

March 3, 2021

Hon. Marc Garneau
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Global Affairs Canada
125, promenade Sussex
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2

Dear Minister Garneau:

We are writing to express our concern with Canada's role in the current crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the impact it is having on the population in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. We call on the Government of Canada to end sanctions against Venezuela and to stop following the United States policy of regime change and intervention in the sovereign affairs of the country.

The COVID-19 health crisis has intensified insecurity and deepened local and regional threats to peace and human rights across Latin America. Venezuela was already facing a prolonged economic and social crisis in large part due to the illegal international blockade and sanctions. US sanctions are threatening the health of millions of Venezuelans by blocking vital medical equipment and life-saving drugs from entering the country.

After a two-week visit to the country, UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures and human rights, Alena Douhan called for the lifting of unilateral sanctions against Venezuela. "Lack of necessary machinery, spare parts, electricity, water, fuel, gas, food and medicine, growing insufficiency of qualified workers many of whom have left the country for better economic opportunities, in particular medical personnel, engineers, teachers, professors, judges and policemen, has an enormous impact overall categories of human rights, including the rights to life, to food, to health and development said Ms. Alena Douhan.¹

An estimated 100,000 people have died as a result of the US sanctions according to a former expert for the United Nations Human Rights Council for the promotion of an international democratic and egalitarian order, Alfred de Zayas.

Humanitarian exemptions to the sanctions are not working, according to experts, "Sanctions that were imposed in the name of delivering human rights are killing people and depriving them of fundamental rights, including the rights to health, to food and to life itself," said Ms. Alena Douhan, UN Special Rapporteur.²

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https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26747&LangID=E&fbclid=IwAR3wE9mxaa-rEJjWZO__J4pITum-WW2B8eY8EyDejsXxmM6GRzL_Z0d45nY

² <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26155&LangID=E>

As faced by many countries, there is a serious risk that the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak will completely overwhelm the healthcare system. Rather than ease sanctions to help Venezuela deal with the pandemic, Canada has increased political pressure against the Government of Nicolas Maduro. Canada has ignored calls from the United Nations to roll back sanctions to battle the pandemic.

Many inside and outside of Venezuela are opposed to sanctions recognizing they are a negation of national sovereignty and bring nothing but hardship to the average person. This includes leaders of the opposition such as Luis Parra and the current President of the National Assembly. All have expressed strong criticism of this unjust interventionist policy and demand an end to sanctions.

In December 2020, Venezuelans elected a new National Assembly which saw Juan Guaidó lose his position as head of the National Assembly. The European Union, Germany, and the Dominican Republic, and others no longer recognize Juan Guaidó as "Interim President".

False recognition of Guaido as the self-declared interim president is preventing Venezuela from accessing their international funds for the purchase of vaccines through the global COVAX program. As the "Interim President" Juan Guaidó controls these funds and is refusing to purchase these desperately needed vaccines. Canada must follow the lead of the United Nations and focus its diplomatic energy on working with the democratically elected President of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro.

It is deeply concerning that the Canadian government has chosen to lead the efforts of the Lima Group and support US-led intervention in Venezuelan. The Lima Group is an alliance of right-wing governments in Latin America, many of which have appalling human rights records and questionable democratic standards. Despite numerous declarations in support of "peace and democracy", the Lima Group has consistently opposed compromise and dialogue and has pressed for undemocratic regime change in Venezuela. This "regime change" objective of the Lima Group violates Art 2 (4) of the UN Charter.

We call on the Government of Canada to end the sanctions against Venezuela and to abstain from following the United States policy of regime change, and intervention in the sovereign affairs of Venezuela.

ALBA Ottawa

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union

Caribbean Solidarity Network

Canadian Foreign Policy Institute

Canadian, Latin American and Caribbean Policy Centre (CAL&C)

Canadian Peace Congress

Canadian Union of Postal Workers

Christian Peacemaker teams-Canada

Common Frontiers
Frente para la Defensa de los Pueblos Hugo Chavez
Louis Riel Bolivarian Circle
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
United Church of Canada
Winnipeg Venezuela Peace Committee