

Latin America and Caribbean Network for Democracy

Solidarity with the Jewish Community in Venezuela and a Call for Tolerance

The Board of Coordinators, organizations, members, and all the signatories of this document wish to express our deep concern for the recent attacks against the Jewish community in Venezuela and the serious threat to freedom of religion and worship that these attacks represent. We are worried to see how President Hugo Chávez and some of his ministers' violent message against the Jewish community have provoked several attacks that today have escalated with the destruction of the Maripérez Synagogue in Caracas, causing destruction and the desecration of sacred symbols like the Torah. Besides the material damage to the Temple, moral damage was inflicted and translated to phrases that express the gravest racism and atrocious anti-Semitism. These are not isolated events. Regrettably, the Venezuelan Jewish community has been receiving attacks from violent groups; but it is extremely worrying that during the assault against the Maripérez Synagogue, the database of the Israeli Community in Venezuela was stolen. Similarly, a few days ago a violent group declared the Venezuelan Catholic Church a military target, with no posterior response from the National Government or any civil or penal authority. These acts of intolerance have been repeated frequently, and with impunity. The official message has brought violence against students, the media and several civil society organizations, and for that reason we reaffirm our call for tolerance, peace and the construction of an environment of understanding.

This intolerance and persecution of freedom of worship should be stopped. Humanity has suffered unfathomable tragedies whose origins arose from exactly this type of inciting official message and legal impunity, which provoked and allowed brutal genocide and persecutions. Any society and government that calls itself democratic should guarantee and defend the respect for human rights for all, the rule of law, the independence of institutions, the respect for dissidence, and the respect for freedom of religion and worship. Other attacks against freedom of religion have taken place in other countries in the region, and it is a worrying matter that this religious persecution might expand throughout the continent. It is unacceptable that religious persecution be justified due to political positions. Freedom of religion is recognized by international law through several instruments such as Art. 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 18 and 27 of the International Covenant of Political and Civil Rights, and Art. 14 of the Declaration of Children's Rights, among others. We regret that violence and lack of respect for democratic principles are being promoted in Venezuela. It is appropriate to remind the Venezuelan government that democracy goes beyond electoral processes, and implies the recognition of the rule of law, human rights for all, the independence of institutions, dissidence, the freedom of choice and practice of any religion, and freedom of expression.

We demand a thorough investigation and punishment for the persons directly responsible for the attacks against the Synagogue, and similar

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measures for those responsible for the other attacks against the Jewish community, in order to put an end to the arbitrary actions that have been generating more violence. We ask the Organization of American States and the United Nations that they use all their good offices to protect the groups now threatened by violence in Venezuela, and to find the proper ways to take action against religious persecutions in any country in the region.

We remind those who perpetrate and incite these violent acts, and to those who have had the opportunity to stop them, that such atrocities are not acceptable to the international community. We express our solidarity with the Jewish community and with all those who have suffered any form of persecution and make available to them protection of the various organizations in the Americas that promote peace and democracy. We will never allow freedom to be wanting, or an aspiration, or anything less than the air we breathe; those of us who build life, who believe in peace, who respect diversity and believe in a better world each day. Our call is for nonviolence, political as well as religious tolerance and respect for freedom as one of the fundamental principles of Human Rights. We advocate for understanding and tolerance, and for the contribution by every sector to a culture of peace.

Signed by:

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Centro Ecuatoriano de Desarrollo y Estudios Alternativos (*Equatorian Center for Development and Alternative Studies*)

Centro de Estudios de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Central de Venezuela (*Venezuelan Central University Center for Human Rights Studies*)

Centro Global Por el Desarrollo y la Democracia (*Global Center for Development and Democracy*)

Congreso Visible (*Visible Congreso*)

Consortio Desarrollo y Justicia (*Justice and Development Consortium*)

Fundacion Boliviana para la Democracia Multipartidaria (FBDM) (*Bolivian Foundation for Multiparty Democracy*)

Fundación para la Union del Pacifico Democrático (*Foundation for the Unity of the Democratic Pacific Area*)

Instituto Nicaraguense de Estudios Humanisticos (INEH) (*Nicaraguan Institute for Humanistic Studies*)

Justice Consortium

La Red de Abogados Venezolanos en Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (*Venezuelan Network of Lawyers to Defend Human Rights*)

Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas (*Displaced Women League*)

Observancia – Bolivia (*Observance – Bolivia*)

Observatorio Género Democracia y Derechos Humanos (OGDDHH) (*Democracy and Human Rights Issues Observatory*)

Pro Voto (*Pro Voting*)

Sócrates Venezuela

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“Confederación Obrera Nacional Independiente de Cuba” (*National Confederation of Cuban Independent Workers*)

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Please indicate your name, country and organization to which you belong in case you wish to adhere through both.