

Bilaga

Bakgrundsinformation om Yren Rotela och Mariana Sepúlveda (på engelska)

The cases that we are presenting are those of Yren Rotela and Mariana Sepúlveda, both transgender women, activists and defenders of the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people in Paraguay, who have been denied the right by the Paraguayan state to legally change their names in accordance with their self-perceived gender identity.

Throughout their lives, Yren and Mariana have faced never-ending personal challenges and obstacles at the family, social and institutional levels, which have placed them in contexts of vulnerability and marginalization. Nevertheless, they have taken agency in their lives, increased their capacity and knowledge and exercised their right to protest and to freedom of expression in order to demand that their rights as trans women be recognized, while at the same time working for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people in their country.

Since their childhood, both Yren and Mariana have undertaken the process of constructing their identity as transgender women, a process that in the case of Yren began at the age of eight and that she embraced completely at the age of 13. For Mariana this process began at the age of seven; she began her hormonal treatment at the age of 11 and at the age of 15 she finished embracing completely her identity as a trans woman. This is not an easy process to carry out in an environment as conservative as the one in Paraguay, where a patriarchal and heteronormative system is firmly entrenched, and surrounded by violence and discrimination in social, family, school and institutional spheres.

Both experienced bullying and harassment at a very young age and were forced to leave school; in Yren's case this was because of the violence from her classmates and Mariana's case it was because the directors of the educational institution decided not to integrate a person with a non-normative gender identity with the rest of the students.

Yren and Mariana had to resort to engage in sex work to earn their livelihoods, which were limited because of lack of support from their families, as well as structural and institutional barriers that made it difficult for them to access education and formal employment opportunities. This situation exacerbated the difficulties they were already facing and placed them in situations of great vulnerability. In 2000, Yren suffered physical violence when six people held and beat her so badly that she sustained disfiguring injuries to her face at the time, while on another occasion she was shot three times because of the violence and transphobia in the country. Those responsible for both incidents remain unpunished by the country's justice system.

However, their drive and determination to move forward led Yren and Mariana to get involved with civil society organizations and begin their activism and training as human rights defenders. In Yren's case she began to be recognized as a public figure in trans activism, largely due to her continuing actions to demand justice for the violent incidents she had experienced as a trans woman, as well as her calls for recognition of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people in Paraguay. In 2015, Amnesty International Paraguay awarded Yren the Peter Benenson Award for the Defence of Human Rights for her commitment and work as a human rights and LGBTIQ+ rights activist.

Mariana, for her part, began to engage with human rights organizations in the mid-2000s and started her development and empowerment as an activist and advocate for the rights of the LGTBI community. Subsequently, thanks to an agreement between several

organizations and the Paraguayan Ministry of Education, Mariana was able to resume her secondary education and subsequently enter the public university to pursue a degree in communications. She is currently in the process of submitting her BA thesis.

Through their training and work as activists, Yren and Mariana have identified that, as part of the journey towards ensuring that transgender people in Paraguay enjoy a dignified and equal life, it is essential that the Paraguayan state and its institutions recognize the identities of transgender people; that is, that they guarantee laws and procedures that allow transgender people to change of their names in law, if they so wish, to bring them into line with their self-identified gender identities.

For this reason, Yren and Mariana initiated a judicial process in 2016 requesting a legal change of their names and amendments to their birth certificates, expressly invoking the rights guaranteed by the American Convention on Human Rights.