



# United Nations Human Rights Council

BCNMUN 2023

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Peace and Conflict

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**Topic:** Establishing measures to ensure the safety of political dissidents in Venezuela

**Chair:** Jan Pasquin Casadellà

**Position:** Chair

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## Introduction

According to The Economist Intelligence Unit, Venezuela is ranked as one of the least democratic countries on earth. The South American country is currently holding hundreds of political prisoners, who are victims of inhumane methods of punishment, including torture. Subsequently, Venezuela is also one of the most sanctioned nation-states in the world. Venezuela also happens to be the country with the biggest oil reserve in the world, and its communist government, as well as its allies, argue that the sanctions are just a way for Western powers to control the global monopoly of this multi-trillion dollar industry and stop the spread of communism in Latin America.

The Venezuelan crisis and its implications have a global impact, as it is the country that holds the largest oil reserves. In addition, its proximity to the United States, and its alliance with countries that the US sees as a threat has given them the title of a *rogue state* by the US, and declared them a 'national security threat'.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Political prisoner

A political prisoner is an individual who is incarcerated or detained by a government or authority due to their political beliefs, activities, or opposition to the ruling regime, rather than for criminal acts.

### Communism

Communism is an ideology aiming for a classless society where resources are collectively owned and distributed based on need, rather than individual wealth.

### Sanctions

Sanctions are punitive measures imposed by governments or international bodies to pressure a country or entity into changing its behaviour. They often involve restrictions on trade, financial transactions, or other economic activities and are used as a means of diplomacy or to enforce international norms and agreements.

### Monopoly

A monopoly is a market structure in which a single company or entity has exclusive control or dominance over the supply of a particular product or service, giving it significant pricing power and limiting competition.

## Democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which the power to make political decisions is vested in the hands of the people. It typically involves free and fair elections, where citizens have the opportunity to vote for their representatives and leaders. Democracy also emphasizes individual rights, the rule of law, and the protection of minority interests, ensuring that government actions are accountable and subject to public scrutiny. There are various models and variations of democracy practised worldwide.

## Rogue State

A "rogue state" is a term used to describe a country that is perceived as defying international norms or engaging in destabilising behaviour.

## Background Information

The United States has historically exerted considerable influence in the politics of Latin America, employing a combination of hard and soft power to shape economic systems and combat perceived threats, particularly communism. The example of the 1973 coup in Chile, in which the U.S. played a role in the ousting of democratically-elected President Salvador Allende and the installation of General Augusto Pinochet as a dictator with close ties to Washington, exemplifies this influence. These actions have contributed to widespread perceptions of U.S. interventionism and imperialism in the region, leading to complex dynamics in international relations. The legacy of these historical events continues to inform how the international community views U.S. engagement in Latin American countries, including its approach to the situation in Venezuela.

Venezuela nationalised its oil in 1973, before private multinational companies got hold of it, such as British Petroleum and Shell. The government then founded PDVSA, which is the state-owned oil company.

This is why the election of a communist president in 1999 Hugo Chavez, led to a series of policy changes designed to enhance the well-being of the general populace rather than favouring the elite, by investing in public services such as healthcare, education, among other social programs, all financed with oil money. During this time oil prices boomed, and along with Chavez's nationalisation, these communist measures multiplied their GDP per capita by 3, directly improving people's lives.

Nonetheless, to maintain his presidency, Chávez engaged in excessive spending that exceeded the nation's fiscal capacity, resulting in a deficit. When oil prices plummeted in 2014 and Nicolás Maduro assumed office, Venezuela spiralled into a period of hyperinflation, causing extensive poverty and scarcities of essential commodities.

Maduro also enacted measures to centralise his authority over the nation, significantly impacting its democratic framework. This action triggered widespread protests across the country, met with a harsh and repressive response from the government. By the end of 2014, there had been 43 deaths, over 5000 injured, and well over 3500 arrested, many arbitrarily.

In response to grave human rights abuses in Venezuela, then-US President Barack Obama imposed economic sanctions and labelled Venezuela a 'national security threat.' These sanctions targeted high-ranking Venezuelan government officials, freezing their assets and limiting their global financial access. However, while impactful at this level, these measures did not immediately lead to a

change in the country's regime. The move to designate Venezuela as a national security threat underscored the seriousness of the crisis and reflected concerns about its potential regional and international consequences. The situation in Venezuela remained complex, marked by political tensions, economic instability, and humanitarian challenges. During Donald Trump's presidency, the U.S. significantly escalated sanctions on Venezuela, expanding their scope to target a wider range of individuals, entities, and sectors, with a particular focus on the critical oil industry. The Trump administration also took the unprecedented step of recognizing pro-USA Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela, part of a broader strategy to support regime change and democratic transition. These sanctions, combined with asset freezes and diplomatic efforts, aimed to increase pressure on President Nicolás Maduro's government and those who supported it. While these measures were intended to encourage political change and alleviate the humanitarian crisis, their effectiveness remains a subject of debate. This is because some economists argue that this was one of the reasons why the country went into a deeper crisis. A report published in 2019 argued that this set of aggressive sanctions indirectly led to 40,000 deaths.

The European Union (EU) also introduced a series of sanctions against Venezuela, placing the country in a category alongside nations like North Korea or Iran, with whom the EU refrained from engaging in certain business activities. These sanctions were part of the EU's efforts to respond to the political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. Similar to U.S. sanctions, they targeted specific individuals and entities associated with the Venezuelan government, freezing assets and imposing travel bans. Additionally, the EU aimed to encourage a peaceful and democratic resolution to the crisis, often aligning its actions with those of the United States and other international partners in support of Juan Guaidó as interim president. These coordinated efforts by the EU and other Western nations reflected a multilateral approach to addressing the situation in Venezuela and promoting a transition to democracy.

However, according to both government published, and advocacy NGO reports, it is clear that Maduro is still systematically violating human rights in the country. On the other hand, Venezuela claims that many of the declarations from the US are false.

Some critics argue that this situation exemplifies a form of hypocrisy on the part of Western powers, as they appear to be practising a selective approach to maintaining their global hegemony. Their contention stems from instances like Saudi Arabia, a country that is arguably less democratic than Venezuela and faces allegations of systemic human rights abuses, including the persecution and silencing of government critics. Despite these concerns, Saudi Arabia maintains strong ties with

the United States and relies on the U.S. as its major supplier of weapons. Another example is Israel, which has faced criticism for policies some view as colonialist and accusations of practising modern-day apartheid concerning its treatment of Palestinians. Nevertheless, Israel remains one of the United States' staunchest allies. This perceived inconsistency raises questions about the alignment of Western powers' values with their strategic interests in international relations, contributing to ongoing debates about the principles guiding their foreign policies.

Despite everything, there is no doubt that the situation in Venezuela is very concerning, as human rights are being violated systematically, and the international community must address this.



## Major Countries and Organisations Involved

All the member-states of the United Nations are involved in the conflict in one way or another, as the oil reserves in the country greatly affect the geopolitical situation of the world. In addition, the world is divided into 2 sides regarding this issue.

### Venezuela

Venezuela has been the centre focus of this crisis, as since oil prices crashed and Maduro took office, tensions between them and Western powers have reached all-time highs. They also hold an anti-US policy, and consider the country's foreign policy as imperialist. They are highly sceptical of IGOs such as NATO and The European Union. Moreover, they hold tight bonds with Eastern powers, as they have the common goal of challenging Western hegemony.

### The United States

The United States took a hardline stance against the Maduro government, accusing it of human rights abuses, election fraud, and corruption. It recognizes Juan Guaidó as the legitimate interim president of Venezuela, leading to diplomatic tensions with the Maduro regime. They imposed a series of economic sanctions on Venezuela, targeting key individuals, institutions, and the country's oil sector, which is vital to its economy. The goal of U.S. policy was to pressure Maduro to step down and facilitate a transition to democracy.

### Russia

Russia is one of Venezuela's biggest allies, and they have a huge influence on the Venezuelan government and economy, as they send the country aid, loans, and weapons. They also invest money in Venezuela's oil industry and are highly critical of the US's stance on the country.

### The European Union

The EU has imposed direct sanctions against Venezuela and is highly critical of the human rights abuses towards the Venezuelan population. They however put an emphasis on dialogue between Maduro's government and its opposition to solve the crisis, instead of forcing a regime change.

## The United Nations

The United Nations has played a role in addressing the crisis by facilitating negotiations between the government and the opposition. In 2019, the UN initiated talks between the two sides to find a peaceful resolution. The UN has expressed concern about the humanitarian situation in Venezuela and has launched humanitarian aid programs within the country.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1999	Marxist politician Hugo Chávez is elected as the president of Venezuela. He nationalizes the oil industry and invests it into social welfare programs, making the country fully reliant on oil.
2013	Hugo Chávez dies and has Nicolás Maduro as his predecessor.
2014	As oil prices tumbled, protests broke out against President Maduro's leadership in Venezuela. In response, the government used violent tactics to quell the demonstrations, resulting in killings, the injury of hundreds, and the arrest of numerous individuals. These developments highlight the severe political and social unrest in the country and raise significant concerns about human rights and the state of democracy in Venezuela.
2017	Widespread protests start again because Maduro consolidated the legislative branch (Supreme Court). Hyperinflation intensifies. EU sanctions.
2019	Juan Guaidó declares himself president of Venezuela, with the support of the United States, led by Donald Trump.
2021 - now	President Biden decreases sanctions on Venezuela due to Maduro's dialogue with the opposition, however, the crisis is still intense, and remains one of the most sanctioned countries on earth.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

### UN General Assembly Resolution 73/8 (2018)

This resolution addresses the situation in Venezuela and expresses concerns about the human rights violations as well as the humanitarian situation in the country. It urges for the solution to be peaceful.

### UN Human Rights Council Resolution 39/1 (2018)

This resolution established an Independent research mission to investigate possible human rights violations in the country. The report confirmed that the country violated many articles of the UN charter, and placed an emphasis on the ongoing extrajudicial killings.

### UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Reports

Michelle Bachelet, who is the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has released several reports on the human rights situation in Venezuela, providing evidence of the violations and urging responsibility.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### Vatican-Mediated Dialogue (2016)

In 2016, the Vatican regulated talks between Maduro's government and the opposition, however, there was no significant progress.

### Oslo and Barbados Talks (2019)

Mediated by Norway, and held in Oslo. While the two parties reached an agreement, they eventually pulled out and the talks gave no significant results.

### Guaidó's Efforts (2019)

While some Western countries recognised Juan Guaidó as the *de jure* president of Venezuela, his efforts to take over Maduro's position did not succeed, and Guaidó eventually decreased in popularity.

### United Nations Mediation (2019-2021)

The United Nations has been involved in facilitating dialogue and negotiations between the government and the opposition. These efforts sought to address the political crisis and provide a path toward free and fair elections. However, these talks faced numerous challenges, and a comprehensive resolution remained elusive.

### International Contact Group

The European Union and several Latin American countries formed the International Contact Group on Venezuela in 2019. The group aimed to foster a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis through dialogue, humanitarian assistance, and support for credible elections.

### Lima Group

Comprising Latin American countries and Canada, the Lima Group was formed in 2017 to address the Venezuelan crisis. The group advocated for a peaceful transition to democracy and coordinated diplomatic efforts to pressure the Maduro government.

## Possible Solutions

There are a series of solutions that the UN can take to end the Venezuelan crisis, however, due to the global political situation, it is highly challenging to find a common ground. These are the solutions that the UN sees realistic to address the current issue:

### *Realist solution*

Revise sanctions, and potentially condone or add sanctions to Venezuela. This would fuel the pressure on the state to address these concerning issues.

If Venezuela refuses to acknowledge their human rights violations as identified by the United Nations (UN), we suggest conducting a vote. This vote would involve recommending to the UN Security Council to contemplate the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. Responsibility to Protect, often abbreviated as R2P, is an international principle that emphasizes the collective responsibility of the global community to prevent and respond to mass atrocities, such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, when a state is unable or unwilling to protect its own population from these grave offenses.

### *Liberalist solution*

Attempt more bilateral negotiations with Venezuela.

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