

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

Venezuela: Unattended health rights crisis is forcing thousands to flee

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Severe violations of the right to health, as well as difficulties accessing food and other basic services, are putting thousands of people's lives at risk in Venezuela and fueling a regional forced migration crisis, Amnesty International said today on the launch of its digital platform ***Emergency Exit***.

"People in Venezuela are fleeing an agonizing situation that has transformed treatable health conditions into matters of life and death. Basic health services have collapsed and finding essential medicine is a constant struggle, leaving thousands with no choice but to seek health care abroad," said Erika Guevara-Rosas, director of Amnesty International in the Americas.

"Inaction is not an option. The international community and the Venezuelan State must start cooperating immediately to defuse this explosive crisis."

Local human rights organizations have said that Venezuela is suffering from an 80% to 90% shortage in medicine supplies; half of the nation's hospitals are not functioning; and there has been a 50% drop in the number of medical staff at the public centers that provide 90% of health services.

The Venezuelan government has denied the existence of food and health crises and rejected offers of aid and cooperation from the international community.

Amnesty International calls on the Venezuelan State to work with the international community to ensure that financial and technical resources are available to guarantee timely access to necessary and quality health care for all.

Throughout 2018, Amnesty International will publish the stories of people from Venezuela seeking protection in other countries in the Americas, including pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses who left Venezuela in search of essential health care, on the digital platform www.amnistiaonline.org/SalidadeEmergencia.

Colombian immigration authorities estimate that the number of people from Venezuela in the country rose to 550,000 last year.

Colombian health services provided urgent treatment for more than 24,000 Venezuelans in 2017, according to Colombia's Ministry of Health. Hospitals in the border cities of Maicao and Cúcuta treated two to three times as many patients from Venezuela in 2017 as they did the previous year.

Hundreds of pregnant women are among those crossing into Colombia to access necessary health care, which is sorely lacking in Venezuela today. From 2015 to 2016, the last years with official information available, maternal mortality in Venezuela rose by more than 65% while infant mortality increased by more than 30%.

"The Venezuelan government cannot keep ignoring this desperate situation. Doing so would condemn the region to one of the worst refugee crises it has ever seen."

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