives below the poverty line, while 84% lives below the extreme poverty line. Likewise, 99% of households headed by women are in the same condition³⁶.

This study is focused on Toas Island. As mentioned above, there is very limited information about its communities. In this regard, the notes described herein serve as an exhortation to governmental bodies, international organizations, and academic institutions to turn their attention to these highly vulnerable communities.

Toas Island is bordered by coasts surrounded by the waters of Lake Maracaibo. The environmental deterioration of its hills and hillocks is the result of the exploitation of limestone. Its inhabitants are friendly and receptive, dedicated and with a high sense of resilience.

Many people decide to stay on the island for reasons of age: many of its inhabitants are elderly. The inhabitants claim that they are forcibly adapted to the precarious situation they face.





► Livelihoods and food security

Toas Island is a place known for its fishing activity. Artisanal fishing is the main source of employment because of the diversity of species that can be found (mullet, sea bass, shrimp, catfish, permit, snook, carp), and is the main source of food for the island and the entire Almirante Padilla municipality.

Despite being an island that is part of an insular group—together with San Carlos and Zapara—and having natural and cultural benefits, tourism activity is almost nonexistent, as well as most of the production processes. Some people are employed in handicrafts (such as weaving), carpentry, and, in recent months, there has been a growth in the production of local and traditional sweets (*conservas* and handmade cookies) and pastries. These activities are carried out daily to commercialize and be able to feed themselves.

It was once an area of high limestone production, specifically in the southwestern part of the island. Some companies were dedicated to this activity and created sources of employment and income for the island. This limestone was taken to Maracaibo and San Francisco for cement manufacturing. Today, there is only one company left with very low extraction activity. This reduced productivity is due, among other reasons, to the deterioration of the natural resource given its excessive extraction, the economic crisis, and the proliferation of mafias that make any profit-making activity unsustainable.

In terms of commerce, there are only small grocery stores for domestic supplies and visitors.

Therefore, fishing is the main source of employment on the island, but it also has several impediments. Sometimes they go more than 15 days without fishing because there is no gasoline for the engines of the small canoes. When gasoline is available, the fishermen must buy it at exorbitant prices. For example, they spend between US\$50 and US\$60 for 60 liters. With this gasoline they go out to fish and, sometimes, there is no good fishing or no fishing at all. The debt remains, and there is no food for their homes.



Some inhabitants reported that they receive government benefits through the Homeland Card (Carnet de la Patria). These benefits are spent through the bio-payment system, but there are only four points of sale of this type on the island. There are no banks in the whole area. Since November 2021 -election time- they do not receive CLAP bags or boxes. They stated, in any case, that they regularly receive them once a year, in December.

On the other hand, houses were completely dismantled. According to the community, some were dismantled by their owners to sell all their household goods and appliances, windows, doors, and asbestos roofs, to use the money to emigrate from the country -especially to Colombia-. In other cases, these are houses left behind by migrant families, which are ransacked and robbed by criminals, leaving only the block walls standing. Many of these families later return to the island, but they no longer have a place to live.

In the entire Almirante Padilla municipality, 41% of the population is economically active³⁷. There is an employment rate³⁸ of 35%: 38% correspond to salaried employees³⁹, and 61% to self-employed workers and family helpers⁴⁰. In the case of women, only 19% of them are considered economically active, 17% of the female population is within the employment rate, 50% are salaried employees, and 49% are self-employed workers and family helpers⁴¹.

More than half of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are neither studying nor employed (56%)⁴². Only 12.8% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 are enrolled in the educational system⁴³.

On the other hand, the Almirante Padilla island municipality has high rates of food insecurity, with an average of 93.3% of moderate or severe food insecurity. By 2020, it was estimated that 8.2% of children under 5 years of age were underweight⁴⁴.



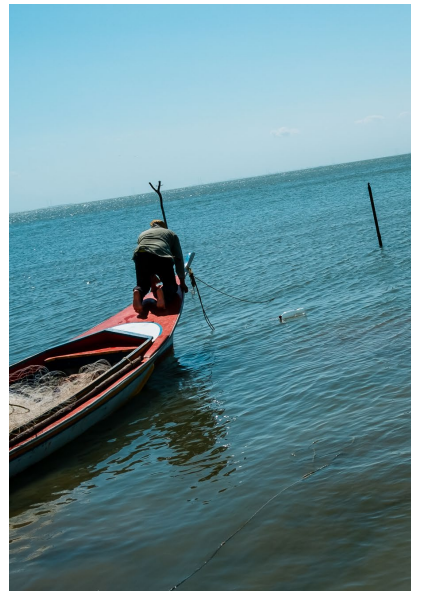
▶ Access to basic services

The provision of public services on the island is deficient and chaotic. For many years there has been no stability, continuity, or regularity in any of the basic services, which has worsened with the pandemic. People say they are surviving without water, electricity, natural gas, garbage collection, transportation, telephone service, or technology of any kind. By 2021, in the entire Almirante Padilla municipality, it was estimated that 72.3% of households had a deficit of public services, while 8.8% had inadequate housing⁴⁵.

▶ Electric service

According to Inso Encovi 2021, 52%, of the households at the Almirante Padilla island municipality have electric service⁴⁶ and it does not mean that it is a continuous and regular service.

The island suffers from several power outages: two to three times a day. There have even been up to four continuous days without electricity. The island's electricity is supplied by a sublacustrine cable, which, according to the inhabitants, does not work because it cannot withstand the energy load due to a lack of maintenance and timely restitution. In addition, the electrical wires have been stolen and replaced by aluminum wires that cannot withstand the wind and constantly fall.





▶ Potable water

Only 43.8% of all households in the municipality have access to potable water⁴⁷ and it does not mean that it is a continuous supply.

There is a sublacustrine pipeline that pumps water from El Moján (Mara municipality), connected to a supply network for the island, but it only works sporadically for a part of the territory. For this reason, it was built a water tank with a capacity of more than one million liters, but it only worked for a while: today it does not supply water either. Currently, the little water that arrives from El Moján is stored in tanks in Punta Arenal. It is distributed by water trucks, but there is only one of them for the whole island nowadays, which provides services for certain people.

Most households must buy water from people who, in a makeshift manner, put water tanks in vehicles to sell them as water barrels. A 20-liter barrel costs Bs. 1.00, a pipe costs around Bs. 8.00 (approximately USD 2.00 in cash). Therefore, inhabitants have to work daily to buy water. People often have to choose between having

money to buy food for lunch or buying water for their basic needs. Sometimes, it happens that "... you have enough for lunch, but you don't have enough for water, or you have enough for water, but you don't have enough for lunch...", according to an inhabitant of the El Hato community. People have to decide between two basic needs.

▶ Natural gas

According to testimonies from the same community, there is no natural gas, neither by pipeline nor by a cylinder. The gas cylinder is unattainable because of its high price: an 18-kilogram cylinder can cost USD 12.00, and because of its scarcity. This situation forces most people to cook with charcoal or firewood.



▶ **Garbage collection**

Garbage and collection services are non-existent. Waste is thrown in makeshift dumps on a corner or on land near the towns where it accumulates without any treatment or processing whatsoever. Each household must decide what to do with its waste. According to neighbors in the El Hato sector, "*...people form a hill of garbage and dump their waste there...*".

▶ **Right to health**

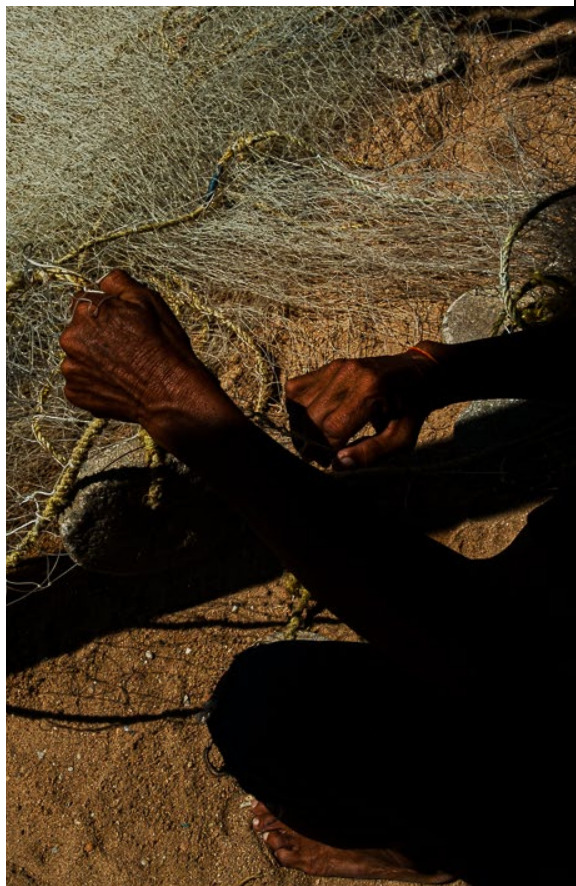
There is a rural hospital and a CDI where basic medical care is provided. The hospital has no medicines or supplies, and people do not have the money to buy the prescribed medicines. In these circumstances, people must carry all the supplies, from injectors to gloves. People must even bring the water to be used in the dental consulting at the CDI.

Some elderly people need ophthalmological surgeries, for example, for glaucoma. These surgeries for both eyes can cost up to USD

3,000.00. People do not have the money to pay it, so they are resigned and state that they will stay that way.

There is no care for chronic diseases. There are no dialysis and chemotherapy treatment units. People diagnosed with hypertension must try to find their daily medications. People with these chronic pathologies must travel to Maracaibo (when there is transportation) to see if they are lucky enough to receive care. In short, primary health care on the island is only available to a limited extent.

Sometimes medical emergencies occur at night or in the early morning hours. The sick person may have the medicine, but there may be no injector for its application, neither in the hospital nor in the CDI. In addition, there are no pharmacies on the island. The last pharmacy closed 15 years ago. Basic medicines such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or aspirin can be found in the markets or stores.





▶ **Right to education**

In the Community Education Center Teacher Heberto Espina (Neighborhood Basic School No. 8), there is almost a total absence of services and infrastructure for the proper care of children. There are no sanitary facilities, no dining room, and no classrooms suitable for receiving classes. The school principal stated that there are only 15 teachers for the two school shifts (morning and afternoon). Some of these teachers are on leave, so many of the children are neglected in this regard as well. Occasionally, people from the community act as teachers.

The school cafeteria and classrooms have been dismantled by crime. Robberies are constant in this educational center. The main door of the dining hall had to be closed -with blocks and cement- to prevent further thefts. All appliances and some kitchen utensils were stolen, as well as the electrical wiring in the lower part of the educational center. As a result, no electrical outlets are working, only some lights and a few ceiling fans. It was observed that the few remaining cables are outside the boxes and without any protection, representing a risk for people, especially for children, in case of any kind of contact.



The institution has no potable water service. The sanitary facilities do not work, and even the sinks are removable because they are stored on weekends to prevent them from being stolen. They only have two water pipes and a small water tank that is occasionally filled by water trucks. Some areas of the institution are cleaned with this water from time to time.

Children attend classes sporadically. Most of them do not have food at home, and parents only send them when there is a possibility of having a meal at school. However, the school has not received the food program for many months. The few children who attend the school do not wear proper footwear —most of them attend in their flip-flops—. Despite the efforts of the school's management and teaching staff, the calamities and needs are overwhelming and out of their hands while the state's inertia prevails.

In 2010, there were 9 educational institutions on Toas Island⁴⁸.



► **Communications and technology**

Only 3.3% of households in the Almirante Padilla municipality have access to the Internet, while 7.3% have computers⁴⁹. Communications and technological networks are almost nonexistent in Toas Island.

Approximately 5 years ago the antenna tower of one of the mobile service providers, Movilnet, was broken and remains that way since then. Cantv's fixed telephone service only reaches the center of the island, and most homes do not have it due to the numerous thefts of telephone cables. People must go to higher areas to try to obtain coverage or signal so they can communicate or have information.

► **Transporte público**

There is only one gas station⁵⁰, which works from time to time. By the beginning of 2022, it was reported that since November 2021 no fuel has been arriving on the island⁵¹. There are no vehicles for public transportation. Public transportation is represented by some trike motorcycles, with a rear box where passengers and motorcycles board. The fare depends on the distance, but the average is Bs. 4.00. However, most people do their errands on foot.

Getting to the island is a difficult journey. There are no boats or ferries, only canoes with makeshift motors that allow the transport from El Moján to Toas Island, without any kind of security. No more canoes leave or arrive at Toas Island after 3 p.m. since the strong waves begin in the middle of the lake, and these boats are not able to withstand them.



Concluding remarks

This descriptive overview of the difficult situation suffered by the inhabitants of La Guajira municipality and Toas Island communities allows us to affirm the high degree of vulnerability these people are exposed in their daily lives.

The desolation and governmental neglect are very remarkable. Physical integrity, health, education, welfare, and quality of life, in general, are not priorities, and there is a regression in the enjoyment of human rights in all senses.

The absence of decent and productive livelihoods directly affects household food security in these areas. Most families struggle to feed themselves daily, and if food is available, it is no guarantee of adequate food.

The lack and malfunctioning of public services is evident. Their provision is deficient in both areas of the state of Zulia, and it deteriorates the quality of life and damages the life projects of each person, as they are forced to perform tasks that wear out their health and well-being by dedicating long daily hours to satisfy their most basic needs.

In addition, poverty is deep-rooted and has no prospect of being overcome. Hunger, educational limitations, and the lack of fair and decent employment increase poverty and remove any hope of building lives and lifestyles of dignity.

The call is to see and consider these realities. These are communities with high social, economic, and cultural potential, made up of friendly and willing people fighting for survival. It is time for their needs to be recognized and addressed with integrity and a human rights approach.



¹ According to the last population census (2011), the indigenous peoples and communities in Zulia State number 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 and Añú/Paraujano 20,688 people (habitat in the north of Zulia State, on the border with Colombia); Yukpa 10,460 people, Bari 2,784 people and Japería 156 people (habitat in the west of Zulia State, on the border with Colombia). These figures may not be adapted to reality because many of the indigenous groups noted above have been forced to migrate due to the lack of living conditions in the country.

² Development Corporation for Zulia Region (Corpozulia) (2011). Guajira Municipality, <http://www.corpozulia.gob.ve/archivos/GUAJIRA%20ANTES%20PAEZ%202010-2011.pdf>

³ National Statistics Institute (2011), Total population by sex, according to municipality and parish, 2011 Census, http://www.ine.gov.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=95&Itemid=26

⁴ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicadores-demograficos/>.

⁵ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-vivienda-y-hogar/>.

⁶ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-pobreza/>.

⁷ Radio Fe y Alegría News (January 19, 2022), "Water is still not reaching villages in La Guajira", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/el-agua-sigue-sin-llegar-a-pueblos-de-guajira/>.

⁸ Formed by the population 15 years of age and older, employed, or unemployed; that is, persons of working age who are or can be engaged in a remunerative occupation.

⁹ According to the Inso Encovi 2021, it is the percentage ratio between the population aged 15 years and older that was employed in the reference period, and the total population in the same range.

¹⁰ According to the Inso Encovi 2021, it is the percentage ratio between the employed population 15 years and older in the category of employees or workers in the public or private sector, and the total employed population 15 years and older.

¹¹ According to the Inso Encovi 2021, it is the percentage ratio between the population aged 15 years and older self-employed or employed as a family helper (paid or unpaid), and the total employed population aged 15 years and older.

¹² Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-empleo/>.

¹³ Ídem.

¹⁴ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-educacion/>.

¹⁵ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/salud-y-alimentacion/>.

¹⁶ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-vivienda-y-hogar/>.

¹⁷ Ídem.

¹⁸ Lenin Danieri on Twitter (October 1, 2021), <https://twitter.com/LDanieri/status/1444040751747317775>.

¹⁹ Reporte Ya on Twitter (October 14, 2021), <https://twitter.com/ReporteYa/status/1448730296522878979>.

²⁰ Radio Fe y Alegría News (December 13, 2021), "Darkness and apathy take over El Libertador de La Guajira", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/la-oscuridad-y-la-desidia-se-aduenan-de-el-libertador-de-guajira/>



²¹ Ídem.

²² La Verdad (January 4, 2022), "More than 30 communities in La Guajira remain without electric service", <http://www.laverdad.com/zulia/189792-mas-de-30-comunidades-de-la-guajira-permanecen-sin-ser-vicio-electrico.html>.

²³ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-vivienda-y-hogar/>.

²⁴ Radio Fe y Alegría News (December 13, 2021), "Darkness and apathy take over El Libertador de La Guajira", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/la-oscuridad-y-la-desidia-se-aduenan-de-el-libertador-de-guajira/>.

²⁵ Radio Fe y Alegría News (January 19, 2022), "Water is still not reaching villages in La Guajira", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/el-agua-sigue-sin-llegar-a-pueblos-de-guajira/>.

²⁶ Radio Fe y Alegría News (November 11, 2021) "Avenue is filled with construction debris in La Guajira", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/con-escombros-de-construccion-rellenan-avenida-en-la-guajira/>.

²⁷ Radio Fe y Alegría News (January 12, 2022) "Paraguaipoa binational hospital was left only for first aid", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/hospital-binacional-de-paraguaipoa-queda-solo-para-primeros-auxilios/>.

²⁸ Development Corporation for Zulian Region Corpozulia) (2011) Guajira Municipality, <http://www.corpozulia.gob.ve/archivos/GUAJIRA%20ANTES%20PAEZ%202010-2011.pdf>

²⁹ Ídem.

³⁰ Radio Fe y Alegría News (January 19, 2022), "Water is still not reaching villages in La Guajira", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/el-agua-sigue-sin-llegar-a-pueblos-de-guajira/>.

³¹ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-vivienda-y-hogar/>.

³² Radio Fe y Alegría News (November 26, 2021), "European Union went to La Guajira over allegations of irregularities in indigenous elections", <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/union-europea-fue-a-la-guajira-por-denuncias-de-irregularidades-en-elecciones-indigenas/>.

³³ Development Corporation for Zulian Region (Corpozulia) (2011). Almirante Padilla Municipality, <http://www.corpozulia.gob.ve/archivos/ALMIRANTE%2520PADILLA%25202010-2011.pdf>.

³⁴ National Statistics Institute (2011), Total population by sex, according to municipality and parish, 2011 Census, http://www.ine.gov.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=95&Itemid=26

³⁵ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-vivienda-y-hogar/>.

³⁶ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-pobreza/>.

³⁷ Formed by the population aged 15 years and over, employed, or unemployed, among the population aged 15 years and over, i.e., persons of working age or persons who can have a remunerated occupation.

³⁸ According to Inso Encovi 2021, it is the percentage ratio between the population aged 15 years and older employed in the reference period, and the total population in the same range.

³⁹ According to the Inso Encovi 2021, it is the percentage ratio between the employed population 15 years and older in the category of employees or workers in the public or private sector, and the total employed population 15 years and older



⁴⁰ According to Inso Encovi 2021, it is the percentage ratio between the population aged 15 years and older self-employed or employed as a family helper (paid or unpaid), and the total employed population aged 15 years and older.

⁴¹ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-empleo/>.

⁴² Ídem.

⁴³ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-educacion/>.

⁴⁴ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/salud-y-alimentacion/>.

⁴⁵ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-vivienda-y-hogar/>.

⁴⁶ Ídem.

⁴⁷ Ídem.

⁴⁸ Development Corporation for Zulian Region (Corpozulia) (2011). Almirante Padilla Municipality, <http://www.corpozulia.gob.ve/archivos/ALMIRANTE%2520PADILLA%25202010-2011.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Economic and Social Research Institute of the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). (2021), Inso-Encovi 2021, <https://insoencovi.ucab.edu.ve/indicador-de-vivienda-y-hogar/>.

⁵⁰ It is necessary to highlight the death of an 18-year-old young man on July 16, 2020, by gunshots fired by GNB officers. These events occurred at the gas station of Toas Island, when the young man was protesting because the coast guard and GNB officers were refusing to allow the sale of gasoline that had arrived in the area. At present, there are no detainees or persons under investigation in this case. There is total silence on the part of the authorities and the Public Prosecutor's Office.

⁵¹ Lenin Danieri on Twitter (January 8, 2022), <https://twitter.com/LDanieri/status/1479995566234947584>