

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 259

Expressing concern and condemnation over the political, economic, social,
and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 6, 2017

Mr. DESANTIS (for himself, Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, Mr. McCAUL, Mr. CURBELO of Florida, Mr. YOHO, Mr. WEBER of Texas, Mr. BILIRAKIS, Mr. SIRES, and Mr. SMITH of New Jersey) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing concern and condemnation over the political,
economic, social, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

Whereas there is no separation of powers or independent institutions in Venezuela and President Maduro controls the Presidency, a majority of the municipalities, the Supreme Court, the military leadership, and the leadership of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA);

Whereas Venezuela's National Electoral Council postponed elections for governors and mayors scheduled for December 2016 and has not set a date to reschedule elections;

Whereas there have been several attempts at dialogue between President Maduro and the opposition over the past year, which have all failed to achieve results;

Whereas a political solution is the way to provide sustainable change for the Venezuelan people, but the dialogues up until now have helped provide Maduro a lifeline while his government is collapsing;

Whereas the Venezuelan government continues to silence its citizens through political arrests, with more than 100 political prisoners currently in jail, including opposition leader Leopoldo López;

Whereas Joshua Holt, a United States citizen, remains imprisoned in Venezuela awaiting a trial, with five postponed hearings to date;

Whereas police and military raids have led to widespread allegations of abuse, including extrajudicial killings, mass arbitrary detentions, torture in prisons, forced evictions, and arbitrary deportations;

Whereas Venezuela is immersed in a deep economic crisis, with the highest inflation in the world and current inflation estimated to top roughly 1,600 percent in 2017, according to the International Monetary Fund;

Whereas in July 2016, President Maduro handed over control of the food supply system to the military, which has enabled corruption, fraud, and food trafficking by the military contributing to food shortages, a scarcity of basic goods, and political discrimination in the distribution of food and basic goods;

Whereas deteriorating conditions in health care persist, with the World Health Organization estimating that there are shortages for 75 percent of necessary medications and medical supplies, up from 55 percent in 2014 and 67 percent in 2015;

Whereas the country is facing increasing outbreaks of malaria and diphtheria, previously eradicated diseases in Venezuela;

Whereas the country has experienced an increase in emigration, according to multiple press reports, including the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and Washington Post;

Whereas Venezuela is the leading country for asylum requests to the United States in the world, according to data reported by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services;

Whereas the Government of Venezuela has expanded its powers to regulate media and reduce the number of dissenting media outlets, including CNN en Español after CNN broadcasted a report alleging that Vice President Tareck El Aissami was directly linked to passport fraud involving members of Hezbollah;

Whereas, on February 13, 2017, the United States Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah as a Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficker pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act for playing a significant role in international narcotics trafficking and imposed sanctions on Mr. El Aissami and froze his assets in the United States;

Whereas, on March 14, 2017, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, issued a second report on the crisis in Venezuela following his May 2016 report, documenting an altercation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter by the Government of Venezuela and calling for free, fair, and open

elections and the release of political prisoners without delay;

Whereas, on March 23, 2017, fourteen OAS Member States published a joint statement calling for the Government of Venezuela to hold elections, restore the constitutional powers of the National Assembly, and release political prisoners;

Whereas, on March 28, 2017, the OAS Permanent Council agreed by a vote of 20 in favor, 11 against, 2 abstentions, and 1 absent/nonvoting Member States to move forward in discussing the situation in Venezuela;

Whereas, on March 28, 2017, the Supreme Court of Venezuela stripped opposition leaders of the National Assembly of their parliamentary immunity and began to take steps to consider prosecuting them for treason;

Whereas, on March 29, 2017, the Venezuelan Supreme Court seized power from the democratically elected National Assembly and nullified the legislative branch's ability to function;

Whereas, on March 31, 2017, in the first major break of a sitting Venezuelan public official, Venezuelan Attorney General Luisa Ortega Diaz affirmed the Supreme Court's actions "had broken constitutional order";

Whereas, on March 31, 2017, Venezuelan citizens took to the streets protesting the Supreme Court's breach of power;

Whereas, on April 1, 2017, during an emergency meeting of the Mercosur countries, the foreign ministers of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay released a statement urging the Government of Venezuela to follow its constitution and guarantee "the effective separation of powers"; and

Whereas, on April 1, 2017, the Supreme Court reversed its earlier decisions taking over the National Assembly’s legislative powers and stripping the legislators of their parliamentary immunity: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) condemns the decisions by the Venezuelan
3 Supreme Court on March 28, 2017, and March 29,
4 2017, stripping the opposition legislators of their
5 parliamentary immunity and seizing power from the
6 National Assembly, nullifying all legislative actions;

7 (2) recognizes the decision by the Venezuelan
8 Supreme Court on April 1, 2017, to restore the op-
9 position legislators’ parliamentary immunity and the
10 National Assembly’s legislative powers;

11 (3) urges the Government of Venezuela to heed
12 the calls of the international community to hold free,
13 fair, and open elections, release all political pris-
14 oners, including U.S. citizens, and immediately ac-
15 cept international humanitarian assistance only
16 through nongovernmental organizations;

17 (4) urges OAS Member States to continue all
18 efforts, including the consideration of a potential
19 suspension of Venezuela from the OAS, if the Gov-
20 ernment of Venezuela fails to hold free, fair, and
21 open elections and release all political prisoners in a
22 timely manner; and

1 (5) encourages the President of the United
2 States to prioritize a resolution of the political, eco-
3 nomic, social, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela,
4 including through bilateral, targeted sanctions
5 against individuals in the Government of Venezuela
6 responsible for the deterioration of democratic insti-
7 tutions and the rule of law in the country.

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