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WE ALERT THE COUNTRY AND THE WORLD ABOUT THE SITUATION OF VENEZUELAN ABROAD GIVEN THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The exodus was one of the first politics of State impulsed by Hugo Chávez as he was taking control of national companies, he expropriated the private ones, disintegrated the armed forces and exacerbated the social class struggle. Today, the Venezuelan diaspora counts approximately 6 million Venezuelans abroad, of which at the least 4.5 million fled in the last five years a significant proportion in situation of being displaced, refugees and persecuted.

A legal, economic, and social vulnerability now joins the dramatic situation that they face along with the different societies that have received them, product of the pandemic COVID-19. Most Venezuelans enjoy sources of formal employment, but a representative group has come to cities where they have managed to survive thanks to the informal economy, one of the sectors mostly affected by the confinement politics. In general, the uncertainty is also high considering politics for the payroll shortage, suspension of the salaries and other measures that the private sector in many countries had to take in response to the impact suffered by the pandemic.

Unofficially, more than 75 Venezuelans have tested positive for virus in different countries, of which the unfortunate death of the least 20 people is known, of whom at least 12 were doctors. To their families, we send our condolences and words of encouragement. Precisely, many are the Venezuelan doctors, nurses and other health personnel who contribute with the authorities of their cities to control the propagation of the coronavirus, risking their lives to save others. To them, our recognition and gratitude for their work performance that well describes the solidarity of the Venezuelan professionals. However, it is also our duty to alert the governments of the world on the vulnerability that many Venezuelans run, which makes them potential victims of this pandemic. Especially we are concerned about the situation of many fellow citizens in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, where we have identified a greater degree of vulnerability.

It is public and notorious that from these four countries big groups of Venezuelans have been made up and this time, they repeat their long journey making their way back to Venezuela. They are known as the "returnees". Many of these Venezuelans spend nights under bridges or stations to continue walking the following day to their final destination. According to the UN Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a total of 45,905 returnees have returned to the country up to May 21st of this year; while 991 people have done so by air. In Colombia, there are long waiting lists for bus tickets to Cucuta, the closest city to the Colombian-Venezuelan border where nearly 27,000 people returned to the country in deplorable situations, being taken by force to where quarantine conditions are unworthy and inhuman, locked up in schools or sports courts by not allowing them to return to their cities of origin, even after being tested for the virus. The number of returnees will

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increase in the following days generating an even more tense situation on the border between Colombia and Venezuela.

From Vente Venezuela and particularly, Vente World, we recognize the work that many governments are doing to address this crisis; as well as the work of organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) concentrating its efforts in the most critical. Similarly, we recognize the invaluable unconditional support of Venezuelan and foreign associations and social organizations that have provided a close sincere and transparent assistance to Venezuelan communities displaced or to migrants themselves in their walks. We appreciate them as another example of a solidarity net that is woven under trust and responsibility agreements.

It is also our duty to call the officials appointed by the interim government that work in Venezuelan embassies. It is inconceivable that these diplomatic spaces have been converted into spaces of political parties where the interest of the citizens are left out. Venezuelans abroad cry out for answers that must be arranged with the competent authorities in the shortest time possible. To the representatives of the legitimate government we remind you that there is more than one life depending on a legal procedure or counting on not having something to eat at least once a day.

The management must be effective and committed. Regarding this, we demand transparency and accountability and a very focused use of all the funds and resources of humanitarian aid received to remedy the situation of many Venezuelans abroad. Recalling once more, that the politician and diplomat in his condition as a leader is in essence is a public server and as it should be towards Venezuelans.

The grave situation we have described, has only one feasible solution: break out of the criminal system. Therefore, we reiterate our formal request to the liberal democracies of the West to act responsibly, with urgency and determination towards a conflict that stopped being exclusively for Venezuelans and has become one of the greatest threats to the Western Hemisphere.

Quarantine time has its expiration date, but we do not know how much longer we can endure the suffering that millions of Venezuelans, both inside and outside their country, experience due to the cruelty of totalitarian socialism of the XXI century.

Caracas, June 1st, 2020