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High Commissioner's Oral Update on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

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PRESENTATION OF THE ORAL UPDATE

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The Deputy High Commissioner presents to the UNHRC an oral update on the situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Since the High Commissioner's last update in December 2024, OHCHR notes the announcement by the authorities that thousands of people, including adolescents, were conditionally released after being detained following the presidential elections. According to state officials, **2,006 people have been released**, whereas civil society puts the number at some 1,485 people. However, regrettably, arbitrary detentions are continuing.

The **independence of the judiciary** is neither respected nor guaranteed. Counterterrorism legislation continues to be widely used to prosecute and detain people in violation of due process and fair trial guarantees, including the right to choose one's own counsel and other international norms and standards. OHCHR is concerned about ongoing reports of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, and of overcrowding both in penitentiary and pre-trial detention centres.



At least three people with critical medical conditions have **died in custody** after being denied timely access to treatment, which is completely unacceptable. In some cases, women in detention have reportedly been denied access to hygiene kits. OHCHR has also received troubling reports of mistreatment of relatives of those detained, including invasive searches and the arbitrary denial of visits.

OHCHR urges the authorities to fulfil their obligation to ensure that detention conditions comply with international norms. OHCHR calls for an **end to arbitrary detention** and the unconditional and immediate release of all those arbitrarily detained, including human rights defenders, members of political parties and their relatives, journalists, and humanitarian and NGO workers. **Enforced disappearances** are also reportedly continuing, including of members of opposition parties, journalists, human rights defenders, foreign nationals, as well as humanitarian workers.

Against this backdrop, **civic space remains severely restricted**. A climate of fear, intimidation, and persecution is silencing human rights defenders, journalists, and others perceived as dissident voices, limiting the exercise of free expression. The requirements to comply with the law on the control, regulation, performance, and financing of non-governmental and related organisations are not clear and are extremely burdensome, undermining freedom of association. OHCHR also urges the repeal of all legislation that **unduly restricts the rights to freedom of expression and of association**. In line with their human rights obligations, the authorities need to take steps to guarantee an open and inclusive civic space, which is crucial for the restoration of trust and social cohesion.

As authorities have announced a **constitutional reform** this year, the Deputy High Commissioner encourages them to ensure that the process is transparent, participative, and inclusive. All Venezuelans from across society must have their voices heard and be able to participate meaningfully in this process. Any constitutional amendments must comply with international human rights law.

Since our last update in December, **high inflation** has persisted in Venezuela, with disproportionate impacts on the lowest income earners in society. The income of Venezuelan people continues to be insufficient for many to make ends meet. According to UN estimates, **7.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance**. Venezuelans continue to face significant challenges in accessing health services, decent work, and an adequate standard of living.

There are continuing reports about the **lack of vital medicine and medical supplies** in an already understaffed public healthcare system. Most patients and their families reportedly are unable to cover the cost of drugs and are often asked to bring their own medical supplies to surgeries. The situation is worse for Indigenous peoples, who are more exposed to HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis, with little to no access to appropriate medical and emergency services. The lack of transparency regarding mortality rates limits the design of adequate prevention and response plans.

Some **Indigenous communities** also continue to suffer the **impact of illegal mining** on their territory, including in areas previously declared to be free of mining in Amazonas state and



elsewhere. Military operations to curb illegal mining must respect all rights of Indigenous peoples, including free, prior, and informed consent.

OHCHR is also concerned about reports of **suspensions of public sector salaries and dismissals** from employment, including of teachers, in other sectors as well. At the same time, OHCHR remains very concerned that broad sectoral sanctions impact disproportionately the most vulnerable. They need to be reassessed and lifted.

To conclude, OHCHR's dialogue with the Venezuelan authorities continues regarding its work in the country, and urges that a prompt and full return of all staff to the country take place as soon as possible within a clear legal framework. OHCHR remains committed to supporting the promotion and protection of human rights in Venezuela in cooperation with the authorities and all its partners.

STATEMENT BY THE COUNTRY CONCERNED

The delegation of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** states that the update presented by the High Commissioner is an excellent geopolitical piece that fits neatly into the map of interest transactions between Washington and the United Nations Human Rights bureaucracy.

'Whenever there is a declared war between the USA and any foreign nation or government or any invasion, any native citizens, denizens or subjects of the hostile nation or government of the USA and not actually naturalised, shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured and removed as alien enemies.' This is a quote from section 1 of the so-called '**Alien Enemies Act**'. Two centuries on, the USA is using this Act to detain and expel Venezuelan migrants without having to guarantee them due process, nor are put on the right to defence or appeal to a higher instance.

The 'Alien Enemies Act' does not require any proof that knowing there is a threat means suspicion is enough. Previous examples of this application show its inhumanity. In the framework of World War II, Japanese descendants were taken to concentration camps inside the USA. They were mistreated, humiliated, stripped of their homes and even separated from their families. The Japanese people must remember this dreadful chapter against their culture and nationality, and now they are doing the same to our citizens. The White House is using **Venezuelan migrants** to prove that they are firmly fulfilling the electoral promise of mass deportations, flagrantly violating all the human rights of the people concerned.

There should be no doubt that this anachronistic law will also be applied to other Latin American migrants in the future. But if the USA is violating international law and human rights, is not the host country, which has landed its territory as a concentration camp for economic reasons, also doing that? The President of El Salvador has said - 'the USA will pay a very low rate for them, but a high rate for us.' The **USA is paying El Salvador money for each Venezuelan** received as an alleged criminal without due process and subjected to cruel degrading treatment as evidenced by countless videos disclosed by the very same Salvadoran authorities. The delegation of Venezuela asks if the High Commissioner is going to remain silent in the face of this reproduction by the Governments of the USA and El Salvador of the methods of the slave system of past centuries? Is the migrant trade going to be normalised as a new economic activity in which governments, NGOs and UN agencies in complicity with the fascist opposition have strangely participated for several years?



Venezuela has been denouncing not just that migration was caused by criminal sanctions, but also that **Venezuelan migrants were used as a bait** in an orgy of millions of dollars, in which several United Nations system agencies have participated. Yesterday, there was a mass march of outraged people in Venezuela. Family members, friends and the general public came out to protest against the USA and El Salvador for this unfortunate measure which is unjustified and sinister and against people who today have no name and no face. There is no file, no trial, no evidence of them committing any crime. Faced with attempts by US federal judges to stop this outrage, the Secretary of State Marco Rubio went from the unquestionable certainty that they were all terrorists to the possibility that there could be mistakes. 24 hours ago, through an affidavit, Trump Administration officials admitted that many of the Venezuelans transferred to El Salvador **do not have criminal records in the USA**.

OHCHR has a responsibility to condemn this atrocity, the indifference of OHCHR and the human rights system will merely confirm, as has happened with the Palestinian genocide, the ineffectiveness and lack of credibility of the United Nations staff. Following the narrative of this system, are there not reasonable grounds to believe that the US and El Salvador are violating the human rights of Venezuelan citizens? Enough of double standards, manipulations and indifference, when the origin of human rights violations comes from Western countries and their subordinates. The High Commissioner's decalogue of principles on human rights says on page 33 it is time to go beyond voices, and for Venezuela it is time to go beyond silence.