



**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK**

Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Venezuela

New York, 10 April 2019

As delivered – verbatim

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Let me be clear from the outset that there is a very real humanitarian problem in Venezuela.

The United Nations is willing and able to respond, consistent with the long standing mandate member states have agreed for principled humanitarian action.

We can do more to relieve the suffering of the people of Venezuela, if we get more help and support from all stakeholders.

Since Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo last briefed you on 26 February, the humanitarian situation has worsened. Recurrent widespread power outages have affected the whole country. Without electricity from the grid, many hospitals have struggled to carry out essential surgical procedures, and to sustain intensive-care services and dialysis treatment. Water and sewage systems have been interrupted. Economic decline has continued and the purchasing power of ordinary people has fallen further, rendering food even less affordable for many families.

The scale of need is significant and growing. The United Nations is working in Venezuela to expand the provision of humanitarian assistance. Our efforts are in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, as determined by the General Assembly in Resolutions 46/182 and 58/114.

The Secretary-General has expressed his concern for the people in Venezuela. I echo that concern. I will focus my briefing today on:

- First, the priority humanitarian needs in Venezuela,
- Second, our efforts to assist the most vulnerable people, and
- Third, the areas where we seek your collective support.



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Mr. President,

We recently produced a draft overview report on priority humanitarian needs in Venezuela. The review was based on the best available data from all available official and unofficial sources, including Government data. We gave our draft report to the Government and the National Assembly on 27 March.

We estimate that seven million people in Venezuela need humanitarian assistance. That is some 25 per cent of the population. There are people in need throughout the country, but needs are most severe in the three states in the south and the Zulia and Lara states in the west.

People with chronic health conditions, pregnant and nursing women, children under five, indigenous people, people on the move, and those living with disabilities are among the most vulnerable.

Mr. President,

The context is a severe and continuing economic contraction, with associated dramatic increases in inflation, on a scale seen in few if any other countries around the world in recent years.

Our review found that access to nutrient-rich foods and a varied diet has diminished. Historically, Venezuela has imported up to 75 per cent of its food. As a result of the crisis, the availability and affordability of food has fallen, with lower imports, reduced local production and declining purchasing power. Many people depend on subsidized food to meet their needs. Six million families across the country reportedly benefit from food supplies distributed by the Government.

Despite this, malnutrition has increased, especially in areas with the highest poverty rates. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has estimated that in 2018, some 3.7 million people suffered from undernourishment. The prevalence of undernourishment has almost trebled over a five-year period. Other aid organizations report an increase in the global acute malnutrition rate among children under five. We estimate that 1.9 million people require nutritional assistance, including 1.3 million children under five. More data is needed to improve our understanding of the nutrition and food security situation.

The Venezuelan health system is strained by shortages in personnel, medical supplies, equipment and electricity. Reduced access to medicines has increased the risk of morbidity and mortality from



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diabetes, hypertension, cancer and HIV/AIDS. Preventable diseases like tuberculosis, diphtheria, measles and malaria have resurfaced. The World Health Organization registered more than 400,000 cases of malaria in 2017, nearly 70 per cent more than the year before. That was the largest increase in the world that year. Overall, we estimate some 2.8 million people need health assistance, including 1.1 million children under five.

Health problems are exacerbated by insufficient access to clean water and inadequate sanitation systems. One estimate suggests that 17 per cent of people living in poverty have no access to safe water, or receive it only once a fortnight. Recent power outages are making this problem worse. Some families have resorted to using water from unclean sources, because they cannot afford safe water. Sanitation systems have deteriorated, affecting solid waste management, among other services. Basic hygiene needs like hand washing are undermined by the unavailability or unaffordability of water and cleaning supplies. We estimate that some 4.3 million people require water and sanitation assistance.

The crisis has interrupted the education of more than 1 million children. Many families cannot afford the transportation, clothing or shoes children need to go to school. The population on the move is at particular risk of protection violations, as are women and girls who compose 72 per cent of trafficking victims. More than 3.4 million people have already left the country. We estimate that some 2.7 million people still inside Venezuela require protection assistance and services.

Mr. President,

Let me now move on to how we are assisting the most vulnerable people.

The United Nations and other humanitarian organizations are on the ground, and we have been expanding our operations. Since 2017, the number of UN staff has increased from 210 to nearly 400. UN agencies are working in all 24 states. Our efforts are particularly concentrated in the vulnerable border states of Zulia, Táchira and Bolívar.

To support the expansion of humanitarian assistance, I released \$9 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund in late 2018.

Through this grant, as well as bilateral funding from donors, the UN has:

- Provided 189,000 children with preventive and curative treatment for acute malnutrition.



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- Expanded maternal and child health through the provision of medicines and supplies from 74,000 health kits.
- Donated 10 generators to provide emergency power to hospitals.
- Installed water tanks in hospitals to ensure a safe supply of water for pediatric and maternal services.
- Distributed 10 million tablets for the treatment of HIV among 50,000 people across all 24 States.
- Delivered 176,000 doses of vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella for babies and young children.

The UN and other aid organizations are working with institutions and organizations across the spectrum, including line ministries, and national civil society organizations, and we are in touch with the National Assembly.

Under the leadership of the UN's Resident Coordinator, we recently established a Cooperation and Assistance Coordination Team bringing together UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs in Caracas to provide strategic-level guidance and coordination to the humanitarian operation.

Mr. President,

It is clear that much more is needed. We seek the support of this Council for action in three areas:

First, improved respect for principled humanitarian action. In Venezuela, there is a need to separate political and humanitarian objectives. Humanitarian assistance must be delivered on the basis of need alone. The Secretary-General has repeatedly stressed the importance of the humanitarian principles and has called on Member States and others to respect them. We seek the Council's support to safeguard the neutral and impartial nature of humanitarian action.

Second, an enabling operating environment, including sustained and regular access to people in need. I note recent steps taken by the Government of Venezuela to facilitate the entrance of additional UN staff into the country and the expansion of humanitarian programmes, including those of the Red Cross movement. Additional steps are needed. We need more humanitarian organizations with the capacity to meet urgent needs to establish a presence and assist with

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operations in the country. We also need more data and information to ensure our understanding of needs evolves with the situation.

Third, more money to support the expansion of humanitarian programmes. The resources available now are extremely modest in relation to the needs we see. I would like to thank Member States who have contributed to the provision of humanitarian assistance in Venezuela, including our generous donors supporting the CERF. Your continued support is critical. But we need a lot more.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.