

Venezuela: Human rights organizations call on UN Human Rights Council to extend and strengthen Fact-Finding Mission

Today, 85 national and international human rights organizations have launched a call on states at the UN Human Rights Council to renew and strengthen the important mandate of the [Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela](#) during the upcoming Council session in September. States should ensure that the Fact-Finding Mission has sufficient funding and is empowered to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyze evidence for future prosecutions or other accountability purposes, including international justice mechanisms, in order to avoid impunity for crimes under international law and gross human rights violations committed in Venezuela.

The Fact-Finding Mission was launched by the Human Rights Council through resolution 42/25 on September 27 of 2019, with a mandate to investigate human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment since 2014, with a view to ensuring accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims. Although the Mission was not allowed to enter Venezuela, it will present its report to the Human Rights Council in September 2020, when its current mandate ends.

The need for this international mechanism to continue to investigate and report on crimes under international law and human rights violations in Venezuela is clear in a context where they continue unabated, despite heightened international scrutiny, and impunity for these crimes at a national level is the rule.

Millions in Venezuela continue to suffer violations of the rights to life, freedom, physical and mental integrity or access to justice. The COVID-19 pandemic has only compounded and worsened the humanitarian emergency in the country, where many people face difficulties in accessing health care services, water, food, fuel, electricity and gas, all of which hamper their ability to protect themselves from the pandemic. More than 5.2 million Venezuelans have fled the country due to the human rights, humanitarian, political and economic crisis in their country. Meanwhile, the pandemic has also served as a twisted justification for Nicolás Maduro's government to continue and expand its crackdown on dissent, including health care workers and journalists.

These serious human rights violations and crimes under international law are facilitated by generalized impunity at the national level. As many organizations have reported, and a recent UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report has made clear, Venezuela's justice system lacks independence and systemically fails to provide impartial justice to victims of human rights violations. Instead, Maduro's administration is using it to criminalize and control the population.

The publication of the Fact-Finding Mission's first report in September will mark an important first step on the path to accountability in Venezuela through the documentation of the participation of those suspected of criminal responsibility. It is critical that the Human Rights Council respond meaningfully to the findings

and recommendations in the report. States need to ensure the full renewal and strengthening of the Fact-Finding Mission's mandate and make sure it has adequate resources to continue its critical investigations.

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