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The United Socialist Party of Venezuela recognizes the current issues our nation is facing regarding violent crime, nearing economic collapse, and social and political divides. As a proud member of this party, however, I insist on stressing the importance of maintaining the distinct system that made our country great following the Bolivarian Revolution. The members of this committee must work cooperatively to mitigate the issues being faced by the Venezuelan people, while still making our best effort to uphold the fundamental socialist values provided to us by the late Hugo Chavez, as to prevent the rise of the terrible neoliberal ways within Venezuela’s borders.

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

The key question that has been posed to our National Assembly during this time of crisis has been “How do we change the mentality in a nation where crime is not only expected, but in some ways necessary for survival?” Crimes in our country are generally driven by necessity, not by anger at the government. Our people demand more support from their government, not an expansion of rights. This should not be an area of concern. Thus, the key approach must be to change the mentality of the Venezuelan people. Although there is quite obviously not a simple solution to this problem, there are targeted approaches that the Assembly can take to reduce violent crime in Venezuelan neighbourhoods. It is my belief that the long-term approach to such a solution lies in the education of youth. Funded by the government, schools must find a way to implement new curriculum that focuses on informing youth in the following areas:

1) the role of the government and its influence on the life of every citizen

2) the civic duty of every Venezuelan individual – This encompasses everything from their responsibility to engage in democratic processes like voting, to respecting and obeying the laws enacted by the federal and regional governments. It must be instilled in the mind of children as early as they can understand that a respect for the law is necessary and only in *their* best interest. We must promote ideas of national unity that teach Venezuelan youth that the government exists to serve its people and ensure their safety and wellbeing, but in return, the cooperation of its citizens is required. At the middle school level, this curriculum can truly begin to be expanded. Perhaps this could be done through a mandatory course focused on educating students of civic duties. Such a course should also place an emphasis on family values as well as a general respect for human life. We must work collectively to foster a mentality that promotes this national unity; no longer should the Venezuelan people live in fear of their own people. It is my genuine belief that this approach will produce notable change in the mentality that the future generations of Venezuela have towards crime and violence.

Obviously this is a long-term approach that focuses on starting from the bottom and working up. I do believe that in the mean time, however, there does need to be immediate efforts to reduce existing crime levels. As seen throughout the last decade, the PSUV now understands that until excessive violence is dealt with, no progress can be made in regards to further development of the nation and increasing accessibility of basic resources to all Venezuelans. Tackling crime levels is presently difficult due to a lack of funding, however, it is my belief that as much of the federal budget as possible be allocated towards these efforts.

But if budgets are limited, how do you fund nation-wide efforts to reduce crime? You first target ‘hot-spots’. We must observe trends and determine the regions in which crime is most prevalent and then tackle the most pressing regions one at a time, with a specific strategy catered to that region. For instance, perhaps a new approach to remove weapons from the streets in areas with high levels of gun-violence could be applied to these “hot spots”. We must look to nations that have successfully reduced gun violence, like Australia, and consider employing mandatory firearm buy-back programs as they did in the late 1990s (Matthews, 2012).

The other way this issue can be tackled in the immediate future is through police reform. Clearly, the Venezuelan national police forces have been ineffective in both crime prevention and crime solving in the past. In such a situation, we must again look towards countries that are successful in the areas that we are not. For instance, take Chile; a nation with one of the lowest crime rates in Central America and one of the most respected police forces in the world (Bonner, 2010). How has their police force become so respected and effective? The Chilean police force places an emphasis on respect, not fear, and encourages open communication between police forces and the citizens whom they protect. We must allocate money from the federal budget to provide this sort of training to our own officers. As well, more selective methods of screening must be implemented. We must create a national police force that is genuinely concerned about the safety and well-being of Venezuelan communities and takes pride in their work. This will also help minimize corruption within the police body itself. If budgetary issues arise, we may have to look to international assistance from organizations like the UNODC, for instance. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime may provide assistance to Venezuela’s national police force by helping develop the capacity of police to improve oversight, accountability, integrity systems, and much more (UNODC, 2016).

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

With the falling prices of oil and rising levels of inflation, it has become quite clear that the National Assembly must begin to make efforts to diversify the economy. We must learn from our mistakes and build an economy that is not solely resource-based so that our entire financial system will not collapse by changes in the global market. It must be kept in mind, however, that the fundamental principles of the PSUV insist on minimizing or even eliminating economic reliance and ties with neoliberal countries such as the US. If we must turn to the international community for monetary aid or even simply to create free trade agreements, we must uphold our values and ensure that such cooperation only involves fellow socialist nations, such as China, Russia, and other Central American countries.

To diversify our economy as successfully as countries in the Middle East, we must evaluate the various sectors of our economy and the productivity level of each. A key area in which our economy is lagging behind is agriculture. Although we produce and export grains such as rice, fish, coffee, and tropical fruits, we still rely heavily on trade to bring in the remainder of food products. The federal government should promote the expansion of agricultural practices within the nation, specifically in regions with arable land. This could perhaps be promoted through incentives such as tax breaks or subsidies. The government could also encourage national banks to provide loans for farmers purchasing equipment at lower than traditional interest rates. These strategies will not only allow Venezuela to become more self-sufficient by decreasing the need to import these resources, but will also open up gateways for more international trade. As well, we must take advantage of the already existing manufacturing industry and try to create more free trade deals that will encourage the export of the steel, aluminum, and electronics produced within our borders (The World Factbook, 2016).

In regards to foreign exchange controls, the PSUV does not believe that this system should be completely dismantled. The system is necessary to prevent money generated by Venezuelan businesses from leaving the nation in a time of such economic disparity. Once oil prices begin to rise again, these exchange controls will regain their original effectiveness. In the mean time, measures to protect the living standards of the Venezuelan people must continue to be implemented. For instance, in addition to price controls, wages should be increased so that they are proportional to inflation.

**Topic 3: Political and Social Divides**

As was demonstrated through the results of the election, great political and social divides exist between the people of our country. Regardless of political affiliation, however, it is imperative that members of the National Assembly understand that human rights are a key principle of our constitution and must be respected. The ultimate goal of the PSUV is to act as a body that supports its citizens and ensures their wellbeing, and this most certainly does not exclude their basic rights and freedoms. By continuing to promote national unity and emphasizing that the Venezuelan community is comprised of people who are all reliant on each other, we will indirectly protect their basic human rights by increasing the levels of respect that exist between citizens.

In the recent past, differing opinions regarding the type of government system that should exist within the country have led to protests and riots, during which various concerns regarding police treatment of civilians have arisen. In regards to the allegations of unfair police treatment, I am quite confident that if this were genuinely an issue, it could also be solved by the earlier mentioned efforts to create police reform. This will be done through stricter screening processes and a training program that instils in its officers that their duty is to serve and protect, not repress, its people.

Lastly, division within Venezuela has been further heightened due to accusations regarding government corruption. Whether or not these allegations are true is beyond my knowledge, however, the federal government has already made efforts to launch investigations regarding issues of corruption so this should not be a public concern.

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