

Joint statement
Venezuela's Crisis Should be a Human Rights Council Priority

(Geneva, September 8, 2017) – UN member states should address Venezuela's deepening human rights and humanitarian crisis during the 36th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in September 2017, 112 Venezuelan, Latin American, and international organizations said.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released a report in late August, concluding that extensive human rights violations and abuses have been committed in the context of anti-government protests in Venezuela, which point to “the existence of a policy to repress political dissent and instill fear in the population to curb demonstrations.” According to the report, the “generalized and systematic use of excessive force during demonstrations and the arbitrary detention of protestors and perceived political opponents indicate that these were not the illegal or rogue acts of isolated officials.” The office condemned the use of military courts to prosecute hundreds of civilians, arguing this violates basic due process guarantees. It also stated that some detentions may have constituted enforced disappearances, in those cases in which authorities refused to acknowledge, for an initial period, the fate or whereabouts of the detainees. In addition, the report concluded that more than half of the 124 officially recorded deaths by the end of July that had occurred in the context of demonstrations, had been caused by security agents or armed pro-government groups called “*colectivos*.” Four people allegedly died after attacks by anti-government groups, and the government claims nine security agents have been killed, according to the office.

High-level officials who have failed to take steps to prevent or punish human rights violations committed by their subordinates bear responsibility for the pervasive and serious abuses committed under their watch. The justice system has failed to bring those responsible for abuses to justice, guaranteeing that they are able to act with absolute impunity.

These human rights violations take place in a context of absolute concentration of power, where there are no independent institutions left to act as a check on the executive. Since the political take-over of the Supreme Court by former President Hugo Chávez and his allies in the National Assembly in 2004, the judiciary has stopped acting as an independent branch of government. Since the opposition majority took over the National Assembly in January 2016, the Supreme Court has stripped the legislature of its most basic powers. The government also controls the National Electoral Council, which has failed to conduct elections for governors that the Constitution mandated for 2016.

More recently, the Maduro government moved forward with the implementation of a Constituent Assembly that has frighteningly broad powers that go beyond drafting a constitution. It was convened in May 2017 through a presidential decree, despite the existing constitutional requirements that prior popular consultation is needed. It is made up exclusively by government supporters, which were chosen through an election on July 30 that the company hired by the government to verify the results said was fraudulent. Since taking office, its members fired the attorney general, who had become a government critic, appointed a loyalist to the position, and took over legislative powers.

Due to severe shortages of medicines, medical supplies, and food, millions of Venezuelans cannot adequately feed their families or access the most basic healthcare. According to official statistics, in 2016, maternal mortality increased by 65 percent, infant mortality increased by 30 percent, and

malaria cases increased by 76 percent. Unofficial studies by Venezuelan universities and civil society groups indicate that most Venezuelans have changed their eating habits, including many who eat once a day. Cases of severe malnutrition of children under 5 years old increased from 8.9 percent in the last trimester of 2016 to 10.2 percent in the first two months of 2017—putting Venezuela above the World Health Organization limit of what constitutes a crisis, according to *Cáritas Venezuela*.

On August 8, 2017, 17 foreign affairs ministers from the Americas met in Perú to address Venezuela's crisis. Twelve of them—11 Latin American governments and Canada—signed the Lima Declaration, a comprehensive statement that condemns the rupture of democratic order and the systematic violation of human rights in Venezuela, states they will not recognize the Constituent Assembly nor its resolutions, calls to stop the transfer of weapons to Venezuela, and expresses concern about the humanitarian crisis and the government's refusal to accept international humanitarian aid, among others. They also indicated their willingness to support efforts towards a credible and good faith negotiation, with the support of all parties, that aims at restoring democracy in the country peacefully.

As the human rights and humanitarian crisis worsens, the UN Human Rights Council should draw inspiration from the Lima Declaration and address the situation in Venezuela as a matter of priority. Specifically, member states should send a clear message to the Venezuelan government that these abuses are not tolerated and those responsible of abuses will eventually be brought to justice when judicial independence is restored in the country, and call on the Maduro government to:

- End the repression and release political prisoners;
- Set a date for free and fair elections with proper independent oversight;
- Restore judicial independence and the powers of the National Assembly; and
- Immediately allow sufficient international humanitarian aid into the country.

The Human Rights Council should also take the recommendations of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into account and request his office to continue to monitor the human rights situation in the country closely and report regularly to the Council.

ENDORSEMENTS

Venezuelan organizations

1. Acceso a la Justicia
2. Acción Solidaria
3. Amigos Trasplantados de Venezuela AC
4. Artgnosis asociación civil
5. Asamblea de Educación
6. Asociación Civil Acción Campesina
7. Asociación Civil Conquistando la Vida (ACONVIDA)
8. Asociación Civil Fomento del Desarrollo Popular (FUDEP)
9. Asociación Civil Fuerza, Unión, Justicia, Solidaridad y Paz (FUNPAZ AC)
10. Asociación Civil Orgullo Guayana
11. Asociación Civil Radar de los Barrios
12. Asociación Civil YoReumático

13. Asociación Venezolana de Amigos con Linfoma (AVAL)
14. Asociación Venezolana de pacientes con Enfermedad Inflamatoria Intestinal (AVEPEII)
15. Asociación Venezolana para la Hemofilia
16. Aula Abierta Venezuela
17. Cátedra de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroccidental Lisandro Alvarado (UCLA)
18. Centro Comunitario de Aprendizaje (CECODAP)
19. Centro de Acción y Defensa por los Derechos Humanos (CADEF)
20. Centro de Atención al Esquizofrénico y Familiares (CATESFAM) Caracas
21. Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Metropolitana (CDH-UNIMET)
22. Centro de Derechos Humanos, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello
23. Centro De Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico para la Libertad - CEDICE Libertad
24. Centro de Estudios y Promoción del Desarrollo (DESCO)
25. Centro de Justicia y Paz (CEPAZ)
26. Centro para la Paz y los Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Central de Venezuela
27. CIVILIS Derechos Humanos
28. Coalición Clima21
29. Coalición de Organizaciones por el Derecho a la Salud y la Vida (CODEVIDA)
30. Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Políticas de la Universidad del Zulia
31. Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Federación de Colegios de Abogados de Venezuela del Estado Táchira
32. Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Federación de Colegios de Abogados de Venezuela del Estado Apure
33. Comisión para los Derechos Humanos del Estado Zulia (CODHEZ)
34. Comisión para los Derechos Humanos y la Ciudadanía (CODEHCIU)
35. Control Ciudadano para la Seguridad, la Defensa y la Fuerza Armada Nacional
36. Convite AC
37. Correo del Caroní
38. Dialogo por Venezuela
39. Espacio Público
40. EXCUBITUS derechos humanos en educación
41. Federación Nacional de Sociedades de Padres y Representantes (FENASOPADRES) Anzoátegui
42. Federación Nacional de Sociedades de Padres y Representantes (FENASOPADRES) Aragua
43. Federación Nacional de Sociedades de Padres y Representantes (FENASOPADRES)
44. Foro Penal Venezolano
45. Foro Penal Venezolano
46. Fundación AguaClara
47. Fundación Centro Gumilla
48. Fundación Humano y Libre
49. Fundación Taller de Aprendizaje para las Artes y el Pensamiento (TAAP) Venezuela
50. Grupo de Trabajo sobre Asuntos Indígenas de la Universidad de Los Andes (GTAI-ULA)
51. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS) Venezuela
52. María Estrella de la Mañana A.C
53. Monitor Social A.C
54. Movimiento SOMOS
55. Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Los Andes
56. Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)
57. Observatorio Venezolano de la Salud

58. Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP)
59. Operación Libertad Internacional
60. Organización StopVIH
61. Padres Organizados de Venezuela
62. Prepara Familia
63. Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos (PROVEA)
64. Proiuris
65. Promoción Educación y Defensa en DDHH (PROMEDEHUM)
66. Proyecta Ciudadanía A.C
67. Proyecto de Extensión: Educación y Visibilización de los Derechos Humanos de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Carabobo
68. Red Ara de Venezuela
69. Red por los Derechos Humanos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes (REDHNNA)
70. Revista SIC del Centro Gumilla
71. Sinergia, Red Venezolana de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil
72. Sociedad Hominis Iura (SOHI)
73. Todas Somos Venezuela
74. Transparencia Venezuela
75. Un Mundo Sin Mordaza
76. Una Ventana a la Libertad
77. Unión Afirmativa de Venezuela
78. Unión Vecinal para la Participación Ciudadana A.C

International Organizations

1. Action for Solidarity on HIV/aids
2. Asociación Arariwa
3. Asociación de Venezolanos en México
4. Asociación Fuente de Paz
5. Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción al Desarrollo (ALOP)
6. Asociación Paz y Esperanza - Perú
7. Asociación por los Derechos Civiles - Argentina
8. Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos (APRODEH) – Perú
9. Canadian Venezuelan Engagement Foundation - Canada
10. Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez - México
11. Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo S.J." (CSMM) - Ecuador
12. Centro de Estudios de Derecho, Justicia y Sociedad (DeJusticia) - Colombia
13. Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP) - Colombia
14. Centro Diocesano para los Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios AC
15. CIVICUS; World Alliance for Citizen Participation
16. Conectas Direitos Humanos - Brasil
17. Cooperación Internacional e Integración para el Desarrollo y el Esfuerzo Regional
18. Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF)
19. Fundación para la Reconciliación - Colombia
20. Human Rights Watch
21. Humanitas360 Institute
22. Iniciativa Por Venezuela - Ginebra
23. International Commission of Jurists
24. International Council of Aids Service Organizations (ICASO)

25. International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights
26. International Service for Human Rights
27. Madres de Soacha - Colombia
28. Madres Falsos Positivos Soacha y Bogotá (MAFAPO) - Colombia
29. Movimiento Manuela Ramos
30. Peace and Hope International
31. Red Para la Infancia y la Adolescencia de El Salvador (RIA)
32. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
33. Taller de Aprendizaje para las Artes y el Pensamiento (TAAP) Colombia
34. Ven Europa, ASBL