

An urgent call to the Venezuelan people, the Armed Forces,
Western governments and the media

VENEZUELA URGENTLY REQUIRES
A TRANSITION PROCESS TO RESCUE DEMOCRACY

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Introduction

This document is addressed to all Venezuelans of good will, especially the members of the National Armed Forces, as well as to the governments of the Western Hemisphere and the media. The objectives of this text are:

First, to state the reasons why it is inevitable that Venezuela will soon undergo a political transition according to the Constitution, in order to prevent a humanitarian disaster, rescue democracy and rebuild the Republic.

Second, to explain the scope of such a transition, according to the parameters set by the Constitution, existing Venezuelan laws and international humanitarian laws.

Third, to inform national and international public opinion regarding the exceptional events that will surely take place in Venezuela, so that they can understand the extraordinary political changes that will occur in our country. Unfortunately, the Venezuelan government has closed all other electoral, judicial and legislative possibilities to restore democracy, ensure the observance of the Constitution and defend the Republic from its impending dissolution.

As shown below, the Venezuelan collapse is observed in all areas of national life: economy, oil, health, power supply, criminality, justice, freedom, human rights, and many other aspects not mentioned in this report. Ironically, the destruction of the social and economic networks of Venezuela comes just as our country has received the largest revenues in its history, due to the increase of oil prices.

Since Chavez came to power fifteen years ago, the government has been systematically violating the Constitution, inflicting successive coups d'état. And if all this were not enough, the government has subordinated our country to the Cuban communist regime and promoting the creation of a Cuban-Venezuelan confederation ruled from Havana.

As a result of the above, it has already begun a process of popular insurrection and social unrest in our country, as evidenced by increasingly protests; anarchy, loss of governance, and the desperate attempt of the ruling party to stay in power through a growing ruthless repressions, which further heightens the feeling of discontent of the population.

If the military do not intervene promptly –as commanded by the Constitution– to bring order and restore the rule of law, the consequences could be extremely serious, and could jeopardize not only the stability and peace of Venezuela, but those of the entire region .

Economy

Last January 30th, a group of 47 leading economists issued a statement, describing the severe economic situation in Venezuela. These experts assert that “the accumulated fiscal, monetary and foreign exchange imbalances of the past decade are reflected in one of the highest inflation in the world, extreme shortage of goods, and a very high consolidated public sector deficit... which is a real vicious circle of government practices unable to provide economic stability to Venezuela. The statement added “this crisis is not due solely to misguided economic policies, but by a government driving without respect to legal limits on the economic - financial area and a radical ideological project that justifies the revolutionary order above any other consideration.” They conclude, “If the Government is to continue in this course, the economic problems of Venezuelans will aggravate dramatically. The sustained rise in prices, fall of real income, limited opportunities for well-paid jobs and shortages of food, medicine and a variety of commonly required goods, will make the lives of Venezuelans a process of impoverishment and suffering for heavy economic difficulties, which is all interrelated” (<http://to.ly/rrmX>).

An editorial by the newspaper *Tal Cual* on February 6th, reports that the government “has a debt of over 10 billion dollars in private sector imports, representing over 50% of total international reserves and more than five times the cash reserves to make payments abroad.” The editorial adds that “the public sector deficit in 2013 by overspending relative to income is estimated at 15% of GDP, and the public debt of over 200 billion dollars” (<http://to.ly/ryCn>).

The shortage in Venezuela has reached unthinkable levels for a country that has received such fabulous income for the last fifteen years. Shortage in spare parts, medicines, food staples, airfare, printing paper, hygiene products including toilet paper, which was the subject of many headlines in the international media (<http://to.ly/rur2>).

According to a study published by the newspaper *El Universal* on 8 February, Venezuela now has the highest risk country in the world. “The investors’ perception of risk means that if Venezuela is to issue bonds, they would have to pay an interest rate of 14.44 percentage points higher than that paid by the United States, which has the lowest financial cost. Following to Venezuela, is Argentina, which would have to cancel at 9.66 percentage points and Belarus at 7.34 points, a long distance from the rest of Latin America countries at an average of 4.6 points” (<http://to.ly/rBd7>). At the time of this writing, Toyota and General Motors announced the shutting down of their activities in Venezuela due to lack of parts to assemble vehicles and the enormous debt in dollars that the government owes to these companies (<http://to.ly/rBdv>).

Incredibly, while Venezuela has been sinking into poverty, the Venezuelan government has squandered fortunes to fund their political allies abroad. In the book *Concentration of Power: Setback of a Protagonist Dream*, written by Orlando Zamora, who was Chief of the Division of Currency Risk Analysis of the Central Bank of Venezuela, government expenditures abroad are documented. Zamora estimated that between 2000 and 2012 those foreign expenditures reached 35 billion dollars. However, leading members of the opposition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable, ensure that the number actually doubles that, 70 billion. Among the many "investments" abroad are 6.6 billion to build a refinery in Nicaragua, one million for a Brazilian samba school, 18 million as a gift to the American actor Danny Glover for a film, contributions to build housing in Mali, heating subsidies in the U.S., rehabilitation of the electricity grid in Gambia, aid to Bolivia, and subsidies to Cuba of around 23 billion dollars. To which purchases of arms and military equipment should be added, thereby Venezuela becoming the largest arms importer in Latin America (<http://to.ly/rrl6>).

An equivalent or even greater fortune was squandered in corruption money. Even government officials have publicly denounced hundreds of cases of loss of public funds. In March 2013, the Minister of Planning and Finance Jorge Giordani, reported that they had granted 25 billion dollars to "briefcase" companies (ghost companies created for lucrative purposes) (<http://to.ly/rCMi>). The NGO Transparency International ranks Venezuela as the most corrupt country in Latin America, and places it in the 165th among 176 countries (<http://to.ly/rCMT>).

Oil

According to a report by *Inter-American Trends*, based in Washington, despite having undergone its biggest oil bonanza in history, Venezuela faces a bleak economic future, and the quality of life of the population could severely collapse by the end of this decade, given the large systemic changes that are emerging in the oil global market and incoherent Chavez administration. Experts recommended an urgent abandonment of the policies that have led to the deterioration of the oil industry and making the investments needed to significantly increase oil production, if Venezuela wants to avoid increasing poverty rates and the highest backwardness seen in the last 100 years (<http://to.ly/rrso>).

The U.S. *Energy Information Administration* revealed that fuel imports by *Petroleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) from the US at the end of the third quarter, tripled that of two years ago, which is a scandal, since Venezuela has always been an oil exporter country. In 1988, before Chavez came to power, shipments to the United States were upward of 1.9 million barrels per day; by 2013 it had plummeted to 601,000 barrels (<http://to.ly/rrtl>).

No wonder the Venezuelan oil industry has collapsed. In 2002 the Government arbitrarily dismissed 30,000 trained and experienced employees, replacing them with unqualified personnel, but willing to follow the policies of Chavez. An external inspection conducted in March 2013 by the firm *RJG Risk Engineering* revealed a long list of maintenance failures in PDVSA's facilities the previous year, responsible for over hundred fires. A tremendous explosion at the Amuay refinery killed 41 people, becoming thus the worst accident in the history of the Venezuelan oil industry (<http://to.ly/rrtJ>).

According to a report published by the newspaper *El Universal*, PDVSA's debt soared 171 percent in six years. In 2006 the debt was 16 billion dollars, by the end of 2013 it was 43.3 billion (<http://to.ly/ryCU>). This was due, among other reasons, to lower production, excessive increase in payroll, financing political activities, payment of external debt with crude (China's case), shipping oil under unfavorable conditions to allied governments (such as in Cuba), and naturally to corruption at shocking levels.

Health

In November of last year a group of social and trade organizations, unions, academic and individuals involved in the sector Public Health Sector, issued a statement to denounce "the shortages of basic medicines and supplies, insufficient medical staff, and the problems of infrastructure deterioration or inadequate planning" that severely affect public health centers, harming thus the poorest sectors of our population (<http://to.ly/rnpb>).

In the private health sector, the executive chairman of the Association of Hospitals and Clinics, Cristino Garcia, warned of the possibility of soon shutting down the hematology and dialysis services in private clinics. Furthermore, García explained that "Some 200 members of the association have supplies only for the next 30 days, while the average inventory covers 45 days" (<http://to.ly/rrmP>).

According to a report published on 3 February in *El Nacional* "materials used for the diagnosis of the six types of higher incidence cancer in Venezuela are being depleted or are no longer available. The supply shortages for prostate tumors, lung and bronchus, breast, cervical, colorectal and stomach medical materials worsens every day for lack of currency... Inventory materials for X-ray mammography and ultrasound will last for three weeks and biopsy needles are almost finished" (<http://to.ly/rrrm>). The same applies to many other medical stocks, medicines, reagents and equipment.

Power supply

Research by professors at the *University of Zulia*, uploaded at the www.agenciadenoticias.luz.edu.ve website, states that 534 power failures were reported last year in Venezuela, more than two per day. Since 1998, the national government has budgeted 50 billion dollars for the electric system but they have been squandered, because despite this huge amount of money, blackouts in our country are still happening (<http://to.ly/rvvu>).

The prestigious *Ricardo Zuloaga Group*, composed of energy experts, considers that the factors that have caused the electricity crisis are: subordination to political control, improvisation, lack of maintenance, collapse of the distribution system, poor marketing, mismanagement of the labor force, and corruption.

These experts condemn that for political reasons, there is “discrimination against the countryside, benefiting Caracas, when rationing of electricity leave millions without a reliable electrical service and quality they deserve, in order to safeguard the capital.” They believe that there is also a lack of transparency and an information blockade by the government, in order to hide the reality of the crisis (<http://to.ly/rvvO>). Additionally, there have been numerous reports of corruption in the electricity sector. According to these reports, government officials assigned contracts –that were never executed– to “briefcase” companies in exchange for fat commissions. These reports point towards a company called Derwick and their so called “bolichicos” (<http://to.ly/rGGr>).

Criminality

During the last fifteen years of pro Chavez government, the crime rate has reached exorbitant levels, turning Caracas into the second most dangerous city in the world, as reported by the *Citizen Council for Public Safety and Criminal Justice*, an NGO based in Mexico that performs an annual study on global criminality (<http://to.ly/ryYU>).

According to the *Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV)*, the last time one could have access to crime statistics in our country was in December 2003, because the government deliberately decided to hide information, in order to conceal the extraordinary increase in crime. At that time there were 11,342 homicides. Last year the OVV estimated 24,763 violent deaths, a huge rate of 79 deaths per 100.000 inhabitants. OVV adds that violent deaths in Venezuela represent 12% of overall mortality. This means that for every 100 Venezuelans who died in 2013, for all possible causes (heart disease, cancer, diabetes, HIV, etc.), 12 died of violent death (<http://to.ly/rzMu9>).

Venezuelan lawyer Criminologist Fermin Marmol Garcia said Venezuela is the fifth country with more kidnappings in the world, according to insurance risks qualifiers based in the UK. The expert said that “kidnapping is the second fastest growing crime in Venezuela and the country has no institutions capable of dealing with this problem” (<http://to.ly/rzNL>).

On 9 January, the U.S. Embassy in Caracas issued a statement warning its officers and other U.S. citizens living in or traveling to Venezuela, that they must “be vigilant at all times and take personal security precautions”. The diplomatic delegation appointed three risk areas in Caracas, “yellow”, “orange” and “red” zones, made up of certain neighborhoods of the capital. Furthermore, Embassy officials asked the personnel transiting the yellow and orange zone, to notify their movements and to use armored vehicles from midnight to 6:00 am. Regarding the red zone, the “unofficial” visits and personal travel was banned (<http://to.ly/rzOI>).

The head of the *Venezuelan Criminal Forum*, Alfredo Romero, reported that in Venezuela there have been 200.000 cases of murder since Chavez came to power in 1999 until late 2013 or “the equivalent of ten sport stadiums filled with killed people.” Romero noted that by 2010, the United Nations classified Venezuela as the fifth most murderous country in the world (<http://to.ly/rzPF>).

Judicial system

According to *The Rule of Law Index 2012-2013*, prepared by the American NGO *The World Justice Project*, the criminal courts of Venezuela are considered the worst worldwide, ranking even below countries of dubious democracy such as Zimbabwe, Iran or China (<http://to.ly/rCNe>).

This is due to the fact that the Venezuelan judiciary system is not primarily used to punish criminals, but to protect the ruling party and to persecute people who think differently. During a judicial ceremony held recently, members of the Supreme Court praised openly the late President Hugo Chavez, and chanted slogans such as “Chavez lives, the struggle continues!” or “Long live Chavez, dammit!” (<http://to.ly/rCNS>).

In April 2010, the renowned NGO *Amnesty International* accused the Venezuelan government of “using the judicial system to silence dissidents and to prevent others to speak out” (<http://to.ly/rCNA>).

In July 2013, the *Venezuelan Criminal Forum* reported to the *International Criminal Court* in The Hague the use of the judicial system in Venezuela as instrument of political persecution. “The courts, the Prosecutor and the Defender of the People, are used as a political weapon, instead of being instruments of citizen protection,” said Alfredo Romero, director of the organization. Romero added that there are “over 500 cases of political persecution in Venezuela already

denounced in The Hague. The accumulated reports, leads to the existence of crimes against humanity in this country do to its systematic occurrence” (<http://to.ly/rCOo>).

On April 19, 2012, the former member of the Supreme Court, Eladio Aponte Aponte, revealed that Venezuelan justice was controlled by the Executive. “We would meet every Friday morning in the office of the Vice-President and decide what to do in every important judicial case. To that meeting assisted regularly the President of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, the Comptroller General, and the President of the Congress,” he said (<http://to.ly/rPSa>).

Lack of freedom

During the fifteen years of the Chavez era, civil and individual liberties have been systematically contravened in all aspects: freedom of press and expression, the right to own private property and exert free enterprise; human rights have been constantly violated, as well as the right to elect (see the two topics below) and, indirectly, the right to freely travel, because exchange controls and limited supplies have seriously hindered the airline operations in our country.

On October 2013, the members of the *Venezuelan Press Association* (BPV) submitted to the *Inter-American Press Association* (IAPA) a report on the national situation, where they claim, “recent occurring facts have been aggravating and will continue to worsen the exercise of freedom of journalism in Venezuela.” The report details, among many other problems, “attacks on media and journalists, restrictions on foreign exchange to import needed items to print newspapers, the creation of an official censorship body, and the withdrawal from the *Inter-American Human Rights System*.” The report also claims the suspicious purchase of private media by entrepreneurs related to the Government, including Globovision, and a “rising tide of lawsuits, actions and prosecutions against private media” all of which qualify as a severe attack to freedom of expression (<http://to.ly/rCQR>).

Indeed, since 2007, when the government illegally confiscated the largest private TV network, *Radio Caracas Television* (RCTV), freedom of press and expression has been increasingly suffocated. To the extent that the *National System of Public Media* absolutely controlled by the government, has become the largest media monopoly, dedicated exclusively to broadcast propaganda in favor the ruling party (<http://to.ly/rCRC>).

On October 2010, the EFE news agency published a report entitled “Chronology of expropriations and confiscations in Venezuela since 2007”, which includes a detailed list of expropriations, many of which were actually confiscations, since the Government does not pay any compensation to the owners; moreover, most of them are arbitrarily executed, without a trial (<http://to.ly/rCRI>). Additionally,

the Venezuelan government supports massive invasions to farm lands and private buildings, as a way to win supporters to the so-called Bolivarian Revolution.

On March 26, 2011, Antonio Peñalosa, Secretary General of the *International Organization of Employers* (IOE), said the situation of private enterprise in Venezuela, particularly the industrial enterprises, was unsustainable. According to Peñalosa, companies must have an appropriate framework for development, but added: "In Venezuela there is a hostile environment for development, something all specialized institutions have been saying, notably the World Bank, in its report about entrepreneurship." The Secretary General of the IOE explained that, according to this organization, Venezuela is the worst country in the world for entrepreneurship. He added: "The Venezuelan reality, is the destruction of a third of the industrial plant in last 10 years, and the loss of more than half a million jobs in the private sector" (<http://to.ly/rEgJ>). Since 2010 the economic freedoms have been further restricted with new confiscations, new laws that criminalize free trade, and more price and profit controls. For the Venezuelan government, the private entrepreneur is an enemy, which must be destroyed, to impose the so called "Socialism of the XXI Century".

The same goes for trade union rights and labor rights; the Venezuelan government has systematically violated them, something which has been fully documented and denounced to the *International Labour Organization* (ILO) (<http://to.ly/rEjc>).

Human Rights

Over four years ago, the *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights* (IACHR) identified many serious violations of human rights in Venezuela. In a report entitled *Democracy and Human Rights in Venezuela* prepared in December 2009, the Commission reported that "political intolerance, Executive control of all branches of government, restrictions on freedom of expression, hostile environment for protesting and dissenting, increase of criminality, violence affecting persons deprived of their liberty, trade unionists, women and peasants, and above all, the impunity of human rights violations cases, are severe limitations on the exercise of human rights in Venezuela" (<http://to.ly/rzSy>).

The IACHR notes that "not only in the context of political ground there are restrictions for those identified with the opposition, but in general the people and organizations that make public their disagreement with government policies are victims of retaliation, intimidation, disqualification, exclusion, employment discrimination and, in some cases, they are even prosecuted and deprived of their freedom." The Commission considers that "the lack of independence and autonomy of the judiciary from political power is one of the weakest points in

Venezuelan democracy, a situation that seriously hinders the free exercise of human rights in that country. According to the Commission, it is this lack of independence that has allowed the punitive power of the State to criminalize human rights defenders, penalize peaceful social protest and prosecute political dissidents” (<http://to.ly/rzSy>). Since 2009, this situation has become much worst.

In July 2012, the NGO *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) published a report entitled *Concentration and Abuse of Power in Venezuela's Chávez*, documenting the accumulation of power by the Executive and the deterioration of human rights guarantees which have allowed the Venezuelan government to intimidate, censor and prosecute critics and those who are considered opposition (<http://to.ly/rzSR>).

In its report, HRW informed "Chavez's majority in the National Assembly enacted laws that expand the powers of the government to limit the freedom of expression and to punish its critics. And the Supreme Court –which in 2010 was renovated with members sympathetic to Chavez– explicitly rejected the principle that the judiciary should act independently from the presidential control, and also rejected the authority of the Inter-American Human Rights System” (<http://to.ly/rzTe>).

To avoid complying with international agreements on humanitarian law, the Venezuelan government simply decided to withdraw from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, claiming falsely that the IACHR is an “absurd system, which has ruled in favor of corrupt people and terrorists,” and that it became an “instrument of persecution against the progressive governments of Latin America and the world” (<http://to.ly/rzWr>).

Electoral fraud

On April 8, 2013, over three hundred Latin-American senators and congressmen sent a statement to the Venezuelan National Electoral Council (CNE), demanding minimum conditions for recognizing as valid the results of the presidential elections that would be held a week later. The document –signed by parliamentarians from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay– demanded the CNE “the total counting of ballots, the use of indelible ink, the removal of fingerprint reading machines, the prohibition of militia operations during the election, and the punishment of using public resources in favor of the ruling party” (<http://to.ly/luDV>).

The CNE ignored these requests and, as expected, the results of those presidential elections were not recognized by the opposition candidate Henrique Capriles. Indeed, in May 2, 2013, the Democratic Unity Roundtable introduced a 180-page appeal to the Supreme Court, “not only challenging the 14 April electoral

event, but the whole campaign, the irregularities in the voters registry, the system used for the election, the imbalance and abuse of public resources by the ruling party, as well as all irregularities that occurred on election day, and thereafter” (<http://to.ly/rCKB>).

ESDATA, an association that integrates recognized experts, documents in great detail all deficiencies and irregularities which took place during all elections held in Venezuela since the 2004 referendum up to 2013. According to this organization, changes that have been imposed on the electoral institution, the irregularities in the voters registry, the modification of the voting structure, the use of questionable electronic voting machines, and the obvious partiality of the CNE, invalidate any election held in Venezuela since 2004 (<http://esdata.info/>).

Violations of the Constitution

In a book entitled *Unconstitutional History of Venezuela*, the renowned lawyer Asdrubal Aguiar documented at least 173 violations of the Constitution since 1999 to 2012. According to the author, those violations are equivalent, in fact, to successive coups that have destroyed democracy in our country. The first of these blows was struck on February 2, 1999, when Hugo Chavez became President. That same day he convened a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution, although this kind of mechanism was not included in the Constitution at that time.

Once installed, the National Constituent Assembly illegally declared itself trustee of the "people's sovereignty" and immediately dismissed all branches of government (Congress, Supreme Court, Attorney General, Controller General and every existing judge). Without the authority to do so, the Constituent Assembly provisionally appointed new members of all powers, and as might be expected, all of them were supporters of the ruling party, a maneuver which allowed the Executive to take full control of the institutions (<http://youtu.be/t8nO4bBKvjg>).

More recently, on January 10, 2013, there was another coup, when Hugo Chavez did not swear to begin a new presidential term, due to his serious illness (or perhaps he was already dead), and Nicolas Maduro took office illegally. Soon after, then Vice-President Maduro performed another coup, when he illegally registered his candidacy for the presidency, despite being explicitly forbidden by the Constitution (<http://to.ly/rA0N>).

Prestigious Venezuelan organizations have denounced that the Government violates the Constitution and existing laws, such as the National Scientific Academies related to Medicine, Political Sciences, Mathematics, Economics, Engineering and Housing. On December 12, 2013, they issued a formal declaration against the implications of the so-called "Plan of the Fatherland",

approved by the Venezuelan government. The chairman of the Inter-Academies Committee, Claudio Bifano, said that the guidelines of this plan violate the Constitution, because “they are not designed for productive and social development of the nation, but rather for a political and ideological project to consolidate the so-called Socialism of the XXI century”. In other words, the Government intended to make of Socialism a mandatory doctrine for all citizens (<http://to.ly/rBet>).

Matters discussed few paragraphs above –such as the infringement of liberties and the disrespect for human rights– also constitute violations of the Constitution, as well as the subordination to Cuba, a topic presented immediately below.

Subordination to Cuba

On January 10, 2013, a large group of influential Venezuelans –including members of parliament, political leaders, intellectuals, academics, journalists, businessmen, lawyers, retired army officers, union leaders, social leaders and students– issued a manifesto, denouncing fourteen years of unacceptable Cuban domination... “Slowly and gradually, the Cubans have taken control of our public offices, the identification and immigration system, our foreign policy, and important sectors of the national economy. Cuban control includes the police and armed forces, at the expense of our national security” (<http://to.ly/IMl7>).

In their manifesto, these notables added that “it is common knowledge that the fate of Venezuelans is not decided by our own authorities, but is blatantly defined in Havana, with the open participation of the Castro brothers.” They concluded that “the above is a clear violation of the Constitution and the existing laws; configuring a coup d’état in favor of a foreign power, which ultimately means the transformation of the Venezuelan State into a Cuban colony.”

Indeed, the unacceptable interference of Cuba in Venezuela internal affairs is not a secret, but it is in an open and shameless matter. Whenever Hugo Chavez needed a hospital to treat his illnesses, he did not go to one in Caracas, as he the distrusted Venezuelan doctors. He traveled to Havana’s *Center for Medical and Surgical Research* (CIMEQ), where he felt more at ease. Leading members of the Government are constantly flying to Cuba to decide with the Castro brothers issues concerning our national internal affairs. There are flags of Cuba openly waving in Venezuelan facilities, including military barracks. In every official event or TV address, the Venezuelan authorities send their greetings to Fidel Castro or chant hails to Cuba. On January 8, Nicolas Maduro left an important official ceremony, to attend a celebration act of the 55th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, held at the Municipal Theater of Caracas (<http://to.ly/rEnO>).

Multilateral organizations

Despite all the violations of the Constitution, lack of freedom and disrespect of human rights, described above, multilateral organizations such as the OAS and Mercosur, do not appeal to or enforce the Inter-American Democratic Charter; on the contrary, they turn a blind eye. This is because for fifteen years, the Venezuelan government has been funding their socialist allies and buying consciences in Latin America, using for this the vast resources from oil revenues.

Some Latin American leaders have come to power thanks to briefcases full of money sent from Venezuela, as in the case of Argentinian President Cristina Kirchner, and others heads of state who act as if they were members of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, such as Bolivian Evo Morales and Ecuadorian Rafael Correa. For his part, Jose Miguel Insulza has been the most criticized Secretary General in the history of the OAS, because he has behaved as an agent of Chavez, and that during his tenure, the Democratic Charter has become a useless paper.

In addition, the Venezuelan government has encouraged and financed the creation of new multilateral organizations such as ALBA and CELAC, ideologically aligned with the XXI Century Socialism, whose real aim is to protect and expand the Cuban revolution throughout Latin America, as evidenced by the fact that the president of CELAC is none other than Raul Castro, to the embarrassment and humiliation of all democratic sectors in the region.

The Final Declaration of the Second Summit of CELAC, held in late January in Havana, is a universal monument to cynicism because it pontificates on "the protection of human rights, non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, pluralism and respect for diversity, repulse for discrimination, prohibition of the use of force" and other precepts that are constantly and openly violated by the Castro communist regime. The declaration contains an explicit praise for "one of the main founders and promoters of the CELAC", Hugo Chavez, whom they characterize as "tireless humanist and promoter of Latin American and Caribbean union, who fought against social exclusion, poverty and promoted the overall development of the region" (<http://to.ly/rGA0>).

For all these reasons, we cannot expect any support from these agencies, nor can we expect that Inter-American Democratic Charter be activated against the Venezuelan government, despite all the serious violations exhibited in this document. Those multilateral organizations and the majority of the Latin American governments abandoned us, and now we have no other choice but to call upon the constitutional mechanisms that remain at our disposal in order to restore democracy and regain freedom.

Legal framework for a transition

The article 350 of our Constitution emphatically orders the Venezuelan citizens to disavow “any regime, legislation, or authority that contradicts the democratic principles, values and guaranties; or that undermines human rights”, which is precisely what the Venezuelan authorities are doing, as exhaustively demonstrated above.

The article 333 clearly states: “This Constitution will not lose its validity, if it is abolished through an act of force, or by any other means different from those provided within it. In such a case, any citizen, invested or not with authority, will have the duty to contribute to the reestablishment of its validity.” Since our Constitution has been systematically violated, it is the sacred duty of all Venezuelan citizens, civilians and military, to reestablish its validity.

The article 328 states that “The National Armed Forces constitute an essentially professional institution, not politically active, organized by the State to ensure the independence and sovereignty of the nation... In carrying out its functions, (the Armed Forces) are obligated exclusively to service the Nation and in no case to any person or political party”. But the Venezuelan authorities have forced the military to serve as an instrument of the ruling party, and furthermore they have obligated them to obey the commands of Cuban military officers, thus violating once more our Constitution.

Finally, Nicolas Maduro not only usurped the Presidential functions by illegally assuming office and inscribing his candidacy against what was established by the Constitution, but he is not even eligible to exercise the post. The article 41 of the Constitution clearly states that “only Venezuelan citizens with no other nationality” may exercise the Presidency. Maduro to date has not proven to be a Venezuelan by birth, despite having been publicly demanded, and also for being the son of a Colombian mother, best cases have dual nationality. Therefore, removing Maduro from office would not be a coup but a constitutional obligation (<http://to.ly/rGD2>).

Alternatives for a transitional change

In our modern days, the military involvement in solving our political crisis need not necessarily be violent. In January 23, 1958, the Venezuelan Armed Forces, massively supported by the Venezuelan population, toppled the dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez without firing a single shot, just by threatening him with the use of force. That bloodless action gave rise to one of the most durable and stable democracies in the region. The same could happen now.

We do not expect from the current members of the Military Higher Command to summon the Government and force new elections, although under the actual circumstances it could very well happen. However, if a representative group of members of the Army, Air Force, Navy and National Guard, decided to publicly issue a statement, demanding Maduro his resignation, arguing the reasons that have been detailed in this paper, the whole country and the rest of the military would definitively support it.

If the Cuban invaders and some sections of the ruling party refused to abide by the mandate of the Constitution, and decided to wield arms in order to stay illegally in power, then they should be rebuked in accordance to the law, but then violence would be initiated by the usurpers and not by members of the Armed Forces.

This is the time for pro-government Supreme Court members and congressmen to reflect on their historic responsibility. It is much preferable for them to remove Maduro from office, and seek consensus with the opposition to manage a transition, rather than remain stubbornly in power, and continue endorsing an illegitimate and totalitarian regime, which is subordinated to the Cuban dictatorship. The consequences of such a mistake would make it worse for them and for the country.

Conclusion

There is abundant evidence of the efforts made by the Venezuelan opposition to find an electoral solution to the deepening crisis that afflicts our country, but the Government systematically has closed such a possibility, by committing fraud. The judicial and legislative channels also are closed, because, as explained above, the ruling party has illegally taken control over all public authorities. So no choice is left but to use other legitimate means rescue Democracy and restore the validity of the Constitution.

This is not an arbitrary decision, based on a selfish desire for power, but an urgent and pressing necessity. The actions taken by the Venezuelan regime are leading the country into an abyss of violence, lawlessness and chaos. The terrible economic crisis, political polarization, arbitrariness and Cuban interference, constitute a dangerous combination that can lead to a serious and lengthy conflict. It is the duty of all concerned citizens to prevent this from happening.

In addition, the Venezuelan regime –guided by the Cuban dictatorship– is not satisfied with destroying our own territory, but rather is determined to impose its perverse model to neighboring countries, something which threatens the regional peace and stability.

We call on all Venezuelans of good will, civilians and military, to put an end to this madness, and to strive together to rescue democracy, regain freedom and restore rationality. We wish to emphasize that civilians will not abandon the military in this historical circumstance; we all share a common responsibility that must be endured together.

We also call for democratic sectors around the world to understand the dilemma we are now facing: either allowing the destruction of our country; or appealing to our sacred right to peaceful disobedience, in order to ensure peace, restore harmony and establish the Rule of Law.