



# PERSPECTIVES ON THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA

REPORT OF THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE  
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Honourable Raynell Andreychuk, Chair  
The Honourable Percy E. Downe, Deputy Chair

June 2016



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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

[www.senate-senat.ca/AEFA.asp](http://www.senate-senat.ca/AEFA.asp).

Information regarding the committee can be obtained through its web site:

[www.senate-senat.ca/AEFA.asp](http://www.senate-senat.ca/AEFA.asp).

**MEMBERS**

The Honourable Raynell Andreychuk, Chair  
The Honourable Percy E. Downe, Deputy Chair

and

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan  
The Honourable Jane Cordy  
The Honourable Dennis Dawson  
The Honourable Leo Housakos  
The Honourable Janis G. Johnson  
The Honourable Thanh Hai Ngo  
The Honourable Victor Oh  
The Honourable Rose-May Poirier  
The Honourable Michel Rivard

*Ex-officio members of the Committee:*

The Honourable Senator Peter Harder, P.C., (or Diane Bellemare)  
The Honourable Senator Claude Carignan, P.C., (or Yonah Martin)

*Other Senators who have participated in the study:*

The Honourable Senators Lynn Beyak and David P. Smith, P.C. (Retired)

*Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament:*

Natalie Mychajlyszyn and Pascal Tremblay, Analysts

*Clerk of the Committee:*

Danielle Labonté

**ORDER OF REFERENCE**

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate*, Wednesday, January 27, 2016:

The Honourable Senator Andreychuk moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Tkachuk:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, in accordance with rule 12-7(4), be authorized to examine such issues as may arise from time to time relating to foreign relations and international trade generally; and

That the committee report to the Senate no later than June 30, 2017.

After debate,

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

*Clerk of the Senate*

Charles Robert

**The Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade** (the “Committee”) heard testimony on 11 May 2016 from several members of the National Assembly of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela about the political situation and growing economic crisis in that country. It also heard testimony from officials from Global Affairs Canada about Canada’s bilateral relations with Venezuela. This meeting conformed with the Committee’s periodic review of developments in Venezuela, notably regarding the serious economic challenges facing the country and the ongoing plight of political opponents.<sup>1</sup>

The National Assembly members who appeared before the Committee were elected in the most recent parliamentary elections held in December 2015. They represent those opposition political parties that won a legislative majority over pro-government parties. The National Assembly is now attempting to put in place wide-ranging political and economic reforms in Venezuela, but faces considerable judicial and government obstruction. In this respect, the Committee is sensitive to the fact that President Nicolás Maduro currently retains sufficient political influence to thwart the National Assembly’s reform efforts either directly or indirectly via the government-controlled judicial system. For instance, the witnesses testified about a recently adopted Amnesty and Reconciliation Law intended to offer amnesty for 77 politicians, students and military officers, many of whom were jailed following the violent February 2014 anti-government protests; however, the Supreme Court overturned the law as unconstitutional. In fact, since December 2015, the Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled many of the National Assembly’s laws as unconstitutional.

The Committee was informed of how the ongoing political strife in Venezuela is hampering efforts to address the country’s increasingly fragile economy, including triple digit inflation that is forecast to reach over 2000% within the next twelve months. For example, the National Assembly’s law to reform the Central Bank in order to address the inflation crisis was reversed by the Supreme Court. The Venezuelan legislators appearing before the Committee emphasized that the political situation needs to be resolved urgently to overcome the country’s economic crisis resulting in part from the decline in global oil prices and the loss of Venezuela’s status as the region’s key oil supplier. Without a political resolution, shortages of food, electricity and basic medicines will become more acute, severely debilitating the health and welfare of the Venezuelan people.

The Committee heard testimony from Global Affairs Canada officials about the Government of Canada’s response to the state of affairs in Venezuela and its emphasis on a meaningful dialogue between the Government of Venezuela and its National Assembly. It also heard about the

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<sup>1</sup> [Evidence](#), Second Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, Issue No. 10.

opportunities Canada takes at various fora to raise awareness about human rights abuses in the country, such as at meetings of the Organization of American States. GAC officials also reported on its unsuccessful efforts to visit political prisoners in Venezuela, such as opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez who was found guilty and sentenced to 13 years in prison for inciting violence during the 2014 anti-government protests.

Accordingly, to avoid a further deterioration of the status quo in Venezuela, the Committee encourages all branches of the Venezuelan political system to undertake dialogue and to reach a compromise on responsible, effective governance for the benefit of the Venezuelan people. The Committee emphasizes the importance of the rule of law in democratic societies. It underscores that any country that imprisons political opponents or politicizes its judicial process undermines democratic principles and the trust of its people. The Committee reiterates the need to release all political prisoners, including Leopoldo Lopez. It also calls upon the Government of Canada to continue its engagement with the Venezuelan government and all relevant stakeholders.

The Committee is grateful to Luis Florido, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly of Venezuela, his colleagues Williams Davila and Luis Emilio Rondon Hernandez, as well as Freddy Guevara, Chair of the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts for sharing their testimony and providing insights into the situation in Venezuela. The Committee appreciates the potential risks to the witnesses' human rights as a result of their public testimony and salutes their courage. The Committee will continue to welcome opportunities such as this hearing to keep apprised of developments in Venezuela, the challenges facing the Venezuelan people and the implications for the region.