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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Europe-Third World Centre (CETIM), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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For the Respect of Human Rights, in Particular the Right of Self-Determination, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela¹

1. Preoccupied by a unilateral presentation of the situation in Venezuela that encourages violence, the CETIM wishes to develop the following clarification in a spirit such that the respect of the right to information enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights may be respected.
2. Since the first victory of the late Hugo Chávez in the 1998 presidential elections, a process of deep but peaceful socio-economic, political and cultural transformations has been under way in Venezuela. From this date and until the electoral victory of the current president, Nicolás Maduro, in April 2013, the political forces demanding a progressive common program have carried the day in almost all the elections held in the country – free and democratic, as attested by numerous independent foreign observers. At the same time, society's structures have been broadly democratized, especially owing to the development of forms of popular and communal participation, and the Venezuelan citizens' rights have considerably progressed. Refusing to acknowledge these advances of civil and political freedoms and of democracy in general, as well as economic, social and cultural rights in this country, amounts to denying the evidence.
3. In the course of this period, certain leaders of the opposition, supported by the government of the United States of America, have exposed to the world their conception of democracy, on several occasions: first, in April 2002, during an attempted coup d'état against the constitutional order, foiled by the people's mobilization; then, starting in December 2002, with the petroleum industry lock-out by management, to which the government responded by taking control of the company *Petróleos de Venezuela SA.* and launching social missions; finally, during the entire period, by incessant sabotage operations against the national economy, carried out in collaboration with major private property owners hostile to democratization. The people and the successive governments that they elected have always dealt firmly but peacefully with these aggressions by the most reactionary fractions of the opposition.
4. Repeatedly expressed in the ballot box, the attachment of a broad majority of Venezuelans to the country's transformation process can be explained by sound reasons. Social progress has been substantial since 1999, in all areas: health, education, culture, food, housing, infrastructure, public services, employment, retirement... The statistics are available to prove it. The effective takeover by the state of the heart of the economy – the petroleum sector – has, for the first time in the history of the country, allowed a more just distribution of the revenue drawn from its natural resources. Consequently, income inequality has begun to shrink significantly, even if there remains much to do in this area. Venezuela today is, after Cuba, the least unequal society in Latin America. It is clear that this, obtained for the benefit of the greatest number, cannot please the richest.
5. Under the impetus of President Chávez, Venezuela took an active part in the construction of a more balanced, non-unipolar world. The 2004 *Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – The Peoples' Trade Treaty (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América – Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos)* opened the prospect of regional relations of cooperation and solidarity at the opposite end of the spectrum from the principles of competition and private profit maximization advocated by capitalist globalization. It is the same of the initiatives undertaken to allow the Global South to free itself from the strangle-hold of the International Monetary Fund and the financial oligopolies dominated by the Global North. A breath of fresh air revived the spirit of Latin American independence, leading to the creation of common institutions at the regional level. This major advance for the peoples of the Global South could hardly merit the approbation of the Northern powers and their local allies.
6. In these conditions, it is not surprising to observe that the process of social transformations in Venezuela aroused waves of enraged attacks in the media, both domestic and foreign. These campaigns through the press, radio, television and also the Internet and social media, orchestrated by the moneyed powers, stirred up hatred and diffused lies about the progressive movement. They contrasted with the same mainstream mass media coverage during the military coup d'état that overthrew President Zelaya in Honduras (2009), or the "parliamentary coups d'état" that ended the terms of

¹ Statement drafted in collaboration with Dr. Rémy Herrera, researcher at the CNRS, Paris.

President Lugo in Paraguay (2012) and President Roussef in Brazil (2016). The unbridled media doubled in intensity after the death of Hugo Chávez and the election to the presidency in 2013 of the torch bearer of his project, Nicolás Maduro. The *de facto* cohabitation implied by the success of various opposition parties in the legislative elections of December 2015 led their most extreme leaders to believe themselves authorized to try to imitate the Honduran, Paraguayan and Brazilian fundamentally undemocratic precedents and to take one more step by triggering a vast operation for the destabilization of Venezuela.

7. This escalation of aggression against President Maduro – legitimately elected – was initially carried out through a parliamentary vote of self-amnesty for the high crimes and misdemeanors (while, in the process, acknowledging them as such!) committed by the leaders of the opposition. It was increased then by an attempt, aborted because not having fulfilled the legal requirements, to hold a revocation referendum aiming to remove President Maduro. Finally, and for several months, the strengthening of an opposition fraction, itself very divided, took the form of calls for intervention from outside powers in the hope of seeing these latter insinuate themselves into domestic matters and call into question national sovereignty. It was, in the first instance, the Organizations of American States that was mobilized to exclude Venezuela, with no regard for its national interests. The most fanatical opponents, who knew the support that President Maduro’s government and the transformation process enjoyed among the masses, aspired to no less than a foreign military intervention in their own country.

8. Whether they be Venezuelans or foreigners, the powers supporting this opposition are carrying on an economic war within Venezuela. Privately controlling most of the means of industrial and agricultural production, they are in a position to impede the fulfillment of the population’s needs by organizing – knowingly and inhumanly, with the complicity of networks identified as subject to the United States – hoarding and shortages of food and necessary goods; exports in cross-border contraband of subsidized goods, including petroleum; domestic price manipulations and distortions of exchange rates of the national currency on the black market; tax fraud and massive capital flight; and more generally, a systematic sabotage of the national economy intended to drive it into a “crisis” artificially maintained. The impression of “chaos” that results serves as a pretext for foreign banks and certain international organizations to raise the country’s “risk rating” and thus the cost of debt – when the foreign credit lines are not simply interrupted. The objective is to try to destabilize the social transformation process under way, to deprive the state of its sources of income and to sap the morale of the people by the exacerbation of shortages, disorder and discontent. This is utterly unacceptable.

9. None of the reasons for the difficulties encountered – arising less from government management errors than from a deliberate desire of its opponents – is impartially analyzed by the mainstream mass media. Logical: the owners of the major means of communication have an interest in stopping the process of democratic transformations which, through the example that it represents, calls into question the order on which their domination is abased. Thus, the cameras are focused on the events in the streets of Caracas or in other cities, presented as activities of “peaceful” demonstrators (when they are not depicted as “heroes”), repressed by a supposed “dictatorship.” The current tumult has not avoided excesses here and there. But strangely hidden are the crimes, undeniable, perpetrated by the ultra-violent fractions of these “dissenters” – among whom are to be found organized groups espousing fascist ideology and gangs of delinquents paid by the most radical opposition to spread terror – whose abuses are triggered by the call to violence, irresponsible and building in a crescendo, of some of the MPs. Thus, between false information and retouched photos, there appears the myth of a new episode of “color revolutions” invented along the lines of those which, over the past few years, have assured access to power by violent means of extreme-right factions subject to the United States. These media manipulations, as crude as they are dangerous, insults to all journalists with any integrity, trampling on the right of the citizens to be informed, playing into the hands of the proselytes of civil war, cannot deceive honest observers.

10. To find a necessary way out of the particularly painful situation experienced by the Venezuelans, on the first of May 2017, President Maduro announced his decision to call a Constituent National Assembly. In the light of the obstinate refusal of the most brutal opponents to resume negotiations with the country’s legitimate government, this initiative bespeaks a presidential intention of appeasement, but also of widening the field of constructive discussions to all the elements of society. It is also the consolidation of the social conquests and missions carried out since 2003, of the existing forms of democratic participation and of the foundation of sovereignty² that is being sought through this

² See Samir Amin, *La Souveraineté au service des peuples* (Geneva: CETIM, 2017).

constitutional reform. The floor is again given to the people, from whom power derives, through the vote. As it is currently conceived, this constituent assembly comprises 545 representatives elected by secret ballot direct universal suffrage from territorial circumscriptions or professional sectors (delegates from communities, missions and indigenous communities, as well as students, business entrepreneurs, workers, peasants, persons with disabilities, retirees...).

11. One must not underestimate the limits nor understate the shortcomings of the transformation process in Venezuela; nor must one seem to ignore the reasons of dissatisfaction, indeed, exasperation, of many citizens – reasons most often related to the ills inherited from the capitalist system, from which the process under way has not entirely emancipated itself (persistent insecurity, cases of corruption, inequality reduced but still high, rentier mentality...). One must nonetheless understand that the bulk of the problems that the great majority of Venezuelans are now experiencing originate in the hyper-concentration of ownership of the means of production in the hands of a tiny minority, sufficiently powerful (and supported from abroad) to be able to plunge the country into a “crisis” – organized by them – , to harm the well-being of the population and to encourage the multiplication of acts of violence. Thus, we declare ourselves for an immediate return to calm and to dialog, for the respect of Venezuelan peoples’ right to self-determination and the deepening of the process of democratic transformation that they have freely and courageously undertaken for two decades, in President Chávez’s spirit of social progress, justice and independence, remaining faithful to Simón Bolívar’s actions and teachings.³

12. In the context of multiple crises (political, socio-economic, cultural, food, climate, migrations...) and armed conflicts in many regions of the world, it is irresponsible to provoke chaos in Venezuela. Those who persist in this way will be responsible under international law and should be held accountable for their acts before the courts.

13. In view of the preceding, Venezuela needs support, from states as well as from the United Nations bodies, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and international human rights law, not a campaign of hate and destabilization.

³ See Rémy Herrera, *Figures révolutionnaires de l’Amérique latine* (Paris: Delga, 2017).