**COA**: I am delighted in my capacity as chairman of the Council of the Americas to welcome Venezuela’s Unity Presidential Candidate Edmundo González and opposition leader María Corina Machado. We are here for a keynote interview at the 54th Washington Conference of the Americas. Thank you both for joining us from the campaign trail at an incredible busy time.

As you prepare for elections that have been scheduled for July 28th, Edmundo and Maria Corina, I understand you have brief comments you would like to make, and then I would like to a few questions. We’re very interested in your thoughts and impressions from the campaign.

**MC**:

Thank you, we are super grateful to the Council of Americas and Americas Society for this ongoing support for the cause of democracy in Venezuela, very grateful to you Andrés for, as a chairman and Susan Seagal as president and CEO and also of course Eric Farnsworth Vice President of the American Society Council.

This is a unique opportunity for us because we want to convey a message of hope and struggle after 25 years of destruction in Venezuela. There is a unique opportunity, a real opportunity for change and democratization of our country; in 80 days, on July 28th, Venezuelans have the right to vote under very hard circumstances, certainly not free and fair elections but we are fighting for our right to choose. What I want to tell you all is that this is different from previous moments, now we have a legitimated leadership, we have a candidate that has the support of the Venezuelan people and all political parties –democratic political parties- we have a huge movement that is growing and going and has over 80% of support. We are seeing tensions among factions of the regime because they know that they have lost total support of the Venezuelan people and we are also seeing the international community recently supporting us in this fight for free and fair elections, ever former allies of Maduro such as president Lula or president Petro that are insistent on the necessity to have this process taken place with fair conditions on July 28th because they realize the implications and the outcome of this elections will have enormous consequences not only for Venezuela but for the region. So we have reasons to be hopeful and to work hard and we are super grateful for this unique opportunity that you are giving us.

**EG**:

Thank you for this opportunity, first to the Council of Americas. I was able to attend some of the previous events in Washington; I was there in the events in the 70’s and 80’s. This is a very complex moment for the Venezuelan people, this situation, not only economic, not only politically speaking, but also social and humanitarian complex situation. At the moment we are very hopeful, not only optimistic but hopeful to win the way of restructuration of our democracy, the reconstruction of our economy and we are very hopeful that you and the audience can hear the voice of two Venezuelans, one is the leader of the opposition and the presidential candidate who was elected by al the parties of the Unitary Platform.

**COA**: You have been harassed; they have made your campaign as difficult as possible. So maybe give us a little bit, on how it is been able to conduct a campaign under such difficult circumstances?

**MC**:

I think this is hard to describe, I think there are precedents in our regions. As we speak we have nine members of our campaign team that are in prison, some of them top positions in the national campaign team. We have six members of our team that are secured in the Argentinian Embassy, some other team members are being persecuted, some of them are hiding, you know, it is very hard to move around. I’m not able to leave the country, for over ten years you are not able to get into a domestic flight, because the airlines would lose their licenses. If I stayed at a hotel with our team, then the hotel is closed, as it happened last week in the east part of our country, when we were touring. Roads are blocked, sometimes we are physically attacked and certainly the conditions of our campaign are super tough. We are not able, I am not able to get into the national television or get interviews or ads.

Nonetheless, wherever we go thousands and thousands of people gather. They go walking, they use their own means, but more importantly, and this is the key of our emotions, that we are seeing people absolutely committed to going until the end, which means bringing our kids back home. That’s the desire that unites us strongly every single Venezuelan.

**COA**: Again, you are both incredibly brave and certainly the international community backs you and we’ll hold the government responsible for any actions, additional actions that they would take against you. What needs to happen between now and then to allow a vote that you would deem free and fair?

**EG**:

First of all, let me tell you that I think the importance of the international community presence here in Venezuela during this campaign is vital to have a result, free and fair. I was speaking with an international leader, they were keen to ask, to know how they can help and I told them the presence of your international community here in Venezuela before and during the act of voting is vital for us, it’s vital because you will see the difference, the unbalance of the government, the advantage of the use of their candidates and in the end and in the voting day is also I think it’s very important to have the audits system working properly.

**COA**: I think is setting an example for the world of popular movement and people taking action into their own hands and you’ve also, a great example of courage for the whole world, if you think about what can the international community do more to help ensure that this elections take place?

**MC**:

I would say that the world needs to understand how the outcome of this election will impact not only Venezuela; I would say Latin America and even the whole Hemisphere. I mean, these are two outcomes; either Maduro holds power by force, by blocking the election or committing huge fraud and understand what that will mean for the region. That would mean that immediately in less than a year, we have two, three, four, five million Venezuelans fleeing that biggest migration wave ever seen so far. Secondly, we’ll see how this criminal networks “El Tren de Aragua“ and others they will strengthen and grow, probably we will see how the relationships with Iran or with Russia will be even more consolidated. So, that will be a devastating outcome with the regional political stability that would be promoted from Venezuela.

On the other hand, if we manage to move ahead and negotiate a transition and we will have Edmundo González as our next president we will not only see migration stopped, but reverse. We will see many people coming back; we will see our country turned into the energy palm of the Americas. We have huge energy potential, not only oil and gas, but also in renewal energies and certainly we will see Venezuela strengthening our relations with other democratic governments in the region and around the world. Certainly these two outcomes are totally different so I think, the international community should help us make this case clear to all stakeholders, not only political but financial, economic, and social around the world.

**COA:** Well, thank you very much; I would like to ask both of you for some closing remarks

**MC**:

What we are living in Venezuela is unique. I really want to convey to every single person that is listening to us that this goes beyond an electoral process. This has turned into an existential fight, even a spiritual one, and that’s why we are seeing people willing to do things that they never thought they were capable of, and the strength that is going day by day is huge. We are organizing thousands and thousands and thousands across the country and I am very honored to share this fight with a person and a man that has such a strong and honorable life as Edmundo González, someone people can trust and that’s why you can see that only in a matter of days he has received this huge support, so we are working together, we are conscious of the huge challenges we are facing but I trust the Venezuelan people and I know that we will prevail.

**EG**:

Let me tell you frankly, I was never involved in a political campaign, I have never ran in any political candidacy and what I am seeing here, what I am perceiving from the people is the enthusiasm to participate in the election day. This morning we received some delegations, some organizations from the center of the political spectrum, from the left from the political spectrum and also very good motivated and willing to give us their support of their organization to have brought coalition supporting the candidacy of María Corina.