



## A CHALLENGE TO BUILD

The Dominican Month for Peace reaches its fifth edition. After joining forces to accompany and help the Dominican family in Colombia (2017), Democratic Republic of Congo (2018), India (2019) and Ukraine (2020), it is the turn of Venezuela, the country with the largest oil reserves on the planet, but which for more than two decades has been going through the greatest political, social and economic crisis in its history.

For the Dominican family in Venezuela. It is a challenge to be able to convey to the whole world the complex reality that is being experienced in this South American country and that has its origin in the destruction of democracy as a system of government and a way of life.

Democracy is considered a form of government that empowers citizens to control their rulers. In the Venezuelan case, democracy was established since 1958, functioning without interruptions for around 40 years, today it is discussed at what moment we lost it (it was in 1998, or in 2006, some say in 2013 and even in 2016); in any case, analyzing the recent history of Venezuela, in 1998 with the election of Hugo Chávez as President of the Republic, a different democratic process began, known as participatory and proactive democracy.

This process consisted of re-founding and modernizing democracy through the change of the constitution, which took place in 1999 and is still in use today.

Democracy, in the Venezuelan case, was understood as the Welfare State, which a government should support through state measures to improve the standard of living and quality of life of the population, in addition to the voting in elections to determine the legality-legitimacy of such government; this vision was dismantled with the deterioration of the quality of life that the Chavista government caused to the country, which led to the understanding that there are many factors that must be taken care of for there to be a real democracy, such as: Rule of law, transparent elections and political parties, human rights, freedom, among others.



*This document was edited from materials sent to the Dominican Family from the Friars and Sisters in Venezuela.*

## RULE OF LAW



Refers to the State governed by laws and other legal norms, where the authorities are accountable. In Venezuela, according to the 1999 Constitution, Article 2 *Venezuela constitutes itself as a Democratic and Social State of Law and Justice, which holds as superior values of its legal order and actions those of life, liberty, justice, equality, solidarity, democracy, social responsibility and, in general, the preeminence of human rights, ethics and political pluralism.*

Today, the rule of law has become a failed state incapable of having a single government that is accepted by society and the world, and unable to control its territory. This is due to the fact that arbitrariness, illegality and illegitimacy prevail in the state institutions, breaking the Rule of Law that allowed access to justice for everyone.

## ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Voting has been the democratic form par excellence used by citizens to settle political conflicts. The people understood that voting in elections was the most important component of what Democracy means, although elections are not enough for the preservation of Democracy, as sometimes voting does not necessarily mean electing.

In a democracy, all members of society can freely express their opinion and have their opinion heard and respected, even if they are a minority. On repeated occasions this has been the path that Venezuela has taken to generate democratic solutions to the crisis, but the bias of the arbitrators, electoral advantageous practices, persecution of leaders, political prisoners, and even the identity theft that affected opposition parties have not allowed this to be a favorable path, generating distrust and skepticism among citizens when it comes to exercising their right to vote.



# HUMAN RIGHTS

In Venezuela, human rights were part of the Venezuelan democratic legislation, although their compliance was questionable, particularly during the social explosion of 1989 known as "Caracazo". The current Constitution recognizes, expands and elevates them. However, there are cases where it has become evident that these have been violated. The right to life, to food, to education, to a healthy environment, to health, to land, to personal integrity, to justice, to personal freedom, to participation.



The report presented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court have highlighted the serious violations of the fundamental rights of Venezuelans.



Franklin Brito died on a hunger in August 2010, after years of seeking after justice without finding it

Captain Rafael Acosta strike Arevalo died in June 2019 after being heavily tortured by military security forces

# FREEDOM

In addition to having a meaning for individuals, freedom has a meaning for the organized society. Liberty, in addition to having a meaning for individuals, has a meaning for the organized society of the State with respect to other states; this is expressed through sovereignty, which is one of the elements for the State to fully exist. Venezuela, which for 40 years promoted an idea of democracy with its consequent system of freedoms in Latin America, with Chavismo, went on to promote the "Socialism of the XXI century" an unclear idea that seemed to be subordinated to the Cuban communist regime, in which, strangely, a richer, larger and more modern country submits politically to the dictates of a smaller one, this fractured national sovereignty.

At this moment, it is difficult to mention one aspect of Venezuelan life that has not been affected by the desire of Nicolás Maduro's regime to control everything. Media is among the most affected areas, with 90% of the print media disappearing, the country's oldest television channel being taken off the air and journalists who dare to raise their voice being persecuted with full force for their work.



The religious life supports the people who want a change of direction in the country's government.

# POVERTY

Venezuela has reached levels of extreme poverty due to multiple factors, including lack of access to basic goods and services, skyrocketing inflation that does not allow for sufficient income, lack of decent jobs with fair wages, and loss of the quality of education. As well as the destruction of the oil industry, which for a long time was the main source of public and sometimes private funds.

This reality is the consequence of a system that has gradually become encysted in the State system, controlling all public powers and committing abuses and excesses.



The hallway of the hospital shows the generalized deterioration of the health system throughout the country, in terms of infrastructure, supplies and personnel.

The overall impact is that we have a country that has been economically and demographically crippled, with high rates of poverty and inequality, and with great skepticism about the future.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Institute of Economic and Social Research of the Andrés Bello Catholic University released the National Survey of Living Conditions for the year 2021 conducted between February and March, covering 22 states and reaching 17,402 households

The study reveals that poverty in Venezuela remains at "maximum possible levels of 94.5%", while extreme poverty continues to grow and covers two thirds of the country's

households with 76.6%, an increase of 8.9 points from 67.7% last year. This is one of the fundamental causes of the Venezuelan exodus, one of the largest in the world with more than 6.5 million Venezuelans who have fled, doubling the number of refugees from Afghanistan.

The reality of the country has caused the forced migration of more than 5 million Venezuelans, the picture of this young man with an elderly woman crossing the border from Mexico



No country is exempt from the reality that Venezuela is experiencing today and that can be driven by ideological currents and governments with similar ideals. We can affirm that in Venezuela we are living in a totalitarian regime with apparently democratic structures where elections have been emptied of content with voting where it is impossible to choose.



This photograph shows the reality of poverty in the country, illustrated by the growing number of people feeding themselves with whatever they can find in open dumps.