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I. Executive Summary

Paraguay's fourth-cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) took place on 7 May 2026 during the 52nd session of the UPR Working Group in Geneva. The national report was presented by Rodrigo Nicora, Minister of Justice, who reaffirmed Paraguay's commitment to multilateral cooperation and to the progressive implementation of international human rights obligations.

He was accompanied by a high-level delegation composed of Javier Dejesús Esquivel González, Ombudsman; Rafael Caballero Campos, Vice-Minister of Justice; Belén Morra, Director-General for Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Leticia Ocampos Núñez, Director of Human Rights at the Ministry of Children and Adolescents; Ana Rolón Candía, Deputy Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the United Nations Office at Geneva; Rafael Escobar Sarubbi, Director-General for Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice; and Sergio Velilla, Director of International Affairs at the Ministry of Justice. Concluding remarks were delivered by Raúl Cano Ricciardi, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

The session addressed a broad range of recurring human rights concerns, including anti-discrimination legislation, women's rights and sexual and reproductive health, child protection, Indigenous Peoples' rights, prison overcrowding and judicial independence, corruption and impunity, the protection of civic space, and socio-economic inequalities.

II. Political and Socio-Economic Context of Paraguay

Paraguay is a landlocked country of approximately 7 million inhabitants located in the centre of South America, bordered by Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia. Since the adoption of the 1992 Constitution, the country has functioned as a representative democratic republic with a presidential system and a formal separation of powers. The Constitution enshrines a broad range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights and recognises the multicultural character of the State, including the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples.

However, Paraguay's contemporary political and institutional landscape continues to be shaped by the legacy of General Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship (1954–1989), one of the longest authoritarian regimes in Latin America. During this period, widespread human rights violations, political repression, and the consolidation of patronage networks profoundly influenced the structure of state institutions and patterns of land ownership. Although democratic governance has become more firmly established since the transition, clientelism, weak institutional accountability, and corruption remain significant challenges to the consolidation of the rule of law.

In fact, the political system has been characterised by the longstanding predominance of the Colorado Party, which has governed for most of the democratic period. While this continuity has contributed to a degree of political stability, it has also reinforced concerns regarding the concentration of political influence and the persistence of patronage practices. Corruption remains one of the principal structural obstacles to effective governance. Allegations of undue influence within the judiciary and prosecutorial services, as well as links between organised criminal groups and state actors, continue to undermine public confidence in the administration of justice.

Despite sustained economic growth, profound social and territorial disparities continue to shape living conditions across Paraguay. Poverty rates have declined over the past decade, yet substantial disparities persist between urban and rural areas. Rural households, Indigenous communities, and female-headed households are disproportionately affected by poverty and limited access to public services. In many remote areas, inadequate infrastructure restricts access to healthcare, education, potable water, sanitation, and transportation, perpetuating patterns of exclusion and limiting social mobility. Moreover, land ownership is highly concentrated, with large agribusiness enterprises controlling a significant proportion of productive land, contributing to rural inequality and recurrent land conflicts.

The situation of Indigenous Peoples constitutes one of the country's most enduring structural challenges. Paraguay officially recognises 19 Indigenous Peoples, but many communities continue to face insecure land tenure, environmental degradation, and barriers to healthcare, education, and drinking water. Access to ancestral territories remains central to the exercise of cultural rights, food security, and self-determination. Deforestation, agrochemical contamination, and expanding agricultural frontiers have further undermined traditional livelihoods and heightened tensions over land use.

Gender inequality also remains pronounced. Women continue to be underrepresented in political and economic decision-making and are disproportionately affected by labour informality and unpaid care responsibilities. Gender-based violence is particularly acute, as according to national surveys, approximately 78.5 per cent of women have experienced some form of violence during their lifetime. Domestic violence, rape, and femicide remain widespread, while adolescent pregnancy rates remain high, especially among girls living in poverty and in rural and Indigenous communities.

Children and adolescents face multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities. Although access to education has improved, school dropout rates remain significant among low-income and rural students. Child labour persists, particularly in agriculture, domestic work, and the informal economy. The practice of *criadazgo*, whereby children are placed in third-party households in exchange for food and schooling, continues to expose many children to exploitation, abuse, and sexual violence. Child trafficking, sexual exploitation, and early unions remain additional concerns affecting child protection.

Lastly, Paraguay's justice and penitentiary systems reflect broader institutional weaknesses. Judicial proceedings are frequently criticised for inefficiency, lack of transparency, and vulnerability to political influence. Chronic prison overcrowding, heavy reliance on pretrial detention, and insufficient rehabilitation programmes continue to strain the penitentiary system and undermine detention conditions. Furthermore, while civil society organisations and independent media play an important role in democratic oversight, journalists, environmental defenders, anti-corruption activists, and Indigenous leaders have periodically reported threats, harassment, and criminalisation, particularly when challenging entrenched political or economic interests.

Despite these structural challenges, Paraguay has developed a broad range of social protection programmes and institutional reforms aimed at reducing poverty, expanding access to public services, and strengthening democratic governance. However, the principal challenge lies less in the absence of legal and policy frameworks than in their uneven implementation. Limited administrative capacity, institutional fragmentation, corruption, and deeply rooted inequalities continue to constrain the State's ability to translate economic growth into equitable and sustained improvements in the enjoyment of human rights.

III. Recurring Human Rights Concerns across the Second, Third and Fourth UPR Cycles

A review of the recommendations addressed to Paraguay during its second, third, and fourth UPR cycles reveals a striking degree of continuity. Across all three cycles, States repeatedly raised concerns regarding discrimination, corruption, judicial independence, prison overcrowding, violence against women and children, child labour and exploitation, Indigenous Peoples' land rights, attacks against journalists and human rights defenders, and the limited implementation of existing legislation.

One of the most persistent issues is the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. During both the second and third UPR cycles, numerous States urged Paraguay to adopt a law prohibiting discrimination on all grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. Despite recurring recommendations, such legislation has not been enacted, reflecting broader political and cultural resistance, particularly from conservative sectors with strong influence in Congress and public institutions. While the Constitution formally guarantees equality, the lack of implementing legislation has left vulnerable groups, including Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, Afro-descendant communities, and LGBTQ+ persons, without effective legal protection.

Concerns relating to corruption and judicial independence have likewise recurred over successive review cycles, as recommendations have consistently called for strengthening the Ombudsman's Office, ensuring transparent judicial appointments, and reinforcing institutional accountability. Although Paraguay has adopted anti-corruption strategies and transparency initiatives, implementation has remained uneven. In fact, persistent allegations of links between judicial actors and organised criminal networks continue to undermine public confidence and contribute to widespread perceptions of impunity, particularly in cases involving land conflicts, attacks on journalists, and high-level corruption.

The rights of Indigenous Peoples have also been a central and recurring concern throughout all UPR cycles. States have repeatedly recommended that Paraguay secure Indigenous land rights, guarantee free, prior and informed consent, and improve access to healthcare, education, and identity documents. Despite the adoption of plans and consultation protocols, progress has remained limited. The principal obstacle lies in Paraguay's highly unequal land distribution and the political influence of agribusiness interests, which have often prevailed over Indigenous rights. As a result, many communities continue to experience insecure land tenure, forced displacement, and restricted access to essential services.

Moreover, violence against women and girls has also remained a major concern. Across all three cycles, States recommended strengthening the legal and institutional framework to prevent domestic violence, rape, and femicide, and to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services. While Paraguay adopted Act No. 5777/16 on the Comprehensive Protection of Women from All Forms of Violence and established support services, rates of domestic violence and femicide remain high. Limited institutional

capacity, insufficient funding, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms continue to hinder effective implementation.

Lastly, conditions of detention and the excessive use of pretrial detention have been repeatedly highlighted since the second UPR cycle. Despite reforms and the construction of new facilities, prison overcrowding remains a chronic structural problem, with institutional weaknesses, judicial delays, and the growing influence of organised criminal groups within detention centres impeding meaningful improvements.

Taken together, these recurring recommendations illustrate that Paraguay's principal challenge is not the absence of legal commitments or policy initiatives, but rather the limited implementation and enforcement of existing norms. Paraguay has developed sophisticated mechanisms for monitoring international recommendations, most notably the System for Recommendations Monitoring (SIMORE Plus), and has adopted numerous strategies and action plans. Nevertheless, progress continues to be constrained by structural inequalities, institutional fragility, corruption, entrenched social norms, and the influence of powerful political and economic interests. The persistence of the same recommendations across three UPR cycles underscores the gap between formal commitments and tangible change, and highlights the need for stronger political will, greater institutional independence, and more effective allocation of public resources.

IV. Overview of Paraguay's Fourth Universal Periodic Review



In his introductory statement, the Minister of Justice reaffirmed Paraguay's commitment to multilateralism, international cooperation, and the progressive implementation of its human rights obligations. He emphasised the central role of SIMORE Plus as the State's mechanism for monitoring and coordinating the implementation of recommendations issued by international human rights bodies. He also highlighted the recent re-accreditation of the Office of the Ombudsman (Defensor del Pueblo) with "A" status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, presenting it as a significant step in strengthening the national human rights framework. The delegation further referred to progress in reducing poverty, expanding social protection, improving access to healthcare and education, combating corruption, and advancing reforms relating to the penitentiary system, access to justice, and the rights of women, children and adolescents, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities.

The interactive dialogue was marked by broad recognition of Paraguay's constructive engagement with the UPR process and of the institutional tools it has developed to monitor implementation. Simultaneously, however, delegations raised a wide range of concerns that reflected longstanding structural challenges. In fact, a significant number of States called on Paraguay to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation prohibiting discrimination on all grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. France, Iceland, the Netherlands, and other delegations also expressed concern regarding sexual and reproductive rights, access to comprehensive sexuality education, and the criminalisation of abortion, particularly in cases involving rape or threats to health.

Several delegations urged Paraguay to amend the recent Law on the Control, Transparency

and Accountability of Non-Profit Organisations, which was viewed by many as imposing disproportionate restrictions on freedom of association and civic space. Many civil society actors argue that the law requires non-profit organisations to disclose extensive information regarding their funding sources, expenditures, governance structures, and programme activities, with broad oversight powers granted to public authorities. As such, many warned that these requirements could be used selectively to burden organisations engaged in human rights advocacy, anti-corruption work, environmental protection, and the defence of Indigenous rights.

States further recommended the establishment of stronger protection mechanisms for journalists and human rights defenders and stressed the need to investigate threats, attacks, and intimidation. Moreover, conditions of detention and the functioning of the justice system were also central themes. In fact, numerous delegations raised concerns with regards to prison overcrowding and the excessive use of pretrial detention, as well as to judicial independence, corruption and impunity within public institutions.

Particular attention was devoted to the situation of women and children, as delegations called on Paraguay to intensify efforts to prevent domestic violence, rape, and femicide; address child labour, trafficking, and the sexual exploitation of children; and eradicate child marriage and early unions. Several States highlighted the high rates of adolescent pregnancy and urged improved access to sexual and reproductive health services. Lastly, the protection of Indigenous Peoples remained another prominent issue. Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Guyana, and other delegations called on Paraguay to secure land rights, ensure effective consultation and free, prior and informed consent, and guarantee equitable access to healthcare, education, drinking water, and other essential services.

In its responses, Paraguay acknowledged that important challenges remain, particularly with regard to structural inequalities, institutional capacity, and governance. The delegation highlighted ongoing initiatives to strengthen social protection, reduce poverty, modernise the penitentiary system, combat trafficking in persons, and improve access to justice for vulnerable groups. It reiterated its commitment to examine all recommendations carefully and to continue cooperating with international human rights mechanisms. As such, the fourth-cycle review highlighted Paraguay's continued cooperation with the UPR mechanism while demonstrating that many longstanding human rights concerns remain unresolved despite the adoption of legal and policy initiatives.

V. Key Recommendations Issued during the Fourth UPR Cycle

The principal recommendations addressed to Paraguay during its fourth UPR cycle may be grouped into the following thematic areas:

Equality and Non-Discrimination

- Delegations recommended that comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation covering all prohibited grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity, is adopted.
- Recommendations also called for stronger measures to prevent and sanction discrimination against women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, Afro-descendants, and LGBTQ+ persons.

Women's Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health

- Member States recommended that the implementation of legislation on violence against women be strengthened.
- Several delegations called for intensified efforts to combat domestic violence, rape, and femicide.
- Recommendations highlighted the need to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education.
- It was further recommended that restrictive legislation criminalising abortion is reviewed.

Rights of the Child

- Delegations called on the Government to eliminate child labour, *criadazgo*, trafficking, and sexual exploitation of children.
- States further recommended that child marriage and early unions are prevented.
- Recommendations also urged the strengthening of child protection systems and support for victims.

Indigenous Peoples' Rights

- Member States recommended that land rights are secured and land restitution procedures are accelerated.
- Several delegations called for the guarantee of free, prior and informed consent.
- Recommendations further highlighted the need to improve access to healthcare, education, water, sanitation, and identity documents for Indigenous Peoples.

Justice and Detention

- States recommended that prison overcrowding and the excessive use of pretrial detention are minimized.
- Recommendations called for detention conditions to be improved in accordance with

international standards.

- It was also recommended that judicial independence and efficiency are strengthened.

Anti-Corruption and Rule of Law

- Member States called for intensified efforts to combat corruption and impunity.
- Recommendations further urged the establishment of transparent and merit-based judicial appointments.

Civic Space and Fundamental Freedoms

- Several delegations recommended that the Law on the Control, Transparency and Accountability of Non-Profit Organisations be amended.
- States also called for the protection of freedom of association and expression.
- Recommendations highlighted the importance of establishing effective protection mechanisms for journalists and human rights defenders.

Social Rights

- Delegations recommended that equitable access to healthcare, education, housing, and social protection, particularly for vulnerable and rural populations, is expanded.

VI. Statements by the Paraguayan Delegation



During its interventions, Paraguay presented itself as a State committed to democratic governance and multilateral cooperation, as the Minister of Justice emphasised that the UPR constituted an important opportunity to assess progress, identify remaining challenges, and strengthen public policies through constructive dialogue and international cooperation. In presenting the national report, the delegation highlighted a number of concrete achievements since the previous review. It reported that monetary poverty had declined from 26.9 per cent in 2021 to 20.1 per cent in 2024, while extreme poverty had fallen to 4.1 per cent. The Government underscored the expansion of social protection programmes, including *Tekoporã Mbarete* and the Social Protection System *Vamos!*, as well as measures to improve housing, education, and healthcare. It referred to investments in maternal and child health, the strengthening of the Family Health Units, and the implementation of educational initiatives aimed at increasing school attendance and reducing inequalities.

The delegation also emphasised institutional and governance reforms, highlighting the strengthening of public access to information, and the digitisation of judicial and administrative procedures. Particular emphasis was placed on SIMORE Plus as Paraguay's principal mechanism for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of recommendations issued by the UPR, treaty bodies, and special procedures. The Government also noted the recent re-accreditation of the Office of the Ombudsman (Defensor del Pueblo) with "A" status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, describing this as an important milestone in reinforcing the national human rights framework. With regard to specific groups in situations of vulnerability, Paraguay presented a series of measures aimed at promoting and protecting their rights. These included the implementation of the National

Equality Plan and programmes to prevent and respond to violence against women; initiatives to combat trafficking in persons, child labour, and violence against children and adolescents; policies to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities; and measures to strengthen the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including through the Indigenous Peoples National Plan and efforts to improve access to land, education, health, and identity documents.

In discussing the country's principal challenges, the delegation acknowledged that poverty, territorial disparities, institutional constraints, and structural inequalities continue to affect the effective implementation of public policies. It also recognised the need to strengthen access to justice and further consolidate anti-corruption efforts and public institutions.

The delegation underscored Paraguay's longstanding cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies, special procedures, and the UPR. It stressed that international recommendations are systematically integrated into national planning and monitoring processes through SIMORE Plus and reiterated the Government's willingness to continue receiving technical assistance and engaging in constructive dialogue. In responding to the comments and recommendations made by Member States, the delegation emphasised that many of the issues highlighted were being addressed through ongoing reforms and interinstitutional coordination. It presented the challenges identified during the review as part of a broader process of gradual institutional strengthening requiring sustained political commitment, adequate resources, and continued cooperation with the international community. In its concluding remarks, delivered by Raúl Cano Ricciardi, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the United Nations Office at Geneva, the delegation thanked Member States for their recommendations and reaffirmed that all recommendations would be carefully examined through SIMORE Plus.

VII. Future Outlook: Emerging Priorities and Anticipated Challenges

The recommendations accepted by Paraguay in the context of its fourth UPR cycle suggest that the country's principal priorities over the coming years will centre on strengthening institutional effectiveness and addressing persistent structural inequalities. In particular, Paraguay is expected to continue advancing reforms aimed at reducing prison overcrowding and the excessive use of pretrial detention, reinforcing anti-corruption and transparency mechanisms, improving access to justice, and expanding protection for women, children and adolescents, Indigenous Peoples, and other groups in situations of vulnerability. The recommendations also indicate growing international expectations regarding the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, the protection of civic space, and the establishment of stronger safeguards for journalists and human rights defenders. In its statements before the Working Group, Paraguay reaffirmed its intention to pursue these objectives through existing initiatives, including SIMORE Plus, the National Strategy for Integrity, Transparency and Anti-Corruption, social protection programmes such as *Tekoporã Mbarete* and *Vamos!*, the modernisation of the penitentiary system, and the implementation of national plans on gender equality, Indigenous Peoples, trafficking in persons, and the rights of children and persons with disabilities. The recent re-accreditation of the Office of the Ombudsman with "A" status further suggests that the Government intends to strengthen its institutional human rights architecture and to enhance the credibility of domestic oversight mechanisms.

At the same time, many of the concerns raised during the fourth cycle are longstanding issues that have persisted across several review cycles and are unlikely to be resolved in the short term. Deep-rooted inequalities in land ownership, poverty affecting rural and Indigenous communities, entrenched gender-based violence, institutional corruption, judicial inefficiency, and weak implementation capacity continue to limit the impact of legal and policy reforms. Political resistance to sensitive issues, particularly anti-discrimination legislation, sexual and reproductive rights, and the protection of civic space, may also slow progress. As a result, it is likely that the fifth UPR cycle will revisit many of the same recommendations, especially those relating to discrimination, Indigenous land rights, prison conditions, corruption, and violence against women and children. The extent to which Paraguay is able to demonstrate measurable progress will depend not only on the adoption of new laws and strategies, but also on the effective allocation of resources, the strengthening of institutional independence, and sustained political commitment to translating formal commitments into concrete improvements in the enjoyment of human rights.

VIII. Critical Assessment of the Fourth UPR Cycle

Paraguay's fourth-cycle UPR presents a familiar contrast between the State's formal commitments and the more complex realities documented by independent sources. The national report is detailed and institutionally sophisticated, placing considerable emphasis on legal reforms, social programmes, and monitoring tools such as SIMORE Plus. While these initiatives are important, the report tends to privilege normative and procedural developments over an assessment of their actual impact. The adoption of laws, strategies, and action plans is frequently presented as evidence of progress, even where implementation remains partial or where the underlying human rights problems persist largely unchanged. In this sense, the report reflects a common tendency in self-reporting processes, by measuring commitment through the existence of institutions rather than through concrete outcomes for those most affected by violations.

The national report also adopts a largely technocratic approach that underplays the political economy underlying many of Paraguay's most persistent human rights challenges. Issues such as Indigenous land dispossession, corruption, judicial capture, and restrictions on civic space are not simply the result of administrative shortcomings or insufficient resources. They are closely connected to entrenched power structures, including the concentration of land ownership, the influence of agribusiness interests, the persistence of clientelist political networks, and the infiltration of organised crime into state institutions. By framing these problems primarily as governance challenges, the report avoids addressing the extent to which powerful actors benefit from the continuation of structural inequalities and institutional weakness.

The United Nations compilation and civil society submissions provide a more critical perspective, but they also have limitations. In fact, some issues receive limited attention despite their significance, including environmental degradation linked to intensive agriculture, the impact of agrochemicals on rural communities, the precarious situation of landless peasants, and the historical legacy of impunity for crimes committed during the Stroessner dictatorship. Similarly, while corruption is widely acknowledged, the systemic links between organised criminal networks and segments of the judiciary and prosecutorial services merit even greater scrutiny, as they affect virtually every area of human rights protection.

One of the most striking features of Paraguay's fourth review is the recurrence of recommendations that have been made consistently since earlier cycles. The repeated calls to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, protect Indigenous land rights, reduce prison overcrowding, and strengthen safeguards for journalists and human rights defenders suggest that progress has been limited in several fundamental areas. The persistence of these recommendations raises an important question about the effectiveness of the UPR process itself. While the mechanism is valuable in promoting dialogue and maintaining international attention, it does not contain robust enforcement tools. As such, States can accept

recommendations without implementing them, with little to no consequences when the same concerns reappear cycle after cycle. The UPR is also inherently shaped by political considerations. Member States often frame their recommendations in diplomatic language and may avoid more direct criticism for strategic or geopolitical reasons. Some interventions are highly substantive, while others remain general and formulaic. As a result, the severity of certain violations may not be fully reflected in the tone of the dialogue. The consensual nature of the mechanism encourages cooperation, but accountability may nevertheless be weakened when constructive engagement is reduced to diplomatic consensus rather than grounded in the candid assessment necessary for meaningful reform.

For these reasons, the UPR should be understood as a useful but limited accountability mechanism. Its greatest strength lies in creating a public record of recurring concerns and in providing civil society with an opportunity to place issues on the international agenda. However, the process depends heavily on the good faith of the State under review and on the capacity of independent actors to challenge official narratives. In the case of Paraguay, the fourth-cycle review demonstrates that the country possesses a relatively advanced institutional framework and a genuine willingness to engage with international mechanisms. That said, at the same time, the persistence of many of the same recommendations over more than a decade suggests that the principal obstacle is not a lack of commitments, but rather insufficient political will to confront deeply rooted inequalities and the interests that sustain them.

IX. GICJ position

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) acknowledges Paraguay's continued engagement with the UPR process, its development of SIMORE Plus as a robust mechanism for monitoring international recommendations, the recent re-accreditation of the Office of the Ombudsman with "A" status, and the progress achieved in poverty reduction, social protection, and the adoption of legislative and policy frameworks concerning women's rights, Indigenous Peoples, children, and persons with disabilities.

However, GICJ remains particularly concerned by the persistent gap between formal commitments and their effective implementation. GICJ is especially alarmed by entrenched corruption and weak judicial independence, chronic prison overcrowding and excessive pretrial detention, pervasive gender-based violence, child labour and sexual exploitation, restrictions affecting civic space, and the continuing marginalisation of Indigenous communities, particularly with regard to land rights and access to essential services.

GICJ stresses the urgent need for Paraguay to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, strengthen institutional independence and accountability, protect journalists and human rights defenders, and address the structural concentration of political and economic power that underlies many recurring violations. Sustainable progress will depend not only on legislative reform, but also on genuine political will, transparent governance, adequate resource allocation, and meaningful participation by civil society and affected communities.

GICJ supports recommendations calling for the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, the amendment of the Law on the Control, Transparency and Accountability of Non-Profit Organisations, the reduction of prison overcrowding and pretrial detention, stronger measures to combat violence against women and children, and the effective protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights, particularly in relation to land tenure and equitable access to healthcare, education, water, and other public services.

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