

## Press Conference regarding the situation in Venezuela

191st Period of Sessions

November 12, 2024 | Washington, DC

*Remarks by IACHR President, Commissioner **Roberta Clarke***

Good morning. My name is Roberta Clarke, and I am the President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. We convened this press conference in exercise of its mandate to bring awareness to human rights issues affecting the peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean and to promote compliance with human rights standards throughout the region. I am joined by the entire Plenary of the Commission.

For over two decades, the Inter-American Commission has closely monitored Venezuela. Because of patterns of attacks on democracy, political persecution, abuse and repression, Venezuela has been included in Chapter IV.B of our annual report for 15 consecutive years.

With the deteriorating situation, in 2019, the Inter-American Commission established a special monitoring mechanism for Venezuela, known as MESEVE. Through this mechanism, we receive and analyse information from diverse sources, including statements and policies of the government, reports from human rights organizations, civil society actors, journalists, people engaged in politics and the UN system.

The failure to comply with the electoral rules in the recent elections is plainly a violation of the political rights of the people of Venezuela. Three and a half months later after the elections, our message today is: what happened and continues in Venezuela this year must not be accepted and must not be normalized.

To this day, Venezuelan authorities continue to refuse to publish the tally sheet from the presidential election held on July 28, 2024. This is a blatant denial of the political rights of Venezuelans and serves as clear evidence that democracy has been effectively dismantled in the country.

To those who may say that this is a matter for Venezuelans, we remind that in response to the protests about the failure to release the election results, the Venezuelan regime has arbitrarily detained and imprisoned many people. Political repression is the reality for those who speak out.

As a human rights commission, we cannot overstate the seriousness of the situation. We are not only concerned with the ongoing denial of democratic principles. Nearly 8 million Venezuelans have fled their country as refugees and migrants since 2015. Venezuelan migration is the largest displacement crisis ever seen in our hemisphere. Venezuelans are seeking safety and opportunities for themselves and their families.

We ask that the international community not relent in demanding accountability, insisting on the publication of the tally sheets, and calling for independent scrutiny of the election process. Without these actions, the declaration by the Electoral Council proclaiming Nicolás Maduro's third mandate is not legitimate.

Some of you may ask why a human rights body is addressing allegations of electoral fraud, or why this is a matter for the international community. The answer is straightforward: political rights are human rights, and in a democracy, every vote counts. As the Inter-American Democratic Charter recalls, representative democracy is indispensable for the stability, peace, and development of the region.

Additionally, the Inter-American Commission has, for decades, raised alarms about the undermining of the independence of key institutions such as the Electoral Council, the Supreme Court of Justice, and the Prosecutor's Office. The lack of transparency surrounding the July 28 election results is a direct consequence of this institutional breakdown.

Before I hand the floor to Commissioner Rapporteur Gloria de Mees, I want to convey three important messages. First, the Inter-American Commission expresses its solidarity with the Venezuelan people. Let us not forget that more people voted than in previous elections, notwithstanding an atmosphere of intimidation and acts of persecution.

Second, the actions of the regime in power is repressive, silencing dissent and suppressing critical voices. All the political prisoners, and all those arbitrarily detained, must be released immediately.

Finally, the Inter-American Commission will continue to monitor and bring awareness to the ongoing human rights crisis and calling for a peaceful transition to democracy.

## Press Conference regarding the situation in Venezuela

191st Period of Sessions

November 12, 2024 | Washington, DC

*Remarks by IACHR Commissioner Gloria de Mees*

Good morning. My name is Gloria de Mees, and I serve as the country rapporteur for Venezuela.

As my colleague Roberta Clarke, Chair of the Commission, has mentioned, on July 28, 2024, Venezuela held its presidential elections, which saw a higher voter turnout than in previous elections, as well as a notable increase in volunteers who served as poll witnesses and observers. However, following the closure of the polls, significant complaints emerged regarding serious irregularities in the transmission of electoral results, as well as a lack of transparency and other obstacles in the citizen audit process.

These grave allegations of electoral fraud and irregularities sparked at least 300 spontaneous protests across the country, mobilizing various social sectors, particularly residents from low-income areas.

In response, the regime resorted to terror as a tool to suppress the populace and maintain its hold on power. As a result, the protests were met with harsh repression by state forces and armed non-state groups affiliated with the ruling party, known as "colectivos." This pattern of repression mirrors that observed by the IACHR in previous protests, particularly in 2014 and 2017, including:

- The arbitrary use of force, resulting in loss of life and injuries.
- Arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances.
- Judicial persecution and harassment of perceived opponents and electoral volunteers.
- Censorship and restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.
- Barriers to human rights advocacy.

Between July 28 and 30, at least 23 individuals were killed during the protests. Preliminary reports indicate that most of the victims, aged between 15 and 56, were from low-income areas.

From July 28 to August 13, civil society organizations documented at least 1,393 detentions, including 182 women, 117 adolescents, 17 people with disabilities, 14 indigenous individuals, and 7

journalists. Notably, the government reported a much higher figure, claiming that 2,000 individuals were detained during the demonstrations.

Those detained face criminal charges based on broadly defined offenses that carry excessively harsh penalties. These charges—including incitement to hatred, terrorism, conspiracy, treason, criminal association, resistance to authority, obstruction of roads, and disobedience—are a clear attempt to undermine the exercise of freedom of expression. They also serve to instill a climate of fear, aiming to stifle further protest and dissent.

In the context of these criminal proceedings, numerous human rights violations have been reported, particularly violations of judicial guarantees. These include:

- The denial of the right to legal representation of one's choice, with public defenders being imposed.
- The denial of communication and representation for adolescents by their families.
- The failure to provide interpretation services and respect intercultural rights in proceedings involving indigenous persons.
- The denial of reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities.

The IACHR is particularly alarmed by the 69 teenagers, including a minor on the autism spectrum, who remain deprived of liberty, detained in connection with the demonstrations. These individuals have been labeled as "terrorists" by the authorities and have been held in detention facilities alongside adults, often without proper gender segregation. Many have been tried in online proceedings in terrorism courts, without the presence of their families or legal guardians.

Since the election of July 28, human rights defenders have faced increased repression by the state. These individuals are automatically viewed with suspicion by the authorities, and their efforts to defend human rights trigger the activation of the regime's repressive mechanisms. At least 36 human rights defenders, journalists, and members of their families have had their passports annulled without any official notification or explanation from the state regarding the revocation.

Between July 28 and August 29, one month after the elections, approximately 130 cases of violations of freedom of expression have been recorded. These include the arbitrary detention of at least 13 journalists and media professionals, who were unfoundedly accused of "incitement to hatred" and "terrorism." Additional reported actions include the closure and raid of media outlets, harassment of journalists, extensive blocking of websites and communication platforms, confiscation of equipment, and the deportation of international press personnel. These actions have led to growing

self-censorship and forced many journalists into exile, reflecting a systematic pattern of harassment against journalistic work and an escalation in the criminalization of the right to freedom of expression.

All of this is happening within a context of complete impunity, where there is no protection for victims, as state agencies responsible for oversight are controlled by the regime and complicit in its repressive strategy.

The main message today and I reiterate is that the Venezuelan government must end its repression and immediately release all those detained arbitrarily.

The Inter-American Commission urges the international community to recognize the gravity of the situation and the chilling effect this repression has had on the population. We also call for a coordinated, multilateral diplomatic effort to support Venezuela's peaceful transition to democracy.

Thank you.