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Venezuela: A human rights agenda for the current crisis

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As the international community is taking an increasingly active role in the Venezuelan crisis, Amnesty International today said that a long-term, comprehensive human rights vision must be one of the guiding principles in seeking ways to avoid a political breakdown and further polarization of the situation.

"Long-standing disrespect for human rights is one of the roots of the crisis, so it is only natural that national and international instruments set up to protect those rights should provide a framework to promote its resolution," the organization added.

While much of the debate at the moment is focused on electoral issues, Amnesty International urged the international community -- and in particular the "group of friends" and international and regional human rights organizations -- to promote a comprehensive strategy based on the full respect for human rights as a key to strengthening the rule of law.

Amnesty International proposed human rights agenda for the Venezuelan crisis focuses on:

strengthening justice - including by guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary -- and eradicating impunity for past and present human rights violations through impartial and thorough investigations and prompt trials;

ensuring that the armed forces and security forces do not play a political role, remain subordinated to the civilian authorities and that they act impartially and in full compliance with standards on the use of force;

guaranteeing freedom of expression and the right to information;

enabling human rights defenders to carry out their work without fear;

implementing concrete and effective policies to combat the extreme poverty and exclusion which has contributed to the extreme polarization of Venezuelan society.

It is the responsibility of all political actors in Venezuela to ensure that these issues are seriously and effectively addressed. When exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, opposition sectors should take responsibility for choosing protest methods that do not undermine constitutional guarantees.

"Far too often all parties involved in the crisis have made an instrumental use of human rights,

appropriating, manipulating and distorting the issue to use it as yet another weapon for polarization and confrontation," Amnesty International said.

"It is now time to see the full respect of all the human rights of all Venezuelans as one of the cornerstones on which to build long-lasting, viable solutions to the crisis. The international community has an important role to play in this respect," the organization added.

Background

César Gaviria, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, has been facilitating negotiations between the opposition and the government in order to achieve a peaceful resolution to the crisis. So far these negotiations have not produced concrete results. The political crisis which has been threatening political stability in Venezuela for the last year reached a new stage with the opposition general strike which began on 2 December and is now in its eighth week. The extremely tense situation is in danger of leading to serious human rights violations.

As a response to the heightened tension and the apparent unwillingness of the two sides to find a peaceful negotiated solution to the crisis, a number of international government have proposed a group of "amigo de Venezuela" countries to further encourage a negotiated solution. The countries which form this group are the USA, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Mexico and Chile.

**** For further information please see "Venezuela, a human rights agenda for the current crisis," available on the web at: www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/amr530012003**

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