

Anti-Corruption Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean

Global Civil Society Coalition for the UNCAC¹
Regional Submission to CoSP11

7 de noviembre de 2025

The Eleventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties (CoSP11) to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) marks a key moment to advance anti-corruption commitments. Having consulted civil society organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) within the Coalition,² we call on States to demonstrate leadership and cooperation to address corruption, organized crime, and democratic backsliding, recalling that Article 13 of the UNCAC obliges States to ensure the participation of society in the prevention of and the fight against corruption.

Regional Context and Urgent Challenges

More than twenty years after the adoption of the UNCAC, **corruption and impunity remain structural problems in LAC**, eroding public trust, weakening democracy, and perpetuating serious human rights violations³. Despite numerous international⁴ and regional⁵ commitments, the reality shows a **restricted civic space, captured institutions, and direct attacks on fundamental rights**.

The **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)** has recognized that systemic corruption compromises States' human rights obligations, fuels impunity, and undermines democracy across the region⁶. In a recent hearing, civil society (CSOs/NGOs) documented cases where corruption facilitated serious human rights violations, which remain unpunished. The IACHR emphasized that **failure to protect victims of corruption constitutes a breach of States' duty to prevent human rights**

¹ Has been known as the UNCAC Coalition.

² Special thanks goes to the following civil society organizations within our network: Mexiro, Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia (ACIJ), Dejusticia - Corporación Centro de estudios de derecho, justicia y sociedad, TI Brazil, Costa Rica Íntegra, Iniciativa Para la Recuperación de los Activos Venezolanos (INRAV), Japiqay, Impunidad Cero, Derechos Humanos y Litigio Estratégico Mexicano (DLM), Acción Ciudadana, Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ), Semillas para la Democracia, Transparencia por Colombia, Chile Transparente, Ethos, Vance Center for International Justice, Fundación Multitudes, Participación Ciudadana, Proética, Transparencia Mexicana, Centro de Gobernanza Pública y Corporativa, Instituto Panameño de Derecho y Nuevas Tecnologías (IPANDETEC), TOJIL, Mexicanos Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad (MCCI) y Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo (FUNDE).

³ General score on the Rule of Law Index for Latin America in 2024: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/global>.

⁴ A/RES/S-32/1, <https://docs.un.org/es/A/RES/S-32/1>.

⁵ Such as the UNGASS21 Political Declaration; the Lima Commitment on Democratic Governance against Corruption adopted in 2018; the Escazú Agreement and its 2024 Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters; and Resolution 10/1 of CoSP10 (Atlanta, 2023).

⁶ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). (2025, March 3). Regional hearing: State human rights obligations in contexts of corruption, 192nd Session, OAS, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/americas/iachr-dialogue-corruption-human-rights?utm;> <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/CorruptionHR.pdf>.

violations⁷, and that States must address corruption as a **structural enabler** of such violations by adopting policies with a differentiated human rights approach.

The region faces alarming setbacks: arbitrary denial of access to public information; weakening and political control of oversight institutions; **criminalization of CSOs**, Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), and the misuse of justice institutions against anti-corruption actors; opaque procurement; and systemic risks from illicit financial flows linked to corruption and organized crime. With an average regional score of **42/100 on the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index**⁸, LAC must act urgently. Weak controls have increased the influence of elites and organized crime. Most countries have regressed in recent years, evidencing a deterioration of the **rule of law** that has persisted into 2025⁹.

Democratic backsliding has also deepened: only two States qualify as “full democracies.”¹⁰ Nearly 30% of the population lives under a “**closed,” “repressed,” or “obstructed” civic space**¹¹. Practices such as “foreign agents” laws, misuse of “gender/political violence”¹² or “anti-corruption” provisions to criminalize NGOs, smear campaigns¹³ – particularly targeting women journalists¹⁴, judges, and activists investigating power – and judicial reforms seeking to capture courts **contradict the spirit of the UNCAC**.

LAC remains the **most dangerous region in the world for those fighting corruption**: in 2023–2024, 85% of global killings of human rights and environmental defenders occurred here¹⁵. These attacks persist amid the absence of protection mechanisms, early-warning systems, and accountability, **undermining pluralism, democracy, and civic participation**.

⁷ Corte IDH, *Caso Viteri Ungaretti y otros vs. Ecuador*, https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_510_esp.pdf.

⁸ Corruption Perception Index for America 2024, available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2024-america-corruption-fuels-environmental-crime-impunity-across-region>.

⁹ World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2023, https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21846723301&gbraid=0AAAAA-TYemtgumexN7gaeB9l14plk4rvz&gclid=CjwKCAjwOrFBhBaEiwAw4bYDfNGxsAJlcRJS-iBtslt29V4ZpTyrcyq4YoO1bJWhmVygrsz1asBoCMxIQAvD_BwE.

¹⁰ Only two of the 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are classified as “full democracies”; the rest are hybrid regimes (eight) or flawed democracies (ten), with four authoritarian regimes according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2024 Democracy Index: <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2024/>.

¹¹ CIVICUS Monitor, 2024, https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2024/.

¹² Latin America and the Caribbean face structural corruption that is deeply intertwined with gender inequality, militarization, and colonial legacies. To meet the objectives of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and Resolution 10/10, States Parties in the region must recognize that corruption is not gender neutral: it reproduces and amplifies structural violence against women, girls, and gender-diverse people, while reinforcing racial, economic, and territorial inequalities.

¹³ Through social media, the use of bots, and government channels.

¹⁴ UN Women & Regional Alliance for Free Expression and Information. (2023, July 20). Online gender-based violence against women with a public voice: Impact on freedom of expression, United Nations, <https://mexico.un.org/es/239968-violencia-de-género-en-línea-hacia-mujeres-con-voz-pública-impacto-en-la-libertad-de?utm>.

¹⁵ EL PAÍS, Monsalve S., María Mónica, “Colombia, the deadliest country for land and environmental defenders,” – América Futura, Sept. 10, 2024, <https://elpais.com/america-futura/2024-09-09/colombia-rompe-el-record-historico-como-el-pais-mas-letal-para-defensores-de-la-tierra-y-el-ambiente.html>; The Guardian, Greenfield, Patrick, “Almost 200 people killed last year trying to defend the environment, report finds,” Mon, Sept. 9, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/sep/09/almost-200-people-killed-last-year-trying-to-defend-the-environment-report-finds-aoe?>

Civil society organizations face an **ever-shrinking civic space**, intimidation, and restrictions that obstruct their operations, funding, freedom of expression, and effective contribution to UNCAC implementation¹⁶. **Backsliding on transparency** has further hindered access to information: governments arbitrarily deny requests, dismantle oversight bodies, or adopt regressive regulations. Even when data are disclosed, they are often incomplete, inaccessible, or unreadable, particularly in areas such as public procurement, beneficial ownership, and contracting. **Without sanctions for non-compliance, opacity prevails.**

Protection for whistleblowers and victims of corruption remains weak or non-existent. In most jurisdictions, victims' rights to reparation and participation in judicial processes are not recognized, and there are no robust mechanisms to shield whistleblowers from retaliation. They are left without remedy, while CSOs are denied a meaningful role in defending their rights. States must adopt protective laws to prevent **strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)** and legal reprisals. This lack of protection is compounded by **institutional capture**, as many governments leave key positions in anti-corruption bodies vacant, paralyzing UNCAC implementation.

Many States also **fail to harmonize their legislation** with the UNCAC, the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, or the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. The lack of coordination and isolated approaches hinders investigations into grand corruption, transnational bribery, and asset recovery. Coordination and international cooperation mechanisms, and the development of joint tools must be strengthened urgently.

Principles of transparency, inclusion, and accountability must govern the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism. Several LAC governments exclude civil society participation from these reviews. A closed process loses out on valuable input from independent experts and communities, diminishing public accountability. **Effective monitoring requires the inclusion of CSOs.**

Recommendations

We urge States Parties to adopt concrete measures for the effective implementation of the Convention:

1. Protect civic space

- Fully guarantee the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly without reprisals, harassment, or misuse of law.

¹⁶ LatAm Journalism Review, "Hit hard by the suspension of US funding, Latin American media outlets adopt new survival strategies," June 13, 2025. <https://latamjournalismreview.org/es/articles/golpeados-por-la-suspension-de-fondos-de-ee-uu-medios-de-america-latina-adoptan-nuevas-estrategias-de-supervivencia/>; Swissinfo.ch, "USAID cuts shake Latin America and leave important social programs in limbo," June 17, 2025, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/el-recorte-a-usaid-sacude-latinoam%C3%A9rica-y-deja-importantes-programas-sociales-en-el-limbo/88846111>; El Universal, "USAID cuts leave at least 60 media outlets and organizations in Latin America mortally wounded; they seek to solve the lack of resources." Available at: <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/corte-de-usaid-deja-herido-de-muerte-al-menos-a-60-medios-y-organizaciones-en-america-latina-buscan-solventar-falta-de-recurso>; Alianza de Medios México, "Cuts to USAID would affect journalism and democracy in Mexico." Available at: <https://alianzademediosmx.org/noticias/recorte-a-usaid-afectaria-periodismo-y-democracia-en-mexico/2728>; El Tiempo, "Anti-corruption efforts in Latin America are regressing." Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/retroceden-los-esfuerzos-anticorrupcion-en-america-latina-3379037>.

- Refrain from criminalizing CSOs and the media, and stop the misuse of courts and prosecutors against anti-corruption actors.
- Repeal laws that restrict civic space.

2. Ensure transparency and access to information

- Restore the right to timely, complete, and accessible public information and reject any regressive measures that limit this right.
- Apply effective sanctions to institutions that fail to comply with transparency obligations. Implement open government and open data policies, fiscal transparency, and open contracting with meaningful public participation.
- Ensure the autonomy of access-to-information oversight bodies by appointing qualified, independent authorities and protecting them from undue interference.

3. Protect whistleblowers

- Adopt and implement whistleblower protection laws aligned with international standards, guaranteeing anonymity, confidentiality, and protection from retaliation.
- Establish incentives for those who expose corruption.
- Publish statistics on complaints and the follow-up of citizen corruption reports.
- Extend protection to CSOs, journalists, and defenders targeted for exposing corruption.
- Collaborate with CSOs to establish independent and accessible reporting channels with adequate resources.
- Promote a culture of reporting by publicizing channels, rights, and protection frameworks.

4. Regulate political financing and safeguard electoral integrity

- Acknowledge that illicit financing and organized crime systematically influence politics and enable state capture.
- Ensure transparency in political financing by prohibiting anonymous and high-risk corporate donations.
- Guarantee independent oversight of electoral financing, real-time disclosure of donors and expenditures, and effective sanctions.
- Sanction the misuse of public resources, clientelism, and undue interference of private, public, or political interests in electoral processes.

5. Guarantee judicial and prosecutorial independence and the rule of law

- Ensure the independence and impartiality of judges, prosecutors, and oversight bodies through transparent appointments and dismissals, and protection from political interference.
- Refrain from abusive disciplinary proceedings and protect judicial and prosecutorial officials from reprisals or political pressure in corruption cases.
- Strengthen autonomy in judicial appointments and disciplinary procedures with clear conflict-of-interest rules.
- Ensure impartial enforcement of anti-corruption and anti-organized crime laws through independent oversight and sanctions against political interference in justice.
- Guarantee transparency and accountability of judicial institutions for public scrutiny.

6. Recognize victims of corruption

- Acknowledge corruption as a human rights violation that creates victims, particularly among vulnerable groups.
- Adopt legal frameworks and policies recognizing victims' rights to justice, reparation, and participation in proceedings, in line with the UNCAC and human rights standards, and report progress in this regard within UNCAC reviews.
- Refrain from misusing "gender or political violence" provisions to criminalize CSOs or citizens.
- Establish **transparent and participatory reparation funds**, financed by recovered assets, with the direct participation of affected communities.

7. Ensure transparency in procurement, public contracting, and beneficial ownership

- Guarantee the independence and effective powers of oversight, audit, and anti-corruption bodies.
- Ensure open contracting, especially in extractive industries, by publishing tenders, contracts, conflict-of-interest declarations, and beneficial ownership data.
- Establish safeguards for emergency procurement and discretionary spending.

Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean is deeply intertwined with organized crime, state capture, and systematic human rights violations that perpetuate inequality, violence, and impunity. Any genuine anti-corruption effort must be grounded in a **human rights-based approach** that prioritizes the protection of individuals and democratic institutions.

Civil society organizations call on States Parties to move beyond symbolic commitments and reverse recent setbacks.

The credibility of this Convention depends on governments acting decisively, transparently, and accountably, breaking the cycle of empty promises. Civil society stands ready to cooperate but will continue to demand **real action and measurable progress**.