



ECONOMIC & SOCIAL JUSTICE TRUST

Venezuela's Right to Self Determination must be respected

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There is no doubt that Venezuela is a deeply divided country where the often opposing interests of various social and political groups clash. The country is also home to large oil reserves which makes it a case of special interest for imperial powers, particularly the USA. The US administration has repeatedly shown its readiness to intervene and to bring any administration which does not adhere to US interests to its knees. The US went as far as orchestrating and supporting a coup against the former and by all accounts democratically elected and widely supported President Hugo Chavez in 2002.

In recent years, the US administration increased the pressure on Venezuela and has now declared war by openly trying to impose a government of its own choice. This is nothing new in the long history of repression and what was accurately described by renowned Australian journalist John Pilger as a “war on democracy” in Latin America. This has happened for many decades and perhaps the most well-known military coup was the one against the democratically elected socialist President of Chile, Salvador Allende in 1973. It is important to recall that in the run-up to this coup, the then US President Richard Nixon said that part of the US strategy was to “make the Chilean economy scream”. In other words, creating economic hardships was a prelude to the military coup to overthrow a democratic government. We must also not forget that it was the USA and its allies who supported groups like the apartheid regime in South Africa and RENAMO in Mozambique which waged a brutal counter-revolutionary war in that country.

Thus we cannot ignore what is happening now in Venezuela and everybody who supports democratic principles has to speak out in defence of Venezuela's right to self-determination. Today it is Venezuela that is under attack and tomorrow it might be any other country which is not aligned to imperial interests. It is ironic that the US intervention is couched in terms of democracy when the exact opposite is actually happening. On 23 January 2019 Juan Guaidó the leader of the opposition declared himself the acting President of Venezuela. Many imperial nations have supported his self-appointment to the Presidency but this is inconsistent with Article 133 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela which sets out the terms under which a President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela may be removed.

Imperialist powers and some Latin American nations supporting this *coup d'état* have cited the unprecedented humanitarian crisis and the exodus of more than three million Venezuelans

as the reason for supporting this attempt at regime change. However, it is important to remember that this humanitarian crisis was caused to a significant extent by the economic warfare waged against Venezuela by imperialist forces. Once again, they made “the economy scream”. While the Venezuelan government is certainly not blameless, it is critical to remember that Venezuela is a sovereign state that has the right to self-determination which includes the right to determine an economic and political system that is most beneficial for its citizens, especially the poor.

The interest of imperial nations in the politics and economics of Venezuela is based on the country’s oil reserves as well as natural resources such as natural gas, iron ore, gold, bauxite, diamonds and other minerals. A key reason for imperialist powers to support a far-right opposition candidate is that the Venezuelan government refuses to follow the neoliberal economic policies in the form of austerity measures, privatisation and de-regulation.

As pointed out by the South African National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADEL) the use of unilateral coercive measures against Venezuela is unlawful and a breach of United Nations Resolution 70/1 adopted 25 September 2015. Resolution 27/21 states: “*Stressing that unilateral coercive measures and legislation are contrary to international law, international humanitarian law, the Charter and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations amongst states ...*

Recognising that unilateral coercive measures in the form of economic sanctions can have far-reaching implications for the human rights of the general population of targeted states, disproportionately affecting the poor and most vulnerable classes...”

We agree with NADEL that the financial and economic blockade placed on Venezuela by the USA, Canada, European Union, Switzerland and the United Kingdom “is in direct breach of Resolution 27/21 and a violation of the human rights of the people of Venezuela. The result of the economic sanctions and financial blockade is that Venezuela cannot import food and medicine and health supplies. Most of its food and medicine imports were from the USA. It has directly resulted in the current humanitarian crisis.”

We want to add our voice in support of Venezuela’s right to self-determination, including finding its own solutions to the challenges it faces and to redistribute wealth and resources in favour of the poor. Imperial powers must not be allowed to force their interests onto smaller nations and we therefore call for the financial blockade and economic sanctions to be lifted. The humanitarian crisis is being used as a pretext for a coup that will only serve imperialist interests. Democratic and progressive organisations and individuals cannot stand by and allow this to happen.

Herbert Jauch

Chairperson