**Melva Paredes: Mesa de la Unidad Democrática**

**Venezuelan National Assembly Specialized Assembly**

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TOPIC 01: SAFETY AND SECURITY IN VENEZUELA

**Background of the issue**

Venezuela is plagued by issues of safety and security, and they only seem to be getting worse. Under the pro-Chavista Bolivarian government, homicide rates have risen to some of the highest in the world. Over 27 000 homicides took place in Venezuela in 2015, and violent crime is common, even in very affluent neighbourhoods. Issues of poverty and inequality such as inflation or a lack of access to basic goods make it nearly impossible for people not to turn to crime as a means of survival, violent and otherwise.

Policing forces within Venezuela are ineffective and unable to properly perform their jobs. They are underfunded and not adequately prepared to deal with the violent gangs who are all too commonly linked to crimes in Venezuela. Entire neighbourhoods are controlled by criminals with unlimited mobility, thanks to the paltry prices of oil and their access to vehicles, and police can neither safely or effectively intervene in dangerous situations in which these criminal gangs are involved. Police and military forces are not receiving the funding or support they desperately need.

**Actions taken by the Bolivarian Government**

The Bolivarian government allowed Venezuela to fall into economic crisis, driving up rates of violence and forcing people into crime. This cycle of underdevelopment continues to drive up rates of violent crime within Venezuela, particularly Caracas, which now has the highest homicide rate in the world. The Maduro government chooses to blame these issues on capitalistic ideals, external influences, and anything other than its own actions. It has not followed through on key promises, and continues to ignore the root problems behind many of the issues surrounding security and safety within Venezuela today.

The pro-Chavista Bolivarian government has not followed through on its promises to better fund police groups and the military, leaving both groups unable to perform as they need to, as well as wasting vast amounts of money on failed plans. In 2012, private gun ownership was outlawed, in an attempt to lower homicide and violent crime rates. 47 million dollars were wasted setting up voluntary gun surrender centres around the country, which proved ineffective. The gun trade has not decreased, but has moved to the black market, increasing crime. Additionally, cases of police officers being identified and then killed so their guns could be stolen have become horrifyingly common.

**Actions/plans of MUD and goals**

These issues, among many others, have been routinely blamed on the MUD (Mesa de la Unidad Democrática), despite the Bolivarian government being at fault. Poor actions taken under current president Maduro and his government have created the precarious situation we are forced to deal with today in Venezuela. The Mesa de la Unidad Democrática aims to address the root causes of the violence and the threats to safety and security plaguing Venezuela today.

These root causes include the massive levels of poverty and inequality present in Venezuela at the present, the prevalent culture of general lawlessness, and the many ways in which the Chavista regime has poorly managed these issues, creating an inescapable cycle of crime. Band-aid solutions addressing violence and security issues in Venezuela have failed to solve these issues or the root problems behind them, and have failed the Venezuelan people. The MUD will focus on these root problems, and solving the economic crisis and improving industry and job opportunities outside of the oil industry and outside of violent crime as a means to survival, or other types of crime as people’s only means to obtaining necessities.

TOPIC 02: VENEZUELA’S ECONOMIC CRISIS

**Background of the issue**

Venezuela’s economy has been dependent on oil exports since the 1930s, which is when the first “Dutch Disease” became evident. This disease overvalued national current, weakened the production of staple goods within the country, and sent entrepreneurs running from their fields towards oil, in a grab for a share of the oil wealth. Massive internal migration within Venezuela saw the movement of many people from more rural areas into cities, creating what became, after the crash of the economy and the oil market, poverty belts. These poverty belts became strongholds of crime within Venezuelan cities, and contributed to the collapse of the social security system.

Venezuela, as a country, pays its debts in oil, and has been forced to give away far more oil than it should in order to pay these debts because of the value of oil being so dramatically decreased. Investors are now refusing loan demands from the state because of doubt around the ability of Venezuela to pay back loans, which is highly problematic for the country. The Venezuelan dollar- the bolivar- has fallen greatly in value and Venezuela is in a state of urgent economic crisis. The vast majority of the economy, which was centered around oil, has collapsed. 95% of foreign income was dependent on oil revenue, and inflation has now risen to 500%, predicted to continue rising to 1600% in 2017.

**Actions taken by the Bolivarian Government**

Economic mismanagement at the hands of the Bolivarian government has led to scarcity of many goods and necessities in the last 4 years. The 21st Century Socialist Project, implemented by Hugo Chavez, in the very early 2000s, put many interventionist economic practises into place within Venezuela. Policy such as price controls of basic goods, have been heavily critiqued by both international officials and many people within Venezuela, as well as policy such as foreign exchange controls. The controls on foreign currency exchange made it illegal for any foreign currency to be obtained through any channels other than the Venezuelan government, in an attempt to prevent the fraudulent funneling of money from within Venezuela to bodies outside of it.

Foreign exchange control created a black market, particularly around the exchange of bolivars for American dollars (and vice versa), and severely damaged the private sector within the Venezuelan economy. These controls have led to many companies ending or largely decreasing production because these companies need foreign currency to purchase materials. Two key examples are the airline crisis, and Empresas Polar. In the recent airline crisis, airlines pulled out of Venezuela because the government owed them so much money in currency exchange. Foreign exchange control essentially allows the government to hold hostage the profits of corporations by preventing them from exchanging such profits out of Venezuelan bolivars.

In the case of Empresas Polar, a major food producer in Venezuela, has ceased parts of its production because of foreign exchange controls. Empresas Polar can no longer import ingredients necessary to its productions, ingredients which must be imported because of the lack of agriculture and production within the country, particularly in the past 15 years. Empresas Polar must convert its bolivars to foreign currency to make these purchases, and without easy access to these foreign currencies, it is not able to do so. Domestic corporations which Venezuela desperately needs to be carrying out production of basic goods are being deterred and held back by Bolivarian economic policy.

**Actions/plans of MUD and goals**

The Mesa de la Unidad Democrática will fight to diversify the economic sector of Venezuela, as a strategy to repair the wide scale economic crisis facing Venezuela today. Sectors such as agriculture and production, particularly of basic goods and necessities, must begin to grow and rebuild themselves in order to restructure the Venezuelan economy after the crash of the oil industry in Venezuela. Venezuela currently faces the worst economic crisis since Chavez came into power almost 18 years ago, and the Bolivarian government and its policy have done an extremely poor job managing this economic crisis.

Foreign exchange controls have been unsuccessful, and the Bolivarian government has failed in its economic policy around both those controls as well as price controls. MUD criticizes these foreign exchange controls and the way they have negatively impacted the private sector, forcing out foreign international corporations as well as preventing new international businesses from developing within Venezuela. Chavez’s policies have had limited success reducing economic inequality and have vastly negatively influenced the private sector in Venezuela. Policies must work to address both the socioeconomic crisis and Venezuela’s oil addiction, working to diversify the economy and expand business and production, particularly around agriculture, food, and basic necessities.

TOPIC 03: SOCIAL DIVISION AND VENEZUELAN POLITICS

**Background of the issue**

Venezuelans are polarized socially and politically, and the conflicting politics of an unstable democratic system are only making matters worse. Protests over the past several years have drawn attention, both for the mass dissatisfaction of the people with the government, as well as the violence of the protests. 3100 protesters were arrested between 2014 and 2015, along with prominent opposition leader, Leopoldo Lopez. Lopez has been held in military facility since February 2014 for “inciting violent protests”.

Additionally, a huge division between those of differing socioeconomic statuses exists within Venezuelan society. Many people in Venezuela, almost 10% of the population, live in extreme poverty, largely due to the current economic crisis, and struggle to access basic resources and goods. This has led to a cycle of poverty and violent crime, as well as a polarization of support between the opposition and the Bolivarian socialist revolution, as a result of the highly charged opinions around economic policy and its personal impact on citizens across the country and their everyday lives.

**Actions taken by the Bolivarian Government**

The PSUV (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela) was founded as a means to institutionalize the Bolivarian social revolution, and that movement has remained not only hugely influential but in control of the Venezuelan government for 18 years. The institutionalization of a social movement created an extreme division between its supporters and those who opposed it as a movement. The Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement, or the BRM, brought Hugo Chavez to power in 1999, and since then, has continued to polarize politics and people in Venezuela. Chavez, and his regime, unconstitutionally centralized power within the Venezuelan government. This regime violated constitutional rights and has been hugely detrimental to Venezuela’s economic and social stability.

The current Bolivarian government has shown itself to be corrupt, over and over again, and its actions must be actively opposed and openly critiqued. Maduro won his presidency by a margin of only 1.5%, a victory that has been highly questioned ever since the results were released. Power in the government is highly centralized to the executive branch, and it often appears the Bolivarian government only aims to maintain its own power. Additionally, the supreme court of Venezuela has yet to produce a single ruling against the government. These are just a few examples of the corruption of the Chavista regime in Venezuela, a regime whose power needs to be checked immediately, and who ultimately needs to be removed from power entirely.

**Actions/plans of MUD and goals**

The Mesa de la Unidad Democrática aims to end this social division and improve democratic representation as well as the views towards the democratic and political systems within Venezuela. We will fight to restore faith in and improve the party representation system, as well as the Venezuelan government as a whole. MUD demands a change of policies, and will push for a new government altogether, as a means to aggressively counteract the corruption and poor policies of the current Bolivarian government which have so divided Venezuela, both politically and socially.

A lack of efficient checks and balances for the executive branch of the government, coupled with the centralization of power carried out by Hugo Chavez and his regime over the last 18 years, has led to a political state in Venezuela that is essentially a dictatorship. This power structure has made other branches of government ineffective, and chipped away at the effectiveness of democracy in Venezuela. The president is currently capable of bypassing local governments, and other branches of the national government, as Maduro has direct control of the distribution of funding in many situations.

The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution recognized fundamental political, civil, social, and environmental rights, as well as rights to democracy and proportional representation. Since then, the Chavista regime has degraded these rights and driven Venezuela into disarray. The MUD aims to defeat the Bolivarian movement and return a political emphasis to social justice and participatory democracy, along with the other values and rights emphasized in the optimistic 1999 Venezuelan Constitution. An increasing number of Venezuelans support the opposition of the leftist regime and its performance, and now is the time for the MUD to push for a change in policy, structure, and power within the Venezuelan government, an important step in solving issues of division, politics, economic crisis, and safety.

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