



The Group of 78
Le Groupe des 78

March 28, 2019

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

Statement of concern on the crisis in Venezuela

The undersigned, coming from academia, civil society organizations, and the labour movement, are Canadian citizens who value the vital importance of adherence to international law and to United Nations principles of non-aggression. We feel compelled to express our deep concerns about Canada's involvement in the political and humanitarian crisis unfolding in Venezuela. We specifically lament the fact that, in concert with the Lima Group, it is orchestrating regime change in that country.

We are cognizant that both internal and external factors have played a role in generating the current crisis. Internally, none of the contending parties are beyond reproach for their deep erosion of political legitimacy in Venezuela. And external actors – including the Canadian government - have intervened in ways that have seriously exacerbated its political divisions and dramatically worsened its economic and humanitarian crisis, most reprehensibly through draconian economic sanctions.

We particularly deplore the United States' repeated threats to intervene militarily to enforce regime change. Not only would this represent yet another egregious violation of international law, and of UN principles, but it would undoubtedly also result in enormous additional human suffering. Military interventions aimed at regime change have a disastrous track record - sowing political discord, causing widespread death and destruction and, all too often, culminating in brutal authoritarian rule.

We do acknowledge that the Lima Group has expressed its antagonism to external military intervention. But its antagonism is put in doubt by its willingness to work so

closely with the United States even as the latter continues its threats. So do its recent warnings to current members of the Venezuelan military, that they face severe future punishment if they do not terminate their allegiance to the Maduro government. In effect, the Lima Group is encouraging a military-backed coup and is thereby complicit in a process that seriously risks a disastrous escalation of violence, or even civil war.

Under these circumstances we demand that the Canadian government should immediately abandon its current policy stance in favour of one that is clearly based on the following four pillars:

1. Active opposition to any partisan external interventions in Venezuela's internal affairs (where "partisan" refers to explicit, *a priori* support for any of the contending factions).
2. The immediate cessation of all economic sanctions, since in international law these are clearly tantamount to external aggression, and since they clearly impose untold human suffering on the Venezuelan people;
3. The restoration of Venezuela's normal access to international markets and finance, and the delivery of international emergency aid through UN – and other impartial – channels to mitigate the current humanitarian crisis;
4. And finally, active support for impartial efforts to promote dialogue, mediation and negotiations, such as the Montevideo Mechanism proposed by Mexico, Uruguay and CARICOM. The aim should be to help Venezuelans work towards achieving political consensus. Ultimately this should engender constructive democratic engagement, contributing to a sustained and positive vision of the country, and supported by the bulk of its population.

With sincere regards,



Roy Culpeper, Chair, Group of 78

Organizations

1. ASOCOLOM -Action et solidarite pour la Colombie
2. Association québécoise des amis de Cuba
3. Canadian Peace Initiative
4. Carrefour d'animation et de participation à un monde ouvert
5. Centre justice et foi
6. Comité Justice des OFSJ
7. Group of 78
8. Hamilton Coalition To Stop The war
9. Ligue des droits et libertés
10. L'Institut Rideau Institute
11. Ottawa Cuban Connections
12. Parti communiste du Québec
13. Religions pour la Paix – Québec
14. Right On Canada
15. Solidarité populaire Estrie

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162. Yves Vaillancourt
163. Constance Vaudrin
164. Gloria Villamil
165. Chris Walker, Saint Mary's University
166. Michael Walsh, Association québécoise des amis de Cuba
167. Carole Yerochewski

Cc: The Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Andrew Scheer, Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the
Conservative Party
The Hon Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party