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Trump's Foreign Aid Cuts Shake Human Rights Efforts in Latin America

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A sweeping reduction in U.S. foreign aid is forcing key human rights and pro-democracy organizations across Latin America to downsize or shut down altogether. The decision, stemming from legislation signed by President Donald Trump in July 2025, has slashed billions in international funding, with serious implications for opposition movements in authoritarian regimes like Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

The recently enacted measure eliminates \$9 billion in foreign assistance, including nearly \$8 billion from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), according to the Congressional Budget Office summary of the July 2025 legislation. Nearly half of this amount, around \$4 billion, had previously been directed toward supporting international human rights groups, independent media, and democracy-building programs. These cuts come at a time when global authoritarianism is on the rise, and organizations countering propaganda from regimes like China and Russia are under increasing pressure.

Much of the affected aid had been funneled through the International Republican Institute (IRI), a nonprofit aligned with American conservative principles, which specializes in fostering democratic practices abroad. According to a June 2025 IRI press release, the institute has suspended 92 of its 95 overseas programs and laid off approximately 85% of its workforce.

All 64 of IRI's international offices have been shut, drastically curtailing its ability to support grassroots efforts in repressive countries, including in Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

Human rights advocates warn that these aid cuts represent more than just budget trimming; they strike at the heart of civil society. Laritza Diversent, executive director of the U.S.-based legal group CubaLex, stated that her organization has had to reduce staff and cut half of its contract workers. "There will be a major weakening of human rights organizations that are operating in Cuba," she told the *Miami Herald*. CubaLex focuses on documenting political imprisonment and providing legal assistance to victims of state repression.

Justicia 11J, another Cuban group supporting political detainees, reported losing 90% of its U.S. funding for a key project in early 2025. According to its director, Camila Rodriguez, the group has had to cancel planned testimonies before both the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. These setbacks hinder international awareness and advocacy efforts on behalf of hundreds of Cubans detained following mass protests in June 2021.

While some members of Congress are exploring ways to restore portions of the aid, the future of these programs remains uncertain. In the meantime, the vacuum left by the withdrawal of U.S. support may be filled by adversarial nations, shifting the ideological balance in favor of authoritarian powers. For now, activists in Latin America are left

navigating a landscape with dwindling resources and growing threats, without the backing that once made their missions possible.