

Written Testimony of Mark Green
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Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security,
Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues
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Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the situation in Venezuela and our work to support those affected by the crisis.

For years, Members of this Subcommittee have called attention to the corruption, economic mismanagement, and oppression that are the hallmarks of the former, illegitimate Maduro regime, and I appreciate your continued leadership on this issue. In particular, I would like to thank Chairman Rubio for his leadership. I appreciated our recent time together in Colombia, where we saw firsthand some of the effects of the crisis, as well as aspects of our response efforts. I would also like to thank Ranking Member Cardin for sustained focus on assisting the Venezuelan people, including the legislation he introduced in the last Congress. Your ongoing support and input is critical to our work.

It will come as no surprise to the Members of this Subcommittee that the situation in Venezuela is severe and continues to deteriorate. In fact, one of our great challenges is finding words to adequately convey the suffering that Venezuelan families feel each and every day. Hyperinflation and food scarcity have driven the monthly cost to feed a family to 100 times the monthly minimum wage. Crumbling infrastructure has disrupted water and sanitation services. Nearly 90 percent of Venezuelan hospitals are experiencing medicine shortages, and almost as many are without reliable power or water. No longer able to meet their basic needs, almost 3.5 million Venezuelans have fled to neighboring countries and beyond, creating the largest cross-border exodus in the history of the Americas; the effects of this crisis extend well beyond the country's borders.

The collapsing health care infrastructure in Venezuela has led to surges of infectious diseases within the country and, increasingly, throughout the region. This includes diseases that had previously been eliminated or controlled. An outbreak of diphtheria that began in July 2016 has escalated to nearly 1,560 cases as of January 2019, resulting in 270 deaths. Dengue has taken its toll as well, with more than 2,400 confirmed cases in 2018.

Again, the effects of these outbreaks are not limited to the country itself. In 2016, 86 percent of malaria cases in one Brazilian municipality were attributed to Venezuelan immigration. The majority of the approximately 17,000 measles cases throughout the region have been traced to outbreaks inside Venezuela. Recently, nearly 50 epidemiological specialists urged health-care authorities to declare a region-wide public health emergency due to ongoing disease outbreaks, stemming from Venezuela – malaria, measles, Chagas disease, leishmaniasis, Zika virus, and dengue virus were all cited.

Of course, mere numbers fall short of telling the full story. Two weeks ago, I visited Cúcuta, Colombia, a short distance from the Venezuela border. There, I saw firsthand the human toll of the illegitimate Maduro regime's disastrous policies and actions. Speaking with the Venezuelans who had managed to reach this city, I heard accounts of children starving, hospitals running out of medicine, and people forced to walk hundreds of miles over several days to cross the border in search of help. One young mother, with tears streaming down her face, told me how she had to leave her seven-year-old child behind when she fled. As I know you all agree, the horror of the situation is all the more painful because Venezuela was once one of the region's wealthiest countries.

The United States has a long, proud tradition of standing with people and countries in their time of need, and acting when it can to save lives and alleviate human suffering. It is who we are as Americans. Of course, that principle is especially important when it comes to crises in our own hemisphere, because our national security interests are also at stake.

Again, this crisis is entirely man-made and regime-driven. Rather than save lives, Maduro's sole objective is quite clearly holding on to his own power—regardless of the misery it causes. As a consequence, humanitarian assistance from the U.S. and elsewhere cannot be entrusted to his control and networks of distribution. Remember, to this day, Maduro claims there is no crisis in Venezuela—that the government is already adequately providing for its people. At the same time, his illegitimate regime is heartlessly using food and other life-sustaining supplies as tools to further oppress and control the lives of individuals. For example, according to industry sources, Maduro controls 100 percent of bakery flour inside the country. His regime decides who receives flour and how much. Much of the time, this basic necessity is made available only to Maduro's key supporters and allies.

But, for the first time in some years, there are real rays of hope. The U.S. and other leading democracies rejected the results of last May's illegitimate elections. We have repeatedly recognized the National Assembly as the only legitimate government body, duly elected by the Venezuelan people. And on January 23, 2019, we became the first country to officially recognize Juan Guaidó as the Interim President of Venezuela under the country's constitution. Interim President Guaidó's leadership has provided new inspiration for everyday Venezuelans to continue bravely resisting Maduro's tyranny, despite the very real risks posed by their courage.

I myself spoke with Interim President Guaidó on January 30, 2019. During that call, I reaffirmed the United States commitment to continue supporting the Venezuelan National Assembly, as well as other key democratic actors, such as local civil society organizations and the independent media. We agreed to work together to help restore dignity, human rights, and democracy in Venezuela. Interim President Guaidó also requested our assistance in helping him begin to meet some of the urgent needs of his people.

In response to his request, USAID and the Department of State—with support from the Departments of Defense and others—has pre-positioned humanitarian assistance in Colombia close to the border for eventual delivery into Venezuela. The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration simultaneously staged assistance in Brazil. All told,

since February 4, the U.S. Government has pre-positioned more than 400 metric tons of urgently needed humanitarian assistance, including food aid, emergency medical items, hygiene kits, water treatment units, and nutrition products, on Venezuela's two longest borders.

At President Trump's instruction, we have closely coordinated these efforts with the international community. President Iván Duque of Colombia and President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, in particular, have been key allies in our efforts. I was honored to join Vice President Pence at his February 25 meeting with members of the Lima Group in Bogotá, Colombia. The U.S. is grateful for our allies in the region who have stepped up to help the Venezuelan people in their hour of need.

As you are no doubt aware, on February 23, 2019, Interim President Guaidó and courageous Venezuelan volunteers attempted to bring these supplies and other assistance from the international community across the border. Unfortunately, they were confronted by more evidence of the illegitimate Maduro regime's callous disregard for the Venezuelan people. Maduro's security forces, alongside *colectivos*--armed gangs under Maduro's control--blocked trucks carrying life-saving assistance. They fired tear gas, rubber bullets, and set vehicles on fire. Members of Venezuela's Pemon indigenous group had peacefully organized the transport of supplies from Brazil, but they were viciously attacked by regime security forces. There are reports that Maduro deliberately released convicts from prison, entreating them to join the violence. Several members of the Pemon community were killed, among dozens of fellow Venezuelans who were wounded by gunshot in an attempt to bring in assistance that Venezuela so desperately needs. It was a shocking display of brutality, but par for the course for Maduro and his thugs.

It's clear that the Venezuelan people will not be deterred by Maduro's brutality or cowardice—and neither will the United States Government. We will continue to support Interim President Guaidó's efforts to deliver aid to his people in Venezuela, and we will continue to support Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, and others that are hosting Venezuelans who have fled. To date, the U.S. has provided more than \$195 million, including more than \$152 million in humanitarian assistance and approximately \$43 million in development and economic assistance, to aid those Venezuelans who have left the country. That funding has supported the provision of urgently needed food, health care, protection, and shelter, to both Venezuelans and host communities. We are not alone in this effort. Many of our close allies have pledged support, and many private citizens have already contributed assistance to the region, as well.

We all realize that humanitarian assistance, no matter how badly it is needed, is treatment, not a cure. It cannot address the root cause of the problem. So long as Maduro and his cronies continue to crush the people of Venezuela, their economy, and their hope, this crisis will worsen. As in Cuba, Nicaragua, and other places where people are suffering under authoritarianism, we know the answer to Venezuela's problem is human liberty and democracy, which remain the highest and best hope for people everywhere.

Venezuelans deserve a return to democracy, rule of law, and citizen-responsive governance. Despite the current turmoil, I am optimistic that a brighter day is ahead. The doomsayers talk as though freedom is in irreversible decline, but the only way freedom and democracy will fall away is if we let them. Interim President Guaidó, and the other Venezuelans I have spoken with during my travels throughout the region, are determined not to let that happen, and we are proud to stand with them in their struggle.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Subcommittee, we are witnessing a truly historic times for Venezuela and our hemisphere. As President Trump recently said in Miami, “the people of Venezuela stand at the threshold of history, ready to reclaim their country—and their future.” With Congress’ support, we at USAID will continue our efforts to support the Venezuelan people and help Interim President Juan Guaidó and the National Assembly restore democracy and prosperity to Venezuela.