**Topic 1: Safety and Security in Venezuela**

Safety and security in Venezuela can be broken down into violence and crime, health, and home life. The economic crisis has increased poverty levels throughout Venezuela, and poverty is correlated with crime. Homicide rates are some of the highest in the world, and drug trafficking is very prevalent. The economic crisis in Venezuela has caused scarcity of resources, like medicine and food, and homes lack security, as there is a water crisis, as well as an energy crisis. All of these factors contribute to the conditions that make crime and violence prevalent. (LA Times, June 6, 2016) Primero Justicia would like to combat the root cause of violence, poverty and poor living conditions, stemming from the economic crisis. I, Dinorah Figuera, for my part, have been very active in the health sector. In 2013 I led a successful campaign to remove the ineffective and uncaring Minister of Health from office, due to their negligence of the oncoming crisis, as hospitals around the country were unequipped to treat any diseases. Recently, I said “El canal humanitario es importante (…) La ministra de Salud dice mentiras al asegurar que hay 15% de escasez de medicinas,” which translates roughly to “The humanitarian channel is important (...) Health Minister tells lies to ensure that there is 15% shortage of medicines.” I will continue to work so that there is transperency and progress in the health industry. (Primero Justicia, November 9, 2016)

Dinorah Figuera: “Para el año que viene se estima una inflación de 1.000%”. (2016, November 9). Retrieved November 9, 2016, from http://www.primerojusticia.org.ve/cms/index.php?option=com\_flexicontent&view=item&cid=158:en-la-prensa&id=32334:dinorah-figuera-para-el-ano-que-viene-se-estima-una-inflacion-de-1-000&Itemid=500

McDonnel, P. J. (2016, June 6). The biggest worry in crisis-ridden Venezuela: Crime. Retrieved November 9, 2016, from http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-venezuela-violence-20160605-snap-story.html

**Topic 2: Venezuela’s Economic Crisis**

Venezuela’s economic crisis began due to its over reliance on oil, and when oil prices fell the economy fell into disaster. This, coupled with bad economic policies of the Government, have led to extreme inflation and economic collapse. One of the worst of these policies, which the opposition would like to rectify, is the constant hiking of the minimum wage. This only harms businesses, as they cannot afford to pay the ever increasing wages, which restricts the amount of workers they can higher, and hurts the economy. Lawrence Soteldo, a coordinator for Voluntad Popular, said “although it is true that Venezuelans need more money to get by, they know that money is pulverized by inflation.” Essentially, the wage increases have no impact on the purchasing power of Venezuelans, but have an extremely negative impact on business growth. (Caracas Chronicles, August 22, 2016) Another problem is Maduro’s insistence on centralizing economic control. In January, despite the National Assembly voting down an “emergency economic decree” he submitted, which gives the executive even more control over the budget, companies, and currency, the puppets on the Supreme Tribunal ruled in favor of the decree. The solution lies in economic diversification, and cutting government spending. (Federation of Scientists, August 22, 2016)

Abadi, A. M. (2016, August 22). The Opposition Reacts to the Minimum Wage Hike. Retrieved November 9, 2016, from http://www.caracaschronicles.com/2016/08/22/opposition-reacts-minimum-wage-hike/

Sullivan, M. P. (2016, August 22). Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations. Retrieved November 9, 2016, from https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43239.pdf

**Topic 3: Social Division and Venezuelan Politics**

I, Dinorah Figuera, am a member of Primero Justicia, a progressive-humanist party, which now holds 33 seats in the National Assembly. The party’s ideology is based in democratizing Venezuela, and is part of the opposition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD). Under Chavez, and continuing in Maduro’s presidency, only a perverted version of democracy has been seen. Despite being elected in transparent and open elections, these heads of state have centralized power in the executive, taken political prisoners, and increased censorship and propaganda. (University of Central Florida, 2012) The opposition to the government has exponentially increased since the death of Chavez, due to an increase in humanitarian concerns, violence, and poverty. After winning the National Assembly, MUD believes this is the perfect time to reform the political system, and have new presidential elections, as clearly the results of the 2013 election do not reflect the will of the people now. There has been significant opposition to these efforts by the government, as the executive controls the judicial and electoral bodies due to the centralization of power by Chavez. The biggest obstacle to new presidential elections is securing a recall referendum, a process with many roadblocks. To have a recall referendum, the party must gather signatures from 20% of the population in each Venezuelan state in 3 days, which in itself is a difficult task, but the National Electoral Council (CNE), the electoral body, ruled that interference had taken place in an earlier step in the process, and the date of the collection of signatures that was supposed to start in mid-October was pushed back. This is a significant setback, as per Venezuela’s constitution, for new presidential elections to be held the referendum must happen within the first half the president’s term, which for Maduro is January 10, 2017. If that requirement is not met, then instead of elections being held, the vice president will be made president, which means the situation will not change, and Venezuela will continue its downward spiral. (Federation of Scientists, August 22, 2016)

Gicherman, J. (2012). THE JUDICIAL BRANCH IN VENEZUELA & THE LACK OF CHECKS AND BALANCES. Retrieved November 9, 2016, from http://etd.fcla.edu/CF/CFH0004205/Gicherman\_Jessica\_201205\_BA.pdf

Sullivan, M. P. (2016, August 22). Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations. Retrieved November 9, 2016, from https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43239.pdf