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Venezuela: Dire living conditions worsening by the day, UN human rights experts warn

Venezuela

09 February 2018

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Spanish

GENEVA (9 February, 2018) – Vast numbers of Venezuelans are starving, deprived of essential medicines, and trying to survive in a situation that is spiralling downwards with no end in sight, according to a group of UN human rights experts*. They made an urgent plea to the government to take action to tackle the crisis, and called on the international community to adopt measures to avoid an unfolding tragedy of immense proportions.

"Millions of people are suffering a lack of food and essential medicines, a shortage of goods including those for personal hygiene, power cuts, and dire housing and living conditions. Conditions are worsening by the day putting many lives at risk," the experts said in a joint statement.

"2016 estimates pointed to over 50 percent of the population facing extreme poverty, a figure that has undoubtedly increased when taking into account the reported 2,400 percent inflation of 2017.

"Venezuelans are suffering multiple breaches of their human rights," the experts said. "Many people are suffering from lack of food and malnutrition, while the health situation has reached unbearable levels, especially for patients with chronic and terminal diseases such as diabetes, kidney disease and cancer.

"Health centres continue to report serious shortages of medicines, basic equipment and medical supplies causing many preventable deaths. Even essential health services like kidney dialysis are unavailable in many parts of the country, affecting the health and putting at risk the lives of 15,000 people with kidney disease.

"By the end of last year, a family needed to earn the minimum wage 63 times over, simply to buy basic food. Other statistics suggest that the

country now has 1.3 million undernourished people, and an average of five to six children dying every week from malnutrition,” said Hilal Elver, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food.

“Financial constraints, do not exempt States of their core obligations and needed austerity measures should not affect the minimum content of economic, social and cultural rights,” said one of the experts, Dainius Pūras, Special Rapporteur on the right to health.

“In terms of the right to health, States must ensure, at the very least, essential primary health care for everyone and the provision of essential medicines, especially for medically vulnerable groups.”

Leilani Farha, the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, drew attention to reports of forced evictions, adding to the dire circumstances people were already facing.

“We have received information that individuals and families have been forcibly evicted from their homes with excessive use of force, and rendered homeless,” she said. “Many homes have been demolished and personal belongings confiscated or destroyed. Due process and rule of law have been abandoned in these cases.”

The experts noted that a lack of updated official data on food, health and power cuts made it impossible to assess the full scale of the crisis and whether the Venezuelan Government was protecting and fulfilling its international obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

“We call on the Government to address the appalling living conditions, tackle the food and health crisis, and to restore electricity,” the experts said. “If necessary, the Government should seek international cooperation to ensure the rights of Venezuelans are protected.

“We also urge the Government to re-examine the policies and decisions that have been taken that have brought Venezuela, a wealthy country, to this critical human rights situation.”

The experts added: “We cannot fail to note that these violations of economic, social and cultural rights come in parallel with the weakening of democratic institutions, the persecution of political opponents and an overall disrespect for civil and political rights in the country.”

In December 2017, several UN experts wrote to the Government of Venezuela, raising concerns over the situation regarding extreme poverty and economic, social and cultural rights. Their letter and the Government’s reply will be made public in the following link: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/> before the 37th session of the Human Rights Council, which starts on 26 February.

ENDS

*The UN experts: **Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing; Hilal Elver, Special Rapporteur on the right to food; Dainius Pūras, Special Rapporteur on the right to health; Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.**

The Independent Experts are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

UN Human Rights country page - Venezuela

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*This year, 2018, is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to **Stand Up for Human Rights**: www.standup4humanrights.org.*

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