



Statement: The will of the Venezuelan people must be respected

On 20th May 2018 Venezuela held presidential elections as well as the election of local state legislative assemblies. There were 5 presidential candidates that contested the presidency, the most important of whom by their electoral and political weight were Nicolas Maduro for the governing coalition the Grand Patriotic Pole; Henri Falcon, for a coalition of some opposition parties, and Javier Bertucci, a Pentecostal Pastor candidate of Esperanza por el Cambio. The results, with a turnout of 46%, were: Nicolas Maduro 68% (6,190,612 votes), Henri Falcon 21% (1,917,036 votes), and Javier Bertucci 11% (988,761 votes).

The 20th May 2018 elections in Venezuela fulfilled all the requisites of free and fair elections. They were in accordance with the constitutional and legal schedule dictated by the country's 1999 Constitution. They were preceded by a prolonged period of violence (six months in 2017) by sections of the opposition that demanded 'elecciones presidenciales adelantadas' (elections before the calendar end of the President Maduro's mandate in December 2018).

The specific additional guarantees to the normal format of the elections (including its date) were decided in the dialogue between the MUD (Democratic Unity Roundtable) coalition of opposition parties and government hosted by the Dominican Republic that lasted several months (between 2017 and 2018) and by the agreement of all the presidential candidates that contested it on May 20.

All these guarantees, including inviting observers from the EU and the UN, were duly fulfilled by Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE).

Regrettably, the EU and the UN decided not to send observers, but about 300 observers from over 40 countries in all five continents accompanied the electoral process by observing the election in 12 states including the Capital District, Caracas.

Additionally, the elections were observed by a delegation from the Council of Electoral Experts from Latin America (CEELA in its Spanish acronym). Among the CEELA group there were several former presidents or members of national electoral councils in various Latin American nations (Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, Peru, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, etc).

International observers and CEELA experts met the CNE on several occasions before elections day, to listen to CNE experts (constitutional, legal and related issues as well as software technicians) at which observers were able to ask all the questions they wished and where CNE officials, including its president, Tibisay Lucena, as well all other four CNE Rectors met the observers.

The CNE took care of organising a special meeting between the international observers and CEELA experts with representatives of all contending candidates, at which all the international observers as well all CEELA experts who actually visited polling stations in 12 states inside Venezuela confirmed the efficiency and total reliability of Venezuela's election system. They called on all parties involved to accept the election results and to respect the sovereign decision of the Venezuela people expressed in the ballot box.

They also declared that there are few electoral systems as reliable as Venezuela's, because it is transparent, efficient and reliable, and guarantees that the vote is universal, direct, free, and secret.

It is difficult not to be surprised by the double standards that seem to prevail in the EU, whereby extreme rigour is applied to criticising one of the most reliable electoral systems in the world while little is said about highly deficient practices such as those seen recently in Honduras, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil, countries where there is irrefutable evidence of electoral malpractice, the assassination of hundreds of social leaders and candidates seeking to intimidate the opponent's electorate. These are a far cry from the calm, tranquillity and set of guarantees which accompanied Venezuela's elections.

Although U.S. sanctions to Venezuela are expected, given the near two-decades of U.S. open and active hostility to the Bolivarian Government, it is impossible not to include in the analysis of the reasons for the US's position the overarching geopolitical factor of Venezuela being the holder of the largest reserves of oil in the world.

What is surprising is the application of sanctions against Venezuela by the European Union. Former Spanish President, Jose Zapatero, at a press conference in Caracas, expressed bafflement about the EU position on Venezuela, and said that better is expected of it. He stated that he with others would be working towards both a process of dialogue in Venezuela and another one between the Venezuelan Government and the European Union.

It must be acknowledged that the sanctions against Venezuela, both by the U.S. and the EU, violate international law.

The international community must make its voice heard and demand that the will of the Venezuelan people expressed on the 20th May 2018 be respected. It must support the process of dialogue offered by President Nicolas Maduro to the Government's various oppositions, and encourage and support a constructive dialogue between the EU and the Bolivarian Government.

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