

Caracas, July 21st, 2016

Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary General
United Nations

Dear Secretary General,

The 49 Venezuelan civil society organizations signing this document wish to express our indignation and rejection of the conduct and silence of several of the agencies of the United Nations System established in Venezuela, particularly with regard to those responsible for health and nutrition, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) itself, in a context of a rapid increase of poverty levels, economic and social fragility and political and institutional instability, in which the population faces massive and severe shortages of food, medicines and medical supplies across the nation and the lack of internal capacity to resolve this situation in the medium term. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have also opted for restricting their activities to the implementation of some programs, keeping away from this very serious situation, which primarily affects pregnant women, children and adolescents, the elderly, rural and indigenous communities, as well as persons deprived of liberty.

At the same time, we recognize and value highly the role played by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), treaty bodies and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council in regards to the grave human rights situation in Venezuela.

On Tuesday July 19, 2016, during the press conference held by the Information Service of the United Nations¹, its Director, Ms. Alessandra Vellucci, said the briefing on Venezuela on Friday 15 had been suspended "because colleagues from the different agencies did not have enough information for a full-fledged briefing". Faced by what seemed to be a question about the silence of the OHCHR about the human rights situation in Venezuela, her representative, Ravina Shamdasani, said this was "an unfair characterization" and that the problem was that they "do not have enough people on the ground". According to the note of the press conference, Fadelia Chaib, of the World Health Organization (WHO), said that she "would check again with PAHO what action they were taking and what information they were receiving from the country. As soon as there would be more information, it was not excluded that WHO would brief the press on the topic".

Since 2013, civil society organizations have sent information to these agencies and have even conducted peaceful protests in front of PAHO's office in Caracas, drawing attention to the generalized failures in the provision of medicines, supplies and services. FAO has also been informed about the progressive deterioration in the nutritional status of the population, since 2012. Since March 1, 2016, the Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has received regular reports referred to the health crisis in Venezuela. These agencies have received the same reports on the situation of the right to health submitted by civil society organizations to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur for Health. The latter bodies have expressed concern publicly and regularly in their reports.

¹ Regular Press Briefing by the UN Information Service:

[http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/\(httpNewsByYear_en\)/BFCA1FB7BD0D36C7C1257FF500555CD2?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/(httpNewsByYear_en)/BFCA1FB7BD0D36C7C1257FF500555CD2?OpenDocument)

The health crisis is serious: it affects 120 thousand people with complex conditions, 3 million with hypertension and diabetes, 90,000 with malaria —the majority of them indigenous people and mine workers— and 60,000 with dengue. Maternal mortality increased from 66 cases per 100,000 in 2015 to 116 in 2016, according to official figures. Deterioration in the nutritional status of the population is serious as well: in 2015, 12.1% (more than 3 million people) reported eating 2 times a day or less, and 87% reported not having enough money to buy food. In the first half of 2016, nutritional deficit reached 12% in urban areas, 19% in peri-urban areas, and 27% in poorer areas. In major hospitals in the country, cases of severe child malnutrition are reported, including diagnoses of marasmus and kwashiorkor.

In light of this situation, it is unacceptable that the briefing on Venezuela had to be suspended “because colleagues from the different agencies did not have enough information for a full-fledged briefing”; it is unacceptable and breaches the principles of “**rights up front**” that neither the OHCHR is receiving reliable and timely information from the UN agencies. What then are the Pan American Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Population Fund, the Children's Fund and, in particular, the United Nations Development Programme doing in Venezuela?

The gravity of the situation in health and nutrition —which is linked to the lack of respect for the Rule of Law, access to an independent judiciary, the exercise of the freedoms of assembly, speech and association— was evident from 2013 to organizations, research centers and universities, and was also public. Omissions by some of the UN agencies in Venezuela add to a buildup of restrictions present already for several years in reporting on the situation of human rights in Venezuela in an objective and impartial manner, both internally and internationally, as well as in regards to dialogue with all sectors of Venezuelan society, without pressure or constraints by the State.

After the suspension of the briefing on July 15 and what was expressed during the press conference on July 19, it seems undeniable that the agencies have not even informed their own headquarters on the crisis in Venezuela, a situation that endangers thousands of people, especially the most vulnerable.

One of the lessons learned in the case of Sri Lanka is that “to the extent that the situation of a country deteriorates during a crisis, the UN requires its presence in the country to respond to the changing situation”. This is only possible if agencies in the country recorded and reported changes in the situation with technical criteria, from a human rights perspective and based on variety of sources.

We ask you, with the sense of grave urgency that the situation demands, to require the United Nations agencies in Venezuela to act according to the principles of the “Initiative to prevent human rights abuses”² and the Plan of Action “Rights up Front”, according to which the promotion of respect for human rights is a central objective of the United Nations and defines its identity as an organization that works for people around the world, “using all resources at their disposal, including its moral authority, diplomatic creativity and its operational reach”. The United Nations System cannot continue “failing to fulfill its responsibilities” in Venezuela, in order to be able to prevent irreparable consequences in terms of loss of life and further escalation of the deteriorating food and health conditions in the country, affecting the most vulnerable, if it does not implement, as quickly as possible, a mechanism of international cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

Respectfully yours,

Acción Solidaria
ACCSI, Acción Ciudadana contra el Sida
Amigos Trasplantados de Venezuela
ASOVILUZ, Asociación Civil Vida y Luz

² Initiative to Prevent Human Rights Abuses: <http://www.un.org/sg/rightsupfront/>

Aula Abierta
AVAL, Asociación Venezolana de Amigos Con Linfoma
AVH, Asociación Venezolana para la Hemofilia
Cáritas Ciudad Bolívar
CECAVID, Centro de Educación y Capacitación para la Vida
Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Católica Andrés Bello
Centro para la Paz y los Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Central de Venezuela
CEPAZ, Centro de Justicia y Paz
Civilis Derechos Humanos
CODEVIDA, Coalición de Organizaciones por el Derecho a la Salud y la Vida
CODHEZ, Comisión para los Derechos Humanos del Estado Zulia
COFAVIC
Convite AC
Escuela de Vecinos de Venezuela
Espacio Público
Excubitus
FENASOPADRES, Federación Nacional de Sociedades de Padres y Representantes
FEPAP, Fundación Ensayos para el Aprendizaje Permanente
FUNCAMAMA
Fundación Aguaclara
Fundación Bengoa
FUNPAZ, Asociación Civil Fuerza, Unión, Justicia, Solidaridad y Paz
Futuro Presente
GTAI, Grupo de Trabajo sobre Asuntos Indígenas de la Universidad de Los Andes
INVESP, Instituto venezolano de Estudios Sociales y Políticos
Justicia y Paz Cáritas Los Teques
LabPaz, Laboratorio de Paz
Movimiento Vino Tinto
Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Los Andes
OVP, Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones
OVS, Observatorio Venezolano de Salud
Padres Organizados de Venezuela
PROVEA, Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos
Red Rosa
REDAC, Red de Activistas Ciudadanos por los Derechos Humanos
REDHNNNA, Red por los Derechos Humanos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes
SenosAyuda
Sinergia, Asociación Venezolana de Organizaciones de Sociedad Civil
SOHI, Sociedad Hominis Iura
Transparencia Venezuela
Uniandes
Unión Afirmativa
Unión Vecinal para la Participación Ciudadana
Venezuela Diversa
Vicaría de Derechos Humanos de la Arquidiócesis de Caracas

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