

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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NEW SANCTIONS BY THE UNITED STATES PUT VENEZUELAN POPULATION AT GREATER RISK OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Amnesty International expresses its concern over the newest sanctions imposed upon Venezuelan governmental entities by the government of the United States on 5 August 2019.

In an already dire and severe humanitarian emergency, in which lack of medicines, medical supplies, food, and other basic goods is affecting Venezuelans who are trying to survive in the country, expanding the scope of sanctions to all governmental authorities and entities intensifies the risk of increased human rights violations, and the risk of continuing pushing Venezuelans out of the country, fleeing from this extreme situation.

Maduro's government's responsibility for the origins of the crisis cannot be ignored, as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed in her last report on Venezuela, published on 5 July 2019: "The economy of Venezuela, particularly its oil industry and food production systems, were already in crisis before any sectoral sanctions were imposed (...)". The imposition of sanctions does not diminish in any way the relevant responsibility of the Maduro government and its obligation to take all possible measures to mitigate the impact of the humanitarian emergency on the population.

Amnesty International reminds US authorities that comprehensive sanctions are likely to cause harm on the population. It is not possible to envisage a situation in which such sanctions can be applied without having a very serious adverse effect on the economic and social rights of the civilian population of their target country, principally by undermining the rights to food and health. Even if a comprehensive sanctions regime is designed to have adequate humanitarian exemptions, as it appears to be the case, there is still a high risk of *overcompliance* towards the restrictions set by the sanctions framework due to their deterring effect, which is extremely difficult to avoid and in practice can lead to the humanitarian exceptions being virtually eliminated.

Consequently, Amnesty International believes these punitive financial measures targeting Maduro's government will be ineffective in their stated objectives and have the potential to deepen the human rights crisis in Venezuela. In addition, its unilateral and collective character, and the absence of a time limitation, may contravene international law and should be lifted by the US authorities. In the meantime, as long as sanctions are in force, US authorities should monitor the impact on the lives of the people in Venezuela and must ensure that exemptions regarding humanitarian goods are complied with, minimizing the deterrent effect regarding these imports.

United Nations organs and bodies should take further action addressing the humanitarian emergency in Venezuela, in coordination with local civil society organizations, and Maduro's government has the obligation to seek and accept international aid and cooperation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has documented a wide range of crimes under international law and serious human rights violations caused by Nicolas Maduro's government in Venezuela since 2014, including politically motivated arbitrary detentions, torture and other ill treatment, unlawful killings, abusive use of force, enforced disappearances, plus a lack of an independent judiciary and due process guarantees, as well as violations to the rights to food and health.

Amnesty International's recent research report, *Hunger for justice: Crimes against humanity in Venezuela*, concluded that the selective extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, and deaths and injuries caused by the excessive use of force by Nicolás Maduro's government were part of a systematic and widespread policy of repression since, at least, 2017, which may constitute crimes against humanity.

The serious deterioration in living conditions and the systematic violation of economic, social and cultural rights continue to affect the majority of the population in Venezuela and have forced more than four million people to flee the country, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Amnesty International has urged the international community to provide a response to this human rights crisis that is aligned with international and human rights law, calling for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, as one of the only avenues available to ensure accountability of human rights violations and international crimes committed in Venezuela.