


International Contact Group on Venezuela Ministerial Declaration

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1. The International Contact Group met at Ministerial level by videoconference on 17 September. The Group welcomed the participation for the first time of Argentina as full member and announced that Bolivia would be stepping down from the Group.
2. ICG members reaffirmed that the only sustainable solution to the Venezuelan crisis will be an inclusive political, peaceful and democratic one, through free, credible, transparent and fair legislative and presidential elections. They expressed their concern at the narrowing of the democratic space in the country and particularly with a view to the organisation of the upcoming legislative elections, and called for the provision of electoral guarantees in accordance with international standards and the Constitution of Venezuela. Furthermore, they called on all parties to commit to an inclusive and credible negotiation. The ICG welcomes the recent release of some political prisoners and the termination of politically motivated judicial proceedings against members of the opposition, and insists that all remaining political prisoners should be released immediately and unconditionally, and house arrest terminated.
3. ICG members concluded that conditions are not met, at the moment, for a transparent, inclusive, free and fair electoral process. All obstacles to political participation must be removed in order for a meaningful electoral process to take place. This includes, inter alia, respect for the constitutional mandate of the democratically elected National Assembly, returning control of political parties to their rightful administrators, cessation of the disqualification and prosecution of political leaders, full restoration of their and other candidates' rights to equal political participation, a comprehensive update of the voter register, including young voters and Venezuelans abroad, and an independent and balanced CNE, and equal participation and unrestricted access to all media. The ICG requests that these obstacles to free, fair and credible elections be promptly addressed.
4. ICG members welcome the call to the international community to observe the elections, as a fundamental guarantee of transparency, freedom and fairness of any future electoral process. The ICG notes that the current electoral timetable does not allow the deployment of an Election Observation Mission, nor does it leave enough time and political space for the parties to negotiate the conditions for credible, free and fair elections. The ICG calls for guaranteed minimum conditions of credibility,

transparency and inclusiveness in the electoral process, and for the ability to observe the elections without interference, including unobstructed access. The effectual requirements for an electoral observer mission need to be in place credibly and in a timely manner before its deployment.

5. A negotiated process, owned by Venezuelans, and leading to a reinstatement of public powers, transparent and internationally monitored elections and a package of guarantees enabling political coexistence, are essential elements to overcome the crisis, achieve national reconciliation and economic recovery.

6. ICG members reiterate their deep concern about the worsening humanitarian situation in the country, which is now aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst acknowledging the recent expansion of the humanitarian space inside the country, including the authorisation for the EU humanitarian aid bridge in August, the ICG reiterated its call for full, unhindered and unimpeded access for both humanitarian personnel and goods, to provide urgently needed access to medicine, food, gasoline and basic health services. An improvement of the environment for humanitarian actors to operate in line with humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence is necessary to step up the response capacity of the humanitarian organisations. Increased donors support for the humanitarian response, as Venezuela remains one of the least funded humanitarian crises in the world, is much needed.

7. ICG members expressed their support for the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN HCHR) and of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, and called for their unfettered access to sites in the country in order to carry out their mandates. ICG members expressed deep concern about human rights violations, as updated in recent reports by UN HCHR Bachelet and the UN Fact-Finding Mission. The ICG stands ready to assist the UN HCHR in her efforts to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Venezuela. The full respect of political rights in the country requires the return of Venezuela to democracy and the rule of law.

8. More than ever Venezuela needs the support of an international community that works together. The ICG expresses its continuing willingness to increase contacts with regional and international partners in order to foster a common understanding and response to the situation in Venezuela. Articulated and complementary international efforts are crucial to help Venezuelans restore democracy and the Constitutional order. Close contacts with national stakeholders will also continue.

