

Johns Hopkins
Center for Public Health
and Human Rights

Side Event

Helping Venezuela Confront a Humanitarian Emergency amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Hosted by the
Permanent Missions of Germany and the Dominican Republic in New York*

29 July 2020, 2:00 – 3:30pm

Concept note

“The Venezuelan healthcare system is grossly unprepared for the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, further jeopardizing the health of Venezuelans and threatening to contribute to regional spread of the disease,” Johns Hopkins University and Human Rights Watch [said in a new report](#). “Ensuring that sufficient humanitarian aid reaches the Venezuelan people is urgently needed.”

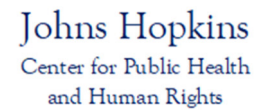
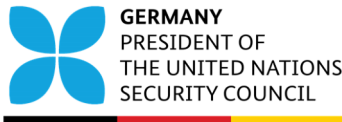
Background

June 1 brought good news from Venezuela. The Venezuelan health minister, Carlos Alvarado, and the opposition-led National Assembly — through its health adviser, Julio Castro — signed an agreement to coordinate efforts to obtain international funding to strengthen Venezuela’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This important agreement also requests “technical and administrative support” from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), a branch of the United Nations.

Despite this welcome news, the challenges are formidable:

Venezuela continues to battle an unprecedented humanitarian emergency – one that has already compelled more than 5 million Venezuelans to seek refuge abroad, most in neighboring countries, often in search of food and basic health services. In 2019, Venezuela had the world’s steepest rise in malaria cases. Vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and diphtheria, which had been eradicated, had already returned long before the pandemic hit. Hospitals lack basic supplies needed to prevent infection and treat illness. Many of them are without regular access to water and electricity, let alone medicine and respirators or protective equipment for doctors and nurses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the crisis. Infectious diseases thrive under the conditions of poverty and malnutrition that many Venezuelans face. Basic measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic, such as handwashing and social distancing, are difficult to implement in a country where the vast majority of households and hospitals have intermittent access to water, supplies are expensive, and overcrowding in low-income neighborhoods and prisons is common. Fuel shortages are causing growing complications for the production and delivery of food and transportation to seek medical care, and many people, especially in the informal sector, are struggling to make a living.



In Venezuela, just like across the globe, the pandemic threatens the rights of women, girls, LGBTI people and other marginalized groups as a result of the pre-existing gender and intersectional inequalities. Women earn less, hold less secure jobs, are more likely to be employed in the informal sector, and are the majority of single-parent households. Women and girls are facing a mix of increased domestic violence and care burden, as well as limited access to income and social protection.

Venezuela's government has an obligation to protect the rights to life and health of people in the country. It should not interfere with the equitable distribution of aid and enable the UN to do everything in its power to assist the Venezuelan population. Venezuelan authorities need to ensure that all relevant information on the pandemic reaches the public, including by publishing reliable and complete public health data. That data is critically important to inform preparations for a coronavirus response and strengthen laboratory capacity so that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be diagnosed early. Authorities should prioritize protection for older people and people with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe illness, and for health workers

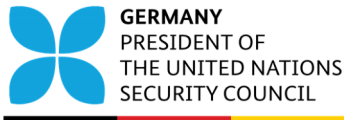
It is imperative that the global community not leave the Venezuelan people alone. Standing by them requires us to provide sufficient humanitarian assistance, first and foremost through the United Nations. Humanitarian actors need unimpeded and sustained nationwide access to the most vulnerable and need to be able to deliver humanitarian assistance in full accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Humanitarian assistance should not be exploited for political purposes. Rather, UN member states should seek to unite all actors in Venezuela so they can effectively combat the spread of Covid-19. Authorities in Venezuela and we, as the international community, should make our best efforts to use all the available resources in the most depoliticized and effective way possible.

Objectives:

- Raise awareness about the humanitarian emergency in Venezuela and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's collapsed health system.
- Analyze the impact of the health crisis on women, girls, and other marginalized groups.
- Discuss ways for the international community to provide sufficient humanitarian assistance in full accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.
- Discuss the recent agreement reached by the government and opposition to distribute aid through the United Nations/Pan American Health Organization and its implementation.

Agenda & invited panelists:

- Welcoming remarks by **H.E. Ambassador Christoph Heusgen**, Permanent Representative of Germany to the UN
- Welcoming remarks by **H.E. Ambassador José Singer Weisinger**, Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the UN



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Briefers:

- **Dr. Kathleen Page** of Johns Hopkins University
- **Louis Charbonneau** of Human Rights Watch
- **Selene Soto** of Women's Link Worldwide

Remarks & questions from the floor are open to all member states, UN agencies, interested civil society and the media.

Please RSVP to GermanMissionUN@gmail.com (indicating your name, function and e-mail address) no later than Monday 27 July close of business to receive information on how to join.