

## **No exceptional measure in Venezuela should be upheld at the expense of basic human rights**

**Geneva-Caracas, 31 October 2016** – Amidst a deepening political, social and economic crisis, Venezuela’s human rights record will be scrutinized tomorrow for the second time in the framework of the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group.

This examination comes right when a number of human rights organizations, including the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and [COFAVIC](#), are denouncing growing restrictions on individual and collective rights in the country.

Tensions have risen a notch higher throughout Venezuela since the Government declared the state of emergency on 13 May 2016, granting [sweeping powers](#) to the Executive, and blocked on 20 October 2016 the opposition’s signature drive for a referendum to recall President Nicolás Maduro.

On 26 October 2016, opposition-led rallies against the impeachment’s suspension were met with excessive use of force by law enforcement and pro-Government armed groups, with dozens of injured and 97 persons detained, according to the Prosecutor’s Office. In 2014, following the protests that took place from February to June, leaving 43 people dead and 878 injured, the Committee Against Torture (CAT) said it was alarmed by “consistent reports of acts of torture and ill-treatment inflicted on persons arrested during the demonstrations, with acts including beatings, electric shocks, burns, choking, sexual assaults and threats”.

In light of this context and ahead of the upcoming UPR of Venezuela, OMCT and COFAVIC submitted a joint [report](#) presenting key human rights concerns in the country. In particular, the report highlights the current militarization of law enforcement, as obvious in security operations such as the OLP, or “Operación Liberación y Protección del Pueblo”, and regulations such as Resolution No. 8610, allowing the use of lethal weapons to control protests; the increase of extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests; as well as the total absence of convictions of law-enforcement agents following acts of torture and ill-treatment committed in the framework of the 2014 protests.

### **Among the recommendations set out in the joint report, OMCT and COFAVIC call on UN Member States to urge Venezuela to:**

- ensure that any allegations of torture, ill-treatment and extrajudicial killing by law enforcement officers are investigated ex officio in a prompt, thorough and impartial manner and the alleged perpetrators are prosecuted, tried and punished with sentences commensurate with the gravity of their acts;
- guarantee that the law enforcement bodies and related agencies working on public safety have a strictly civilian and professional character at all levels, as stipulated in article 332 of

the State party's Constitution, and amend any legislation, regulations and plans that authorize the participation of the military in the maintenance of public order, including the OLP and the Resolution No. 8610;

- remove barriers that facilitate impunity including the concealment of the identity of law enforcement officers, the criminalization and trivialization of victims and the modification of police reports;

- ensure that no individual or group is publicly discredited, threatened or subjected to physical or other abuse for carrying out human rights work including vis-à-vis the UN human rights bodies and the Inter-American Human Rights System;

- ensure that all obstacles to women's access to justice and protection from violence are removed, strengthening the special courts dealing with violence against women and ensuring victims' access to protection measures including shelters;

- ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture, Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

- cooperate fully with UN Treaty Bodies, in particular the CAT, in the implementation of their recommendations and decisions, and with Special procedures, allowing outstanding requests for visits and encouraging the issuance of standing invitations.

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