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**THE COLLAPSE OF THE RULE OF LAW IN VENEZUELA:
WHAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY CAN DO TO RESTORE DEMOCRACY**

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Uruguay
Venezuela

**HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
TRANSNATIONAL CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES
JULY 19, 2017**

**LUIS ALMAGRO LEMES
SECRETARY GENERAL
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

Senator Rubio, Senator Menendez, members of the subcommittee,

As Secretary General of the Organization of American States, I fulfilled my duty to activate the Democratic Charter on May 30 of last year when I submitted my first Report on the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Permanent Council, requesting a meeting under the Democratic Charter.

As the situation continued to deteriorate, I submitted my second report on March 14, 2017

On April 3, 2017, the Permanent Council passed Resolution 1078 declaring that there had been a “alteration of the constitutional order” in Venezuela.

This past Sunday, the people of Venezuela came out in force to defend their democracy.

More than 7.5 million people voted peacefully to reject Nicolas Maduro’s proposed National Constituent Assembly, calling on the armed forces to defend Venezuela’s constitution, and demanding full elections.

The citizens of Venezuela came out to vote despite fear and terror of the retribution threatened by their government; a regime that is already

responsible for more than 100 deaths of their friends, their family and their neighbors.

Xiomara Solidaridad Scott, a 61 years old, nurse gave her life Sunday trying to vote for a free and democratic Venezuela.

When others were content to look the other way as Venezuela collapsed into dictatorship, I raised my voice to denounce the systematic violation of the Constitution and the escalating violent repression.

There is no greater crisis facing our hemisphere today. We must stand in solidarity with the brave people of Venezuela in restoring democracy and the rule of law in their country.

My raison d'être at the OAS is "More Rights for More People". This is a solemn commitment I take seriously every single day. It is a responsibility of which I will never tire.

It is the fundamental role of the Organization of American States— to stand vigilant in defense of democracy throughout the Americas.

This is why the Inter-American Democratic Charter was created.

It is a commitment that all member states must take seriously at this moment of truth for Venezuela.

Senator Rubio, Senator Menendez, members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for this opportunity to be with you today in support of the people of Venezuela.

I want to commend you for your strong commitment to this issue. The United States Congress, its leadership, and members of this Subcommittee, have been vital voices in denouncing the abuses inflicted daily upon the Venezuelan people.

Your bipartisan efforts to draw attention to this crisis, as well as the work of Senators to reach out to legislators throughout the Americas, have marked important moments in rallying the international community to the cause of the Venezuelan people.

As part of your ongoing efforts, this hearing is essential and comes at a critical time as the people of Venezuela deserve our support and need it now more than ever before.

Today's hearing is entitled "The Collapse of the Rule of Law in Venezuela: What the United States and the International Community Can Do To Restore Democracy."

As the Secretary General of the OAS, I am not here to tell United States or any other individual country in the Americas what to do. That is the sovereign decision of each Member State.

I will speak to what I have done in the face of Venezuela's collapse into dictatorship what I believe is the responsibility of the inter-American community of States to do in the face of that collapse.

The international community has an important responsibility in the face of tyranny and repression. And the OAS continues to be the only multilateral forum willing to address the crisis in Venezuela.

In a Hemisphere of close to 1 billion people, 20 countries that represent nearly 90% of the population of the Americas joined to speak in defense of democracy in Venezuela.

Twenty foreign ministers advocated for the lives and human rights of the Venezuelan people, at the General Assembly that took place in Mexico in June.

But as the violence in Venezuela escalates and the death toll continues to rise, it is clear that words are not enough.

The reluctance of the international community to act in defense of democracy has allowed the situation to deteriorate incrementally, but consistently, to the point where today it has become a full-blown humanitarian and security crisis.

Every step of the way it has been too little, and too late.

The Democratic Charter was designed as a preventative tool. When it was agreed, it established a very explicit authority to act in every signatory state, when necessity requires.

When used as intended, it can prevent or stop any backsliding in the regions' hard-earned democracies.

It is true that only the people of Venezuela must solve the crisis in their country. However, in Venezuela, the words of civilians are met with the weapons of the Regime.

The people of Venezuela peacefully took to the streets in defense of their fundamental rights and freedoms. The Regime responded strategically and systematically, targeting an unarmed, civilian population with violence and terror.

More than 100 people have been killed since the protests began. That is one close one person each day.

Of those killed, more than 30 were under the age of 21; 24 were students; 14 were teenagers.

Since the protests began, more than 450 investigations into human rights violations have been opened. Civil society estimates that the number civilians injured is above 15,000.

As of July 12, there were 444 political prisoners in Venezuela; the highest number since the military dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez.

These statistics do not include the thousands of lives lost in the humanitarian crisis.

Countless Venezuelans are dying without food or medicine- between 4 and 6 children die every week from malnutrition.

In 2016, seven children died each day before reaching the age of one. There are better survival rates for newborns in Syria.

Almost 2 million people have fled their homeland in recent years.

Having lost the rule of law, Venezuela now has one of the highest murder rates in the world.

The Regime has consistently rejected any and all offers of international humanitarian assistance. Instead, they have weaponized what little resources they do have, selecting who gets what.

As Secretary General, I have a responsibility to stand up for the people of Venezuela.

I will be relentless and continue to denounce the dismantling of democracy and the Constitution, the violations of human rights, and the violent repression taking place.

However, my voice alone is not enough. Member States and prominent leaders around the world must speak up together and explore what tools they have at their disposal to act.

President Maduro, his cabinet, and his military leaders have blood on their hands and they must be held accountable.

I am often asked about sanctions. It is imperative that the sanctions do not worsen the suffering of the Venezuelan people. However, targeted sanctions that hold those criminals responsible for the crisis and repression to account have been helpful.

It is a clear message to perpetrators that they can no longer act with impunity.

Senator Rubio, I ask that the three reports I have presented to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States on the situation in Venezuela be entered into the record of this hearing as part of my statement.

The first two reports lay out the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, as well as the complete alteration of the constitutional and democratic order in Venezuela.

These Reports also present a series of Recommendations that offer guidance for action by the international community.

The third report, I released this week, details the strategic and systematic violent repression targeting the unarmed, civilian population in Venezuela

Senator Rubio, I also ask that Permanent Council Resolution 1078 recognizing the “alteration of the constitutional order” in Venezuela be entered into the record of this hearing.

Finally, I ask that a report from the Office of the Attorney General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela released July 10, detailing the 92 deaths of demonstrators at the hands of Venezuelan security forces during the first 100 days also be entered into the record.

This damning report from the Venezuelan government itself shows the brutal extremes to which Maduro and his government will go to hold onto power.

We cannot remain distant or indifferent to the human tragedy. The international community must continue to build and exert external pressure, demonstrating that the Regime of Nicolas Maduro cannot act with impunity.

We must demand compliance with the Constitution and focus on a democratic exit from the crisis.

Thank you again for your time and attention to the tragedy in Venezuela.

I am pleased to answer any questions you may have regarding what the international community can and should do to support the Venezuelan people in their efforts to restore democracy and the rule of law to their beloved country.