

International Observation by Churches and Ecumenical Bodies of the Process for Legislative Elections in Venezuela

December 6, 2020

Report

I. Introduction

Convened by the Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela (UEPV) and assisted by the Venezuelan Human Rights Organization, SURES, seven representatives of churches and ecumenical organizations from Canada, the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean had the opportunity to provide virtual accompaniment to the Venezuelan Legislative Elections, held on December 6, 2020. The United Church of Canada was represented by Latin America Partnerships staff, Christie Neufeldt.

II. Methodology

This International Commission of Churches and Ecumenical Agencies had the opportunity to hold preparatory meetings and train in the particularities of the Venezuelan electoral system, including the implications for respect and affirmation of human rights in Venezuela. Given this unprecedented virtual observation experience, we agreed to work through Zoom to accompany and observe in real-time during three moments of polling day (morning, noon, and closing of elections). We recognize the limitations of this type of observation; however, having the testimony of the Venezuelan churches and SURES's help, with its team of national observers, we have obtained first-hand information of the whole process. At the close of the day, we were also able to interview other entities working on human rights in the country, such as the Venezuelan Association of Jurists.

III. Context

It is essential to highlight some fundamental aspects of the context, which we heard from the people interviewed including representatives of churches in Venezuela, in which this election took place:

- a. The COVID-19 pandemic—the most active population committed to exercising their right to vote in previous elections has been seniors.
- b. A vigorous campaign that called people to abstain from voting through social media.
- c. Due to the blockade there is a lack of fuel, which has reduced the frequency of public transport.
- d. Electoral participation in Venezuela is voluntary and not mandatory.
- e. In the Venezuelan electoral tradition, there is a lower percentage of participation in parliamentary elections than presidential ones.

IV. Report

After conversation regarding what we observed and receiving information from church representatives and citizen testimonies and national observers, who were kind enough to

share their analyses with us, the following is our report regarding the Venezuelan Legislative Electoral Process:

1. Neatness and transparency in the organization of the electoral process. We found an efficient organization at polling stations: the preparation of voter lists, the use of adequate voter identification, and the use of a computerized system that protected the secrecy of citizen voting and operated with a high degree of efficiency.
2. Compliance with biosecurity measures for voting citizens. Measures such as the use of masks, surface cleaners, physical distancing, non-agglomeration of groups of people, and other measures were duly taken, exercised, and respected by both the authorities and the public.
3. Calm and fluidity in the exercise of the right to vote. We witnessed how the process was carried out calmly and safely, within the aspiration of social peace and harmony.
4. Accessibility for differently abled citizens and seniors.
5. Citizens went to the polling stations freely, despite a vigorous campaign against these elections.
6. The presence of the CNE (National Electoral Council) accompanying the electoral process.
7. The presence of authorized military members accompanying the process ensuring the safety of polling centers.

V. Final Reflections

As the Commission of Churches and Ecumenical Organizations, we have observed the Venezuelan people's sovereignty manifest at the polls in a democratic, free, and peaceful manner. We question calls for abstention and non-participation in this process from specific sectors of the opposition to the current government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. We call for peace, dialogue, and understanding in Venezuelan society. We reject the promotion of violence and interference by external factors in Venezuelan life. In the absence of specific findings that question its suitability, we understand that the electoral process is the best way to respect the Venezuelan people's free and sovereign will.

As churches and ecumenical organizations, we affirm peace as the main objective of a full life and as the way to achieve it. In this sense, we maintain that peace is always the work of justice (Isaiah 32:17) in bringing to life the aspirations of the common good. Now, peace will be subjected to continuous changes in the evaluation of human existence. Therefore, it will never be a wholly done thing but will be faced with constant change. This requires "a perpetual work" (Second Vatican Council, Vat. II, Const. Past. *Gaudium et Spes*, 78). Democratic expression, as we have felt in these elections, has been an excellent example of this task in building social peace and full life for the Venezuelan people. We call for peace, dialogue, and respect for the free self-determination of the Venezuelan people. MAY GOD HELP US.

*For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;*

*authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
Isaiah 9:6 (NRSV)

By the International Commission of Churches and Ecumenical Agencies

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