

# The United States government's policy toward Venezuela

## Memorandum

**To:** Friends and Progressive Movements of the US left wing

**From:** Citizens' Platform in Defense of the Constitution (Venezuela)[i]

**Subject:** The United States government's policy toward Venezuela

The policy of the United States governments in relation to the Bolivarian process that began with the election of Hugo Chávez Frías as president in 1998, from its initial more democratic and participatory moments, to the authoritarian and repressive drifts of recent years, has been one of direct and indirect intervention, supporting politically and financially the extreme right-wing opposition and threatening the country economically and militarily. This has basically been, over the past two decades, a bipartisan policy, although with higher levels of aggression during Republican administrations. The George W. Bush administration openly supported the failed coup of 2002 and the oil strike of 2003. With the arrival of Donald Trump as president of the United States, the offensive against Venezuela has notably intensified, expressed in the attempt to impose regime change through undemocratic means, threats of military intervention, the progressive imposition of severe economic sanctions, and increased support for sectors of the Venezuelan far right.

Today, the Democratic Party controls both the country's presidency and both houses of Congress. With political divisions within the Democratic Party leading to the

strengthening of its progressive wing, the extraordinary rise of progressive grassroots movements such as the Movement for Black Lives Matter, the powerful movements for migrant rights, environmental justice, women's rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and others, there is reason for cautious optimism about the possibilities for change in U.S. government policies. This includes the possibility of changes in the bipartisan policies that have caused and continue to cause so much harm to the Venezuelan population.

Appealing to internationalism, which has historically been at the center of the struggles of the left and progressive movements around the world, we are writing to you to raise the most critical issues for which we need your solidarity:

1. Stop the economic sanctions imposed progressively since 2017, sanctions that while not the sole cause of the serious economic and humanitarian crisis the country is going through, have contributed and continue to contribute to making it deeper and deeper.

These sanctions have contributed to the practical paralysis of the oil industry, which was the country's main source of income and on which the Venezuelan economy depends,[ii] blocking access to international credits and the possibilities of renegotiating the foreign debt, placing serious obstacles to the importation of food, basic medicines, as well as equipment and spare parts needed for the, deteriorated, productive apparatus and the maintenance of the country's essential services.

As a result of these sanctions and the inefficiency and corruption of the Venezuelan government, the country's economy has been steadily deteriorating for seven years. Today, the gross domestic product is approximately 30% of what it was seven years ago. There is a serious food crisis[iii] in Venezuela today, child malnutrition has taken on dramatic dimensions. Health and education services, as well as most

public services, are in a state of collapse. The country's indigenous peoples and the environment have suffered severely both as a consequence of the deepening extractive policies, in particular the Orinoco Mining Arc, and as a result of economic sanctions by the United States. Faced with all these conditions, and in the absence of prospects for change, more than five million people have emigrated from the country in recent years.

These economic sanctions are an open violation of international law, human rights, and the Geneva Conventions. They are not an alternative to war, but a form of war. The goal of blockades and economic sanctions is to produce the greatest possible harm and suffering for the population of the country subjected to such policies. In this, sanctions have been extremely successful. Recognizing these impacts, opinion polls consistently record that a large majority of the population rejects sanctions. While a significant proportion of the population agrees with personal sanctions against government officials, only 5% express support for sanctions against the country's economy. [iv]

As international experience has repeatedly shown, sanctions are very ineffective instruments in terms of their supposed policy change objectives. However, they allow, among other things, governments under sanctions to escape their responsibility for the failures of their management by blaming them for all the problems faced by the population.

2. Withdraw the recognition of Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela, since he has neither institutional legitimacy nor popular support. The term of the National Assembly of which he was president ended in January 2020. He currently holds no elected mandate by suffrage. He is a former deputy. According to the latest Datanálisis poll 67.4% of the population has a negative opinion about Guaidó's contribution to the country's well-being. (Idem.)

3. Release the billions of dollars and assets belonging to the Venezuelan state that have been confiscated or blocked by the United States government. Mechanisms can be put in place so that, at least initially, these funds can be jointly managed with the United Nations to respond to the humanitarian crisis. In the context of this serious crisis, which has been deepened by COVID-19, the withholding of these resources constitutes a blatantly criminal act.

4. Eliminate the blocking of access to funds in international organizations such as the IMF and other multilateral organizations, funds to which the Venezuelan state has a legitimate right.

5. Abandon the policy of regime change. It is not up to the government of the United States to decide what government there should be in Venezuela. This is a sovereign decision that only corresponds to Venezuelan men and women. Speeches aside, the history of U.S. policy toward Latin America can be characterized by anything but democratic orientations. Time and again, democratic governments with popular orientations like that of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala or Salvador Allende in Chile were overthrown with the direct intervention of the United States, while authoritarian and genocidal governments like that of Pinochet in Chile and the Argentine military junta (taking into account only recent history) had the full support of the United States. The policy of regime change is not guided by democratic motivations, but by the goal of crushing, both the Venezuelan population and the populations of Latin America, any idea that changes are possible that go against the interests of the hegemonic groups in the United States. The idea of regime change seeks not only the replacement of a president, but the defeat of any imaginary of possible transformation.

6. Stop defining U.S. government policies toward Latin America in terms of domestic political expediency, as happened with the pursuit of votes from the Cuban and Venezuelan immigrant

community in Florida.

7. Recognize that the Venezuelan people have the right to sovereignly decide their own destiny. The systematic intervention of the U.S. government, pressuring the radical opposition to reject any negotiated solution, to not participate in the elections to precipitate the fall of the government, has systematically blocked any possibility of negotiation. Today, the majority of the Venezuelan population wants a change of government. 92% of the population has a negative perception of the situation in the country, and 82% has a negative evaluation of Nicolás Maduro as president (Idem). But no change is sought. Any violent solution is rejected, be it a coup d'état, a civil war or an external military intervention. The experiences of Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan are painfully present. All opinion polls indicate that the aspiration of the majority of the Venezuelan population is to reach a political agreement, a democratic, constitutional and electoral solution to the current Venezuelan crisis. Every time this possibility appears on the horizon, as was the case in the negotiations sponsored by the Norwegian government, it has been blocked by the US government.

We believe that the solidarity of the US left is fundamental for the realization of these objectives.

For the Citizens' Platform in Defense of the Constitution

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i] The Citizen Platform in Defense of the Constitution is a leftist political collective that for the last five years has

been working for the recovery of the 1999 Constitution, which has been systematically ignored and violated both by the government of Nicolás Maduro and by sectors of the right-wing opposition, with the support of the United States government.

[ii]

<https://www.wola.org/2020/10/new-report-us-sanctions-aggravated-venezuelas-economic-crisis/>

<https://www.wola.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Oliveros-Resumen-FINAL.pdf>

<https://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/venezuela-sanctions-2019-04.pdf>

[iii] <http://www.fao.org/3/cb1907en/CB1907EN.pdf>

[iv] Datanálisis. Encuesta Nacional Ómnibus, Caracas, October 2020.

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