



VENEZUELA: ABSENCE OF INSTITUTIONALITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF POWERS ALLOWS OFFICIALS TO COMMIT ALL TYPES OF CRIMES.

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The deployment of a counternarcotics operation by the government of the United States in the Caribbean Sea has placed in public discussion the participation of Venezuelan officials in illicit activities outside the law.

For Human Rights Venezuela en Movimiento, the grave erosion of democratic institutionalism, without oversight institutions and the total absence of independence of powers, has generated conditions for Venezuelan officials, at different levels of public administration, using state institutionalism and with total impunity, to become involved in activities of transnational organized crime, corruption, and illicit enrichment.

Venezuela can be a model example of how the dismantling of democracy generates a political, economic, and social context favorable not only for abuses of power against human dignity, but also for officials to participate in acts of corruption, illicit activities, money laundering, and in cross-border illicit financial flows.

Structural corruption as a systematic pattern; the capture of the State through manipulation of institutionalism, laws, and public policies for personal benefit and subjugation of society; the patrimonial use of the State administered as private property of those who hold power; the intricate political, economic, and administrative clientelist network for illicit profit; and the institutionalization of embezzlement in a systematic way has resulted in a Complex Humanitarian Emergency causing loss of life; dependency and violence against highly vulnerable groups; and forced migration for survival reasons.

The omissions of the Comptroller General's Office, Public Ministry, and Ombudsman's Office have exponentially increased impunity and the institutionalization of illicit practices. In the absence of checks and balances, of compliance with the normative framework, and of institutions truly exercising oversight over those who govern, the population has faced the exponential growth of

irregular, systematic, and generalized actions by officials, in the serious violation of human rights—a policy of State Terror evidenced by international protection bodies and NGO reports, and echoed in media outlets.

Very alarming is that after the disregard of the popular will that occurred on July 28, omission and impunity have intensified in the face of generalized extortion practices by civilian, police, and military officials. The networks of institutional extortion have not only increased charges for procedures and permits. The context of political persecution and State Terrorism has been an opportunity for officials to increase the collection of “vaccines” [extortion payments]; detain people to demand money in exchange for release; or to withdraw the annulment of passports.

The institutionalization of practices outside the rule of law became more complex after agreements with criminal groups in areas called “Peace Zones,” ceding territorial control, and with negative leaders, “pranes,” that allowed inmates to control penitentiary facilities, transforming them into epicenters of action for criminal gangs which, in coalition with police and military officials, have committed very serious crimes such as extortion, kidnappings, and homicides. These successful modes of operation inside the country have been replicated beyond our borders: controlling the migratory flows of Venezuelans for personal benefit; the smuggling of fuel, food, fauna, and flora; human trafficking; and drug trafficking.

In the case of the involvement of officials in drug trafficking, a recent report by Transparency Venezuela in Exile has indicated that, for the year 2024, almost 24% of world cocaine production passed through Venezuela, generating income for those who enabled the flow of USD 8.236 billion. This has generated an unprecedented situation in the region: drug traffickers do not permeate the State structure; from positions of power, officials have incorporated themselves into global drug trafficking networks. In the absence of legitimacy, Venezuelan authorities have transformed into a criminal structure and human rights violator that controls territory.

The cited World Drug Report 2025 of UNODC has acknowledged that it is based on a questionnaire sent to States about their work for compliance with control, prevention, eradication of production, distribution of all forms and practices linked to drug trafficking and organized crime: “All analysis contained in the World Drug Report is based on the official data submitted by Member States to UNODC through the annual report questionnaire.” In Venezuela, there is no



way to verify the information provided by officials and the state institutions that supply such information.

Specifically, in the case of the counternarcotics operation in the Caribbean Sea, we wish to recall that the United States controls several hundreds of thousands of km² of maritime space in the Caribbean, through its federal states and unincorporated territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, to which is added the authorization and cooperation in the anti-drug operation granted by Trinidad and Tobago and Curaçao. Understanding their competences in those maritime spaces, and the warning given to the Government of Venezuela by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that she could authorize the use of lethal force against unidentified Venezuelan vessels entering its territorial waters, we express our deep concern about the lack of information and reports of actions with human rights standards that explain the destruction of vessels with civilians, in which the death of at least 14 people is said to have occurred.

As organizations committed to life and human dignity, from the perspective of human rights, every action to combat organized crime must respect the principle of proportionality and the right to life, ensuring that persons accused of crimes appear before impartial courts, with due process respecting judicial guarantees, and are not summarily executed at sea. Such action may become a grave precedent for the entire region.

Faced with this panorama, we reiterate that the only sustainable path to halt the expansion of crime, illicit activities, and violence in Venezuela and transnationally requires the restoration of democratic institutionalism, the independence of public powers, and full respect for the rule of law. As long as oversight, investigative, and judicial bodies remain co-opted, impunity will continue to feed State Terror, political persecution, Crimes Against Humanity, forced migration, corruption, drug trafficking, and systematic human rights violations.

Given the gravity of the situation, it is urgent that the international community assume an active role in the face of a State that combines the systematic commission of crimes against humanity, the participation of high-level officials in drug trafficking networks, and the use of diplomatic blackmail as a mechanism of international pressure.



We call on the international community to:

- 1) Promote regional cooperation against transnational organized crime. Establish effective cooperation mechanisms among neighboring States to contain the transnational drug trafficking and human trafficking networks linked to state elites.
- 2) Reduce the international margin of maneuver with international blackmail, or hostage diplomacy, by condemning these practices publicly and in alliance among countries.
- 3) Maintain attention on Venezuela, demand respect for popular sovereignty, legitimate elected leadership, and the peaceful transition to democracy, pointing to individual and collective responsibilities, and support the victims who, today more than ever, are abandoned before a State turned into perpetrator.
- 4) Activate international mechanisms of investigation and accountability.

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