

Venezuelans ‘teetering on the brink of survival’ warn UN human rights experts



OCHA/Gemma Cortes – Dioximar Guevara lives with her five children in San Felix, a slum of Puerto Ordaz, the main city in Bolívar, Venezuela, where poverty runs deep.

United Nations independent experts demanded on Wednesday that the Venezuelan Government take concrete actions to tackle the devastating impact on basic human rights of the country's economic crisis.

“We are deeply concerned about the spiraling economic crisis, and the effect this has had on people's ability to subsist from one day to the next”, three UN Special Rapporteurs asserted. “The Government must immediately explain how it intends to support people, many of whom are teetering on the brink of survival”.

Lift sanctions

They acknowledged that while the Government blamed crippling international sanctions for the humanitarian crisis, many of the country's problems – such as food shortages, hyperinflation, power cuts, and soaring unemployment – preceded

the trade restrictions.

“Nevertheless”, they said, “especially in light of the coronavirus pandemic, the United States should immediately lift blanket sanctions, which are having a severe impact on the human rights of the Venezuelan people.”

Collapsing health system

The experts also flagged the country’s collapsing health system, pointing out that many hospitals are struggling to care for patients – with no reliable electricity or even running water.

“Hospitals are reporting a shortage of medical supplies, protective equipment and medicine”, they echoed. “Given the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income people in even the wealthiest countries, this is alarming”.

The three experts also pushed the Government to “ensure that people have the support they need to safely practice social distancing”.

Education breakdown

Meanwhile, the education system has lost thousands of teachers, and many children no longer make it school because a scarcity of food at home has left them without the energy to attend or they cannot afford transportation.

“This guarantees the crisis will do lasting damage to the next generation,” the experts spelled out.

Citing UN World Food Programme (WFP) estimates, the independent experts revealed that a third of the population is food insecure.

Retaliation and detentions

Moreover, they were alarmed by reports that journalists, lawyers, and medical workers have faced retaliation and even been detained for raising concerns about conditions in the country.

Anyone arbitrarily detained should be released immediately, and the Government should investigate these allegations, they underscored.

“There is no doubt that the Government is facing numerous challenges right now, but human rights cannot be put on hold”, they stressed.

“Even at a time like this, the Government still has an obligation to protect people’s basic rights”, concluded the Special Rapporteurs

The UN experts

The three UN experts are Olivier De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; Léo Heller, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation; and Kombou Boly Barry, Special Rapporteur on the right to education.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.



UNICEF/Velasquez – At a health center on the outskirts of Caracas, Venezuela, a lack of spare parts has rendered mobile health units and ambulances unusable.

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