

Minister of
Foreign Affairs



Ministre des
Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

MAR 15 2018

The Honourable Raynell Andreychuk
Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
and International Trade
Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A4

Dear Senator Andreychuk,

The Government of Canada extends its gratitude to the Committee for its close attention to the crisis afflicting the people of Venezuela and for its helpful report and analysis. The government of Nicolas Maduro, aided by an illegitimately elected National Constituent Assembly (which Canada does not recognize) has usurped the rights of Venezuela's democratic institutions and violated the human rights of its citizens, who are experiencing hunger and the deliberate denial of medical supplies to treat the sick. Never have the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights in Venezuela been more important.

Accordingly and pursuant to Rule 12-24. (3) of the Senate, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the recommendations made in the Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, entitled *The Deepening Crisis in Venezuela: Canadian and Regional Stakes*.

The views that were shared with the Committee by witnesses during the hearings, as well as the analysis contained in the report, are very closely aligned with the Government of Canada's evaluation of and approach to the crisis. I welcome your affirmation that Canada is well positioned to play a leading role in addressing this crisis, and agree that the crisis runs the risk of impacting many of our neighbours in the region. As a champion of the values of inclusive and accountable governance and the promotion of human rights, Canada has a moral obligation to defend democracy and the rule of law, especially when these rights are at risk in our hemisphere.

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The enclosed response describes Canada's multipronged strategy to help address on an urgent basis the political and economic situation in Venezuela and resulting humanitarian needs. The government's overarching goal is to support a return to democratic and constitutional order, while lessening the impacts of the crisis on the people of Venezuela. The response includes Canada's high-profile communications approach, which has included multiple strong statements on the unfolding situation, issued at the ministerial and prime ministerial level. These are complemented by messaging shared on the widely followed social media accounts of Canada's Embassy in Caracas and Global Affairs Canada. Canada's ongoing advocacy within the Organization of American States and within the Lima Group has also sought to ensure that the Maduro regime cannot withhold the rights of its citizens with impunity. Coordinating our actions and messages with those of regional partners, as well as those outside of the hemisphere, such as members of the European Union, is important to maintaining international pressure on the Maduro regime to bring about the peaceful restoration of democracy in Venezuela.

The government's imposition of targeted sanctions under the *Special Economic Measures Act* and under the *Justice for Victims of Corruption of Foreign Officials Act* sends a strong signal in support of human rights, democracy and anticorruption efforts. At the same time, \$810,000 in humanitarian support has been allocated through humanitarian partners to help respond to the most pressing needs of the Venezuelan people. This is augmented by targeted programming at Canada's Embassy in Caracas, which is focussed on strengthening civil society efforts to promote human rights, including the right to health, as well as support to Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers in neighbouring countries.

Once again, I wish to express my gratitude for the work of the Committee in presenting this report. Please find enclosed a copy of the Government's response to the recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Freeland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.

Enclosure

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE JULY 2017 REPORT OF THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE: THE DEEPENING CRISIS IN VENEZUELA: CANADIAN AND REGIONAL STAKES

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Canada is pleased to respond to the July 2017 Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (AEFA or “the Committee”), entitled *The Deepening Crisis in Venezuela: Canadian and Regional Stakes*.

The Government appreciates the work of the Committee and welcomes the consultation process it has undertaken, as well as the ensuing analysis and recommendations. The Government has carefully reviewed the Committee’s report and recommendations and welcomes the opportunity to provide a response along the following three themes:

- Increased pressure on the Maduro regime
- Support for the Venezuelan population
- Contribution to meaningful negotiations

The Government would like to thank the Committee for its report, for its continued interest in the crisis and its impact on the people of Venezuela, and for its work to ensure that Canada’s response to the situation is robust and effective, and aligned with our foreign policy priorities.

Despite increasing international condemnation of the deteriorating situation in Venezuela, concerted action by regional partners via the Lima Group, efforts by the Dominican Republic to facilitate talks between the government and opposition (“Santo Domingo process”), as well as targeted sanctions by Canada, the US and the EU, the prospects for a resolution to the situation in the short-term are not currently evident.

It is clear that the only path forward is through meaningful negotiations and Canada is well positioned to continue to take a leadership role in supporting such an approach. This opportunity aligns with our foreign policy priorities and is an outgrowth of our desire to positively impact key challenges facing our region. Our hemispheric partners are looking to Canada to take the lead given our unique profile as an honest broker without any legacy of interventionist policies, as well as Canada’s ability to act as a bridge to the Caribbean, the US and other extra-regional partners such as the EU.

CONTEXT

Political Situation

The dismantling of Venezuela’s democracy hit a critical point in July 2017 when, following months of deadly protests, the ruling party of Nicolas Maduro consolidated its power with the “election” of a National Constituent Assembly (ANC). The election of this body took place

without the constitutionally required referendum allowing the Venezuelan people to decide on whether it should be established. This new body stripped the democratically elected National Assembly of all meaningful law making powers and is rewriting the constitution. Canada and other Lima Group members have rejected its legitimacy, and have pledged not to recognize any decisions coming out of the ANC.

Regional elections held on October 15, 2017, and municipal elections on December 10, 2017, were plagued with voting irregularities and social coercion tactics. Many opposition representatives abstained and the government claimed overwhelming victory in both. Varied perspectives among opposition members on whether to take part in these elections have deepened divisions in the coalition, making it increasingly difficult for meaningful negotiation to take place.

On January 23, the ANC called for presidential elections to be held before April 30, 2018, far ahead of the July date being discussed in the Santo Domingo dialogue process. This date makes it virtually impossible to allow for the institutional changes needed to ensure the vote is free and fair.

Economic Situation

The Maduro regime is locked into a series of political and economic policies that will inevitably lead to a continued deterioration of Venezuela's socio-economic fabric and a deepening of the ongoing crisis. With petroleum exports accounting for more than 95 percent of the country's export revenue and some \$150 billion USD in debt—\$60 billion USD in bonds—Venezuela is reliant upon the international financial system to conduct its business. As such, it is absolutely imperative for Venezuela to continue to meet its international debt obligations. To accomplish this, Venezuela has run down its international currency reserves to historic lows, and imports have been reduced in an effort to free up foreign exchange to meet debt payments to bond holders. In early November, Russia announced possible terms of restructuring a total of \$3 billion of Venezuela's debt, including a postponement of debt repayment. Nevertheless, on November 16, the International Swaps and Derivatives Association (ISDA) announced that Venezuela had defaulted on the payment of their debt. This risks putting even greater pressure on an already dire humanitarian situation by further reducing the country's ability to export oil and generate the foreign reserves required for food and medical imports. Even after the country officially entered a hyperinflationary state in November, the Government continued to print new money. Venezuela saw a 12 month inflationary rate of over 1700 percent in 2017.

China has been an indispensable source of financing for the regime, but may be losing patience. In a lawsuit filed in a Houston federal court in November 2017, an American subsidiary of China's Sinopec sought more than \$23 million in damages from PDVSA. Sinopec alleged it never received full payment for 45,000 tons of steel rebar it agreed to sell PDVSA for \$43 million and which was delivered in 2013. On December 11, a settlement was reached in which PDVSA agreed to repay Sinopec \$21.5 million, but this action demonstrates that China has essentially entered a phase of greater caution and growing frustration. Provision of any new financing is considered to be highly unlikely.

Humanitarian Situation

Limited access for humanitarian partners seeking to enter the country to obtain reliable and current data on humanitarian needs has made gathering this information challenging. However, according to trusted sources that have conducted localized or partial needs assessments, it is estimated that malnutrition cases have doubled since 2016, and child malnutrition has reached 11.4% (equivalent to a state of crisis, according to global standards). Child acute malnutrition has reached 8% in some of the most affected areas. Infant mortality has increased by 30% and maternal mortality by 66% from 2015 to 2016. Food costs have increased by 343% in the last year. Venezuelans need 5 times the minimum wage to acquire a basic food basket. The primary school dropout rate has increased by 45%. Some 71% of hospitals have now closed due to the lack of basic working supplies (there is a 90% shortage of medical supplies and medicines). Venezuela is now short of 190 different types of medicines, including anti-retrovirals to treat chronic diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Diseases like malaria, thought to have been eradicated until 2014, have increased by 76%, and there have also been 17 fatal cases of diphtheria, which had previously been eradicated in the country.

Migration and Displacement

The crisis in Venezuela has begun to spill across its borders and has the potential to worsen significantly. Although the border is porous, and statistics difficult to come by, the rate of Venezuelans leaving the country via legal and illegal channels accelerated in 2017 as Venezuelans sought food, medicine and employment outside of their country. The number of asylum applications by Venezuelans in 2017 has soared to nearly 50,000 (compared to 27,000 in 2016) according to the Office of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The main countries of destination for Venezuelan asylum seekers this year have been the United States (18,300) and Brazil (12,960). However, many don't register formally as asylum seekers; therefore these figures only represent a fraction of the population which has migrated in search of safety or economic opportunity. The UNHCR estimates that, as of July 2017, there are 300,000 Venezuelans currently residing in Colombia, 40,000 in Trinidad and Tobago and 30,000 in Brazil. Although some Venezuelans living in these countries have been issued temporary residence permits, many choose to remain in an irregular situation due to bureaucratic obstacles—a situation that leaves many exposed to recruitment by illegal armed groups or criminal networks. Many are also at risk of labour exploitation, prostitution or sexual violence.

INCREASED PRESSURE ON THE MADURO REGIME

This theme addresses Recommendations 1, 7, 9, 10

Recommendation 1: The Committee believes that Canada, as “a country of the Americas” has tremendous stakes in a favourable outcome to the Venezuelan crisis. Moreover, its deepening network of ties with key countries in the region, its profile in the Organization of American States (OAS) and its commitment to the promotion of democratic values, the rule of law and human rights offer a number of opportunities for Canada to play a leadership role in the Hemisphere.

Recommendation 7: The Committee calls on President Maduro to exercise the full authority of his office in a positive manner that respects the rights and responsibilities of Venezuela's citizens, in particular its elected representatives and judicial officers. The key elements of the measures required include the provision of humanitarian assistance based on the findings of needs assessment missions that are undertaken by recognized humanitarian organizations; the release of political prisoners; as well as a mutually-agreed electoral calendar and the restoration of Venezuela's constitutional order that reflect the country's international obligations to uphold democratic principles.

Recommendation 9: The Committee believes that, as the positions of key states in the region continue to evolve, Canada can play an important leadership role in sustaining the momentum of recent initiatives that aim to benefit the Venezuelan people. In particular, it encourages the Government of Canada to leverage its network of bilateral and regional ties within the framework of the OAS and other institutions. These include partnerships with like-minded countries such as Mexico and Argentina, whose recent regional initiatives align with Canada's priorities to strengthen engagement with both of them on various platforms, including within the OAS.

Recommendation 10: The Committee also encourages the Government of Canada to leverage regional ties with countries of the CariCom, many of whom share with Canada a democratic tradition sustained through the values of the Commonwealth. To this end, the Committee also encourages the Government of Canada to consider lessons learned from other political crises in the Americas or elsewhere, and the value of finding creative incentives in order to generate a positive outcome in the case of Venezuela.

The Government of Canada has refused to stand by silently as the Maduro regime robs its people of their rights and will continue to use its leadership role to work with like-minded partners on concerted and coordinated action to address the crisis.

Communications

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister have repeatedly delivered forceful messages in ministerial statements and via social media. Some 20 ministerial statements have been issued since March 2017, along with 16 multilateral statements and declarations since June 2016. Canada's ongoing advocacy within the Organization of American States and the Lima Group has resulted in these multilateral communications products. Through statements, social media, the department's Venezuela crisis webpage, as well as multilateral and face-to-face meetings, the Government has criticized the Venezuelan government's harassment and imprisonment of political opponents, recognizing that restoring respect for democratic rule in Venezuela is fundamental to guaranteeing respect for human rights, and security and prosperity for all Venezuelan citizens. Canada has been swift in condemning the Maduro regime's actions to strip the democratically elected National Assembly of its lawmaking power and has loudly supported the Venezuelan people's right to have their voices heard through their elected representatives.

OAS

Canada has been among the most active countries working through the OAS to maintain pressure for a credible dialogue to address Venezuela's deteriorating political, economic and humanitarian situation. The OAS Permanent Council (PC) has been increasingly seized of the situation in Venezuela over the last year. In November 2016, the OAS PC adopted a declaration supporting the establishment of a Vatican-mediated dialogue between Venezuela's government and opposition, recognizing the commitment of both parties to peaceful, respectful and constructive coexistence and encouraging both sides to achieve concrete results to end the difficult situation facing the country. Following the Venezuelan Supreme Court's contentious ruling on March 31 that it was taking over the powers of the democratically elected National Assembly, the OAS Permanent Council adopted on April 3rd a resolution (co-sponsored by Canada, Colombia and others), determining that there had been "an alteration of the constitutional order" in Venezuela.

At the request of the OAS PC, the Organization convened on May 31 a Consultative Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the situation in Venezuela, which resumed on the margins of OAS General Assembly in Cancun on June 19. Minister Freeland represented Canada and played a key role in building support for the achievement of a consolidated position seeking a return to democratic order in Venezuela. Canada was integral in developing a draft declaration calling for: the cessation of violence; respect for human rights and the rule of law; a halt to the National Constituent Assembly as currently formulated; the release of political prisoners; the reestablishment of an electoral calendar; and for the Maduro regime to formally request international humanitarian assistance. Ultimately, the meeting could not reconcile member states' views, despite Canada and its like-minded partners' efforts, into a consolidated OAS position outlining a way forward and member states failed to reach consensus.

Canada and a broad group of like-minded OAS Member States have repeatedly called on the Venezuelan Government to adhere to the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. In June 2016, 15 OAS Member States, including Canada, issued a communiqué that called for dialogue between the Government and the Opposition, and condemned all acts of violence. In August 2016, the same group issued another communiqué requesting the Maduro regime take all necessary steps to hold a recall referendum, as permitted under Venezuela's constitution. A communiqué issued by the Group followed the March 2017 report by OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, calling for the Maduro Government to ensure that free and fair elections take place in 2018 or face suspension, as well as to address as a matter of priority the release of political prisoners. The group issued a Declaration on the situation in Venezuela this past July reiterating their concern for the serious alteration of the democratic order in Venezuela and calling for the creation of a facilitation mechanism to support a process of dialogue.

In addition, the Government of Canada has supported the appointment of prominent Canadian human rights defender, Irwin Cotler, to an OAS panel of independent international experts that is examining evidence on possible crimes against humanity in Venezuela, with a view to bringing these before the International Criminal Court should the evidence support this course.

Lima Group

In addition to actively engaging within the OAS to generate consensus on the need to act, Canada has also joined with hemispheric partners through the Lima Group—an *ad hoc* group of 12 likeminded regional countries, such as Mexico and Argentina, that has focussed on coordinating a concrete response to the crisis since it first met in Peru in August 2017. The first Lima Declaration, issued on August 8, 2017, has built international momentum that has exceeded expectations. Canada is committed to keeping up this momentum, and hosted the group's third meeting in Toronto on October 26. Canada's hosting of the third meeting of the Lima Group in Toronto allowed us to push concrete actions and strong calls for improvements in specific areas, such as election observation and humanitarian access. Canada and other members of the Lima Group recognize the importance of coordinating that body's efforts with those of the OAS. Given Canada's important role in both the OAS and the Lima Group, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs took on the role of sending a letter to OAS Secretary Luis Almagro on behalf of the Lima Group, outlining the importance of a coordinated approach.

The Lima Group's Toronto declaration denounced both the egregious voting manipulations by the government and called upon the political opposition to maintain its unity, with a common platform, as an essential condition to reaching a peaceful solution. The declaration also condemned the Venezuelan Government's rejection of humanitarian aid, and called for the United Nations and its Secretary-General to address both the humanitarian crisis and ongoing human rights violations. On October 30, Minister of Foreign Affairs Freeland and her Peruvian counterpart travelled to New York to meet with UNSG Guterres where they pressed for greater UN involvement. UNSG Guterres welcomed efforts from Canada and Peru to explore ways to provide humanitarian assistance in Venezuela. He remained cautious given the considerable constraints facing the UN system in providing such assistance to the most vulnerable Venezuelans given that the Maduro regime continues to formally refuse the provision of humanitarian assistance in the country. UNSG Guterres did not indicate any new opportunities for UN agencies to provide additional humanitarian assistance in Venezuela in the short term.

Lima Group participants also agreed that membership should be widened to include countries from the Caribbean, and the Government of Canada encouraged all countries that participated in the Toronto Lima Group meeting (Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Guyana) to sign the Toronto declaration of October 26 as a key step toward wider Caribbean engagement.

Recognizing the important role that Canada can play as a bridge between the Lima Group and the Caribbean, Canada has committed to engage proactively with Caribbean states, particularly those of CARICOM. Most of the CARICOM Member States are energy poor and many are highly indebted. Many of their economies have come to rely upon Venezuela's PetroCaribe program, receiving subsidized oil shipments, and this no doubt influences their perspective on the Venezuela situation (along with other specific bilateral issues and regional dynamics). While CARICOM had offered to play a mediation role between the Venezuelan government and the opposition, this offer was not taken up. CARICOM displayed outward solidarity with the Maduro regime in a July 2017 statement calling for non-interference in the internal affairs of Venezuela, but several individual Member States have expressed their concern over the situation and have supported international efforts to address it, to varying degrees.

In the aftermath of failed efforts to bring CARICOM on board at the OAS, Canada's outreach to the Caribbean has focused on engaging these like-minded states in particular, to encourage them to 1) attend the Lima Group Meetings, 2) sign the Lima Group Declarations, 3) influence other CARICOM Member States to consider doing so, and, 4) influence CARICOM as an organization to consider playing a more active and constructive role. Such messaging has been conveyed at the highest levels, including by Prime Minister Trudeau to Caribbean Leaders with whom he has met, by Minister Freeland during telephone calls to and meetings with regional Foreign Ministers, and by senior officials during visits to the region and through telephone calls, by Heads of Mission at the highest levels of government, and in messaging during remarks at national days and other events in Ottawa. Canada's engagement with the Caribbean seeks to address some of their economic concerns, thereby potentially reducing their dependence on fossil fuels, which have encouraged those states to maintain a position of solidarity with the Venezuelan Government. Working to assist the region in post-hurricane reconstruction and in longer term climate-resilience, including through developing renewable energy, is a Government of Canada priority for this region.

Canada also played an important role in the fourth Lima Group meeting held in Santiago, Chile on January 23, 2018, where Santa Lucia and Guyana joined for the first time as signatories to the declaration. Canada also pushed for strong language in the declaration that included a rejection of Maduro regime's presidential election call, concern regarding possible extrajudicial killings, and deploring of the regime's ongoing denial of the humanitarian crisis.

Human Rights Council

Canada has been consistently vocal about human rights violations in Venezuela, including at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The September 2017 general debate was no exception. In its national statement, Canada expressed grave concern with the drastic increase in violations of human rights in Venezuela. We strongly urged the Venezuelan Government to restore the powers of the elected National Assembly, as well as the freedom of its citizens and media to express views without fear of reprisals. At the Arms Trade Treaty Third Conference of the Parties, also held in Geneva in September, Mexico highlighted on behalf of Lima Group countries, including Canada, the human rights and security situation in Venezuela. Consistent with the Lima Group's August declaration, it called on States Parties not to transfer arms to Venezuela until democracy has been restored.

Sanctions

In addition to advocacy and diplomacy, the Government of Canada has used targeted sanctions to maintain pressure on the Venezuelan government. On September 5, 2017, Canada and the United States formed an association to address the situation in Venezuela. Understanding that individual country's efforts can be enhanced through coordination, at its inaugural meeting, the association called upon its members to take economic measures against Venezuela and persons responsible for the current situation in order to in an effort to further pressure the Maduro regime to engage in meaningful negotiation. On September 22, Canada imposed targeted sanctions under the *Special Economic Measures Act* against 40 Venezuelan officials and individuals who

have played a key role in undermining the security, stability and integrity of democratic institutions of Venezuela. On November 3, 2017, Canada imposed a second round of sanctions under the new *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act* on Venezuelan individuals responsible for, or complicit, in gross violations of internationally-recognized human rights and acts of significant corruption.

International pressure on the Maduro regime continues to grow. On November 9, the US imposed new targeted sanctions on 10 individuals, of which five have already been sanctioned by Canada; these include asset freezes and a ban on doing business with US citizens. This is a positive step toward maintaining the pressure on the Maduro regime. After the European Union agreed on November 13 to impose an arms embargo and create a framework for a travel ban and asset freeze on Minister Freeland encouraged the swift naming of targeted officials in meetings with her EU counterparts. On January 22, the EU approved a list of seven individuals to be targeted with sanctions.

SUPPORT FOR THE VENEZUELAN POPULATION

This theme addresses recommendations 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the Committee's report

Recommendation 2: The Committee underscores the importance of the Government of Canada undertaking a leadership role in addressing Venezuela's humanitarian crisis and ensuring that humanitarian assistance is delivered to those most in need.

Recommendation 3: The Committee urges the Government of Canada to continue supporting projects from the Canadian embassy's Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) that focus on capacity-building of Venezuelan non-governmental organizations engaged in health and social welfare.

Recommendation 4: Committee calls on the Government of Canada to prioritize regional efforts to engage with President Maduro with the aim of allowing in the near future a humanitarian needs assessment mission to be carried out by recognized international humanitarian groups, as well as to ensure the full, safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and humanitarian assistance in accordance with international standards.

Recommendation 5: Committee also urges the Canadian government to strengthen its support of international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the relevant United Nations specialized agencies, that are prepared to offer humanitarian assistance to Venezuela on the invitation of its government.

Venezuela is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis without the traditional means of international assistance needed to respond.

Humanitarian Assistance

Since the onset of the crisis, Global Affairs Canada has been in regular contact with experienced humanitarian partners to identify programming options to provide assistance to vulnerable crisis-

affected people in Venezuela. The current crisis, which is largely attributed to the continued political unrest and deteriorating economic context in Venezuela, is impacting access to basic amenities, including food and health services, leaving segments of the population with significant humanitarian needs. The failure of the regime to recognize the existence of humanitarian needs in the country and limited access for international humanitarian organizations to conduct credible and independent needs assessment are hindering the possibility of increasing the humanitarian response to address the needs of the most vulnerable crisis-affected people.

Canada is currently supporting a limited number of organizations with an operational presence in Venezuela to address the most pressing needs of people affected by the crisis, including access to health services, nutrition and food supplements. On October 26, 2017, the government announced the allocation of \$310,000 to our humanitarian partners to address these pressing needs, including access to health services, nutrition and food supplements, and on January 23, an additional \$500,000 in humanitarian aid was announced to provide emergency medical aid and medicines to Venezuelans affected by the crisis.

The Government is also cognisant of the detrimental humanitarian impact the Venezuelan crisis can have on the region, including population displacement in neighbouring countries. Canada continues to monitor the situation and to explore additional options to support humanitarian partners able to respond to the needs of people affected by the crisis in Venezuela and the region.

Humanitarian organizations require the consent of domestic authorities to allow them to conduct a thorough needs assessment in Venezuela. This would be the first step to enable a scalable humanitarian response. These organizations would then require full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access, allowing them to deliver assistance in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Canada has repeatedly called on the Maduro regime to allow this access and has engaged partners who may have influence with the regime to encourage them to do the same.

Just as Canada ensures all of its actions with respect to the Maduro regime take into account their potential impact on staff of the Canadian Embassy in Caracas, it considers their impact on humanitarian access by humanitarian partners. Action taken to increase pressure against the Maduro regime may also impact the already limited programming options to provide humanitarian assistance in Venezuela. Canada supports principled and needs-based humanitarian action and, by respecting humanitarian principles, partners can more effectively gain acceptance by relevant actors on the ground. This acceptance is critical to ensure humanitarian personnel have safe and sustained access to respond to the humanitarian needs of crisis-affected people and reach the most vulnerable.

Canada maintains strong relationships with its experienced humanitarian partners including the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations working in developing countries. Global Affairs Canada is in regular contact with these humanitarian partners to identify additional humanitarian programming options in order to respond to the needs of crisis-affected people in Venezuela and the region. Canada stands ready to respond to emergency appeals from its humanitarian partners to build on our existing

contributions and to address needs arising from the Venezuela crisis, as appropriate and will continue to advocate for the Maduro regime to allow access to aid.

The declaration issued following the Toronto Lima Group meeting focussed on the need to help address the humanitarian needs resulting from this crisis. As a follow up, on October 30, Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland and her Peruvian counterpart travelled to New York to meet with UNSG Guterres where they pressed for greater UN involvement.

Canada Fund for Local Initiatives

Canada's Embassy in Caracas also uses some of its \$150,000 in annual CFLI funding to strengthen civil society in the areas of promoting human rights and democratic governance. However, given the severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Venezuela, the Embassy has actively encouraged health-related civil society organizations to apply for funding, and is currently using its CFLI to strengthen a local non-governmental organization's capacity to deliver the humanitarian aid it has been channeling to Venezuelans. Project partners have been using the funding support to assist them in: investigating cases of violations of the right to healthcare in the country's interior region; offering legal assistance in cases where the right to healthcare has been breached; offering training to other NGOs on the right to healthcare and data systematization; and developing social media content linked to promoting the right to healthcare; and the donation of medical and food products. CFLI support is also helping the organization to map national and international actors involved in humanitarian assistance to Venezuela to ensure needs are well understood and responses are effectively channelled. This mapping system will be of use to Canada and other like-minded countries to identify sources of support outside of Venezuela that could be amplified.

In addition, in light of the fact that the crisis can be felt beyond Venezuela's borders, Canada's Embassy in Brazil is directing approximately \$35,000 in CFLI funding to improve health and education services provided to the 480 Venezuelans sheltered at the Immigrant Reference Center in Boa Vista, Brazil.

Canada is also closely monitoring the situation along the Colombian border. This area has traditionally seen substantial migration flows but with the dire economic situation in Venezuela, the situation has been rapidly deteriorating. A considerable increase in migrants could pose substantial challenges for the Colombian government. The Government of Canada continues to discuss the situation with Colombian counterparts, at bilateral and multilateral meetings (such as the Lima Group) to determine where it can best play a supportive role.

CONTRIBUTION TO MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS

This theme addresses recommendations 6, 8 and 11.

Recommendation 6: With a view to Venezuela's return to democracy, rule of law, stability and prosperity, the Committee reiterates its encouragement of Venezuela's government and opposition leaders, as well as all regional and international stakeholders, to undertake

meaningful and constructive measures that fundamentally improve the political, economic and humanitarian conditions in the country.

Recommendation 8: The Committee urges all parties in the crisis to respect Venezuela's political institutions and fulfill the country's international commitments related to democratic processes, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. It also calls on them to refrain from using violence and politicizing democratic and legal processes. The Committee underscores the urgency of these efforts given the deepening political, economic and humanitarian crisis facing the Venezuelan people.

Recommendation 11: The Committee urges parliamentarians in the Senate of Canada and the House of Commons to consider a joint initiative that promotes confidence-building and mediation among the key stakeholders in the Venezuelan crisis.

The Government of Canada supports the Committee's proposal for Canadian Parliamentarians to play a constructive role in addressing the crisis in Venezuela. The Venezuelan opposition's preconditions for a negotiation with the government have consistently been: better electoral conditions; a humanitarian channel; the release of political prisoners; and the restitution of the National Assembly's constitutional powers. The Government of Canada's messaging has consistently underscored the need for the Maduro regime to create the necessary conditions for successful negotiations, including: the release of all political prisoners; recognition of the supremacy of the democratically elected National Assembly; a reconstitution of an arm's-length National Electoral Council with a clear timetable for free and fair elections; and, the facilitation of external humanitarian assistance. Where appropriate, Canada's messaging has been coordinated with like-minded partners.

Regional Support for Negotiations (Lima Group)

The Government of Canada has consistently maintained that there can be no solution that is not rooted in meaningful negotiation, underlining the need for all parties to do their part - to refrain from violence and respect the rule of law and democratic processes. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and her counterparts in the Lima Group have strongly emphasized the need for the Maduro regime to create the necessary conditions for successful negotiations such as the release of all political prisoners and the establishment of a channel for international humanitarian aid to help respond to the urgent needs of vulnerable populations. At the same time, Lima Group members have called for the political opposition to maintain its unity, with a common platform, as an essential condition to reaching a peaceful solution. This has been reflected in Lima Group declarations, which reaffirmed members' support of the democratically elected National Assembly. It also called for the National Assembly to be allowed to appoint members to the national electoral council in order to urgently renew the body's important role in holding free and fair elections, as well as calling for the issuance of a new electoral calendar (which should be overseen by independent electoral observers). The declaration highlights that these actions are fundamental to ending the crisis. In addition, it states that a negotiated agreement between both parties is the only peaceful solution to the current crisis, and reiterates members' willingness to support all efforts of credible negotiations. Finally, the declaration urges the various opposition

groups to maintain their unity, with a common platform, as an essential condition to reaching a solution to the crisis in Venezuela.

Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT)

Along with consistent promotion of a mediated solution to the crisis, Canada has been directly supporting the work of civil society to make tangible progress in this regard. Through the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program (PSOPs) the Government of Canada has been supporting the work of Barcelona-based Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT) in Venezuela with \$203,000 in funding in the 2017-18 fiscal year. IFIT is a highly respected non-governmental organisation dedicated to helping fragile and conflict-affected states achieve more inclusive and sustainable transitions out of war or authoritarianism. It has worked on challenging mediation efforts around the world, including for the Colombia peace process. With support from Canada and Norway, IFIT has created a Venezuela Experts Group aimed at developing options for a “Negotiated Mediated Settlement.” The Experts Group, made up of representatives from across Venezuela’s political spectrum as well as civil society is doing effective, low-profile work to help build the conditions and framework for effective negotiations to take place.

Attempts at dialogue between the Venezuelan government and the opposition coalition, MUD, have been taking place in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic since fall 2017, but following the Maduro regime’s call for presidential elections to take place by the end of August, the talks may well be dead. Mexico – a guarantor country for the opposition—pulled out immediately. Chile the other opposition guarantor, announced it would reconsider its participation, as did prominent opposition negotiators.

Embassy of Canada Programming

The Canadian Embassy in Caracas further supports domestic efforts to restore democracy and resolve the crisis by using CFLI funding to support democratic coexistence in vulnerable communities and building understanding between civil society and political actors. Much of its \$150,000 in annual program funds are used to create space for human rights defenders with a focus on justice, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as well as the right to health and access to food (see above).

Support for an NGO working on promoting peaceful coexistence in vulnerable communities is another example of the grassroots assistance the Embassy is able to provide with its programming. The social fabric and community leadership of Venezuela’s most at-risk communities has deteriorated significantly over the last ten years. It leaves these communities without the tools and support network they need to withstand the socioeconomic aspects of the crisis and to fight for a better future. CFLI funding is helping a well-recognized local NGO identify the communities’ main needs and develop local responses through collaboration and community leadership. The project includes an assessment of the main social, economic and political problems faced in each community, and the holding of local meetings to draft community-based actions plans to address the problems identified. Results are disseminated to citizens. This project is the second phase of a CFLI project developed last year with the same organization. The first phase established a network of 200 community leaders in Southwest

Caracas. This second phase will empower that network with the capacity to engage all their neighbours in the dynamic of identifying solutions for their local needs. Overall, the project will result in increasing the capacity of communities in Southwest Caracas to be more connected, resilient and responsive to local needs in the phase of increasingly dire circumstances.

Yet another CFLI project is allowing a local NGO to build understanding between Venezuelan civil society and political actors in what is a highly polarized Venezuelan society. It brings civil society leaders and political actors together to promote the setting up of agendas of understanding in five priority areas: (i) governance, (ii) democracy, elections and institutions, (iii) political economy and development, (iv) justice and security; and (v) life conditions of Venezuelans. While it is still underway, the project will include: the creation of ten social media videos to promote the importance of agendas of understanding; an awareness-raising forum on the importance of a negotiated solution; five themed meetings in the prioritized areas to produce five different working papers that aim to articulate how each prioritized theme can be effectively addressed by civil society and political actors together or separately; as well as forums in the capital and the regions to present the results of the themed meetings.

Other CFLI programming includes support for a local NGO documenting the risks to journalists and freedom of expression in Venezuela, in order to provide important statistical evidence to the national and international community on the worsening condition of basic freedoms in the country.

Finally, Canada's annual Human Rights Award, which is co-sponsored with the Central University of Venezuela, is supported through this programming. The award was presented for the first time in 2009 and has since become one of the most prestigious in Venezuela. Each year the recipient has travelled to Canada and met with Canadian Parliamentarians to share experiences and build ties with members. The 2018 award is expected to be announced early in January or February.

Canada will continue to take a leadership role with like-minded and other international partners to support the people of Venezuela and to pressure the Maduro regime to work towards creating the conditions for meaningful negotiations. The Government will do so through: strong public messaging and programming to address the human rights situation and deterioration of democracy; continued targeted advocacy (including by seeking to expand the Lima Group); consideration of future targeted sanctions and encouragement of other countries to impose sanctions; and working with partners toward strategic approaches at future Lima Group meetings and the Summit of the Americas in April. The full restoration of democracy in Venezuela is important to the entire hemisphere and Canada will remain actively engaged on this issue.

Engagement with Canadian Civil Society

On December 11, 2017, Parliamentary Secretary Matt DeCoursey, Michael Levitt (MP for York Centre), and Irwin Cotler from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights hosted a civil society roundtable on Venezuela to help inform Canada's strategy. The gathering brought together a variety of NGOs and academics, including: the Canada Venezuela Democracy Forum, the Canadian Council for the Americas, ParlAmericas, the Human Rights Research and

Education Centre at the University of Ottawa, the Parliamentary Centre, Amnesty International, and the International Council Of Aids Service Organizations. It also included a representative of *Soy Venezuela*, a small coalition of opposition groups in Venezuela. Participants shared their perspectives as well as recommendations for action—in particular, their ideas for supporting Venezuelan civil society and human rights defenders. This meeting followed up on an October 25, 2017 civil society roundtable that discussed the ongoing political and economic crisis in Venezuela. The Government has committed to continue this engagement in 2018, with another roundtable taking place early in the year. The input to date has been valuable and has helped to inform Canada's voice in other fora, such as the Lima Group.