

**UNITED NATIONS UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS
AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK**

**STATEMENT ON THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN
VENEZUELA**

Caracas, 6 November 2019

During my first visit to Venezuela, I have seen how ordinary women, men and children face overwhelming challenges every day to survive. Millions cannot afford the bare minimum of food, water, and health care. The situation continues to deteriorate.

The vast majority of Venezuelans have been affected by the political and economic crisis in what was once Latin America's wealthiest nation. A huge economic contraction fueled by hyperinflation has resulted in a dire situation for ordinary people all across the country.

I have seen myself how the health system is on the verge of collapse with many hospitals lacking the most basic water and electricity infrastructure. Hospital patients, many of whom are already critically ill, are at high risk of losing their lives from new infections they are acquiring while they are in hospital, because basic cleaning and disinfection cannot be done. This is exacerbated by a lack of medicines, and a shortage of doctors and nurses to administer them. Preventable diseases including malaria and diphtheria are back with a vengeance. People with chronic health conditions, pregnant and nursing women, infants and those living with disabilities are among the most vulnerable.

Some estimates suggest that 4.5 million Venezuelans now live outside the country – mostly elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean. Too many people are risking perilous journeys every day, facing sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse.

Despite the severity of the situation, I have also been struck by people's solidarity in supporting each other. Staff and patients at the Jose Gregorio Hernandez hospital, which I visited, told me medicines are scarce, power outages mean that only one fifth of the hospital has electricity, water runs only two days a week, and when it does some of the rusty and broken pipes ooze a filthy stench that lingers throughout the hospital. Some hospital workers, I was told, spend more than their monthly salary just getting to work.

In my meetings with senior Government of Venezuela officials and members of the National Assembly, I found a common will to address the humanitarian situation. Only a political solution can end the suffering in Venezuela. Meanwhile, the United Nations and our humanitarian partners will continue to provide humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable in accordance with our principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality.

In this vein, the Humanitarian Response Plan developed this year by the United Nations and partners to address the most dire humanitarian needs, has been fully endorsed by the Government of Venezuela and

the National Assembly. I have received firm commitments that the implementation of the plan will be supported, to the benefit of vulnerable Venezuelans across the country.

The humanitarian community focuses on the provision of life-saving assistance and protection for the most vulnerable. All parties must respect our principled humanitarian approach and not manipulate the needs-based assistance. Human suffering is not a political weapon. We will continue to monitor the delivery of assistance to ensure aid is delivered transparently and in accordance with independent assessments.

I have asked the authorities and others for support in improving access for humanitarian organisations, including non-government organisations, allowing them to bring in expert staff more easily, to reduce the bureaucratic constraints to registration and moving aid supplies into and around the country, to support independent monitoring and to help us improve the availability of data to ensure the neediest people can be helped.

UN-supported aid programmes are making a difference. Over the last year we have helped vaccinate 8.5 million children against measles, supported some 975,000 people with medicines in 109 health facilities, distributed food and provided agricultural support to 50,000 people, ensured 350,000 people have access to safe water, provided education support to over 160,000 students, and allowed many to stay in school at the start of the new year. We have also provided nutritional support to over 100,000 children and pregnant and nursing mothers and supported 35,000 people with information and support to access protection services.

Last but not least, I should like to thank all those who have contributed financial resources for UN-supported activities to the humanitarian effort in Venezuela. More than US\$155 million has been received this year. But our US\$223 million Humanitarian Response Plan remains under-resourced and the biggest constraint to delivering humanitarian assistance remains funding. Everyone needs to do more.

We will next month publish provisional plans for UN-supported humanitarian response in Venezuela in 2020. Substantially more financial resources will be needed, and we will seek additional funding from donors.

But we need to recognize that international resources are unlikely to be sufficient to stabilize the humanitarian situation. We will need to find a way to unlock Venezuelan resources to contribute more to humanitarian action. While recognizing the ongoing political differences, this will require stakeholders to place a greater priority on reducing the immediate suffering of the people of this country.

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