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Political situation in Venezuela

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

Venezuela's ongoing political crisis, that stems from a contest for legitimacy between the government and opposition, has come to a head.

The new head of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, declared himself interim President of Venezuela on 23 January, saying he would assume temporary executive power while fresh elections were organised.

Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro, [responded](#) by making a public statement from the presidential palace, claiming this was an attempted coup backed by the "gringo empire" and called for the armed forces – to resist it "at all costs".

Mr Maduro, who has led the country since 2013, was only sworn in for his second six-year term on 11 January.

President Maduro ran as the candidate for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), founded by Maduro's predecessor Hugo Chávez, in elections held in May 2018. Internationally brokered talks between the opposition and government broke down in February 2018, when the government decided to go ahead with presidential elections without instigating any of the reforms of the electoral system the opposition had asked for.

The majority of the opposition parties then boycotted the poll, saying it would not be free and fair. President Maduro won the election with nearly 68% of the vote, with a turnout of only 46% of voters. The opposition candidates that did participate [claimed](#) there was widespread fraud. The EU, UK, US and the 14-member Lima Group all refused to recognize the results as legitimate.

Venezuela's National Assembly has been controlled by opposition parties since December 2015, when they won the legislative elections by a landslide. However, the country's Supreme Court, which is packed by government loyalists, blocked crucial pieces of legislation that the National Assembly had passed by declaring them unconstitutional. The Court also blocked the opposition's attempt to call a recall presidential election.

In July 2017 a new body, the Constituent Assembly, which is full of government supporters, was elected in a disputed and widely condemned election. While the new Constituent Assembly was meant to re-write the Constitution, in August 2017, it assumed for itself legislative powers, effectively neutering the National Assembly.

The National Assembly never recognised this move by the Constituent Assembly, and it has continued to sit as a body and pass legislation, although in practice these laws are not enacted.

The National Assembly elected Juan Guaidó as the body's President in the first week of January. Mr Guaidó [claimed](#) that President's Maduro was an illegitimate "usurper", and that he had the right under the Constitution to assume the country's Presidency until fresh elections could be held. He also called for a day of nationwide protests on 23 January.

International reaction

Eleven members of the 14-nation Lima Group — Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay and Peru — issued a [joint statement](#) endorsing Guaidó as interim president. Mexico, which has maintained a principle of non-intervention under newly-elected President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, did not endorse the call.

US President Trump released a [statement](#) saying that he recognised Guaidó as the Interim President of Venezuela and that he would "continue to use the full weight of United States' economic and diplomatic power to press for the restoration of Venezuelan democracy". He went on to encourage the US's allies to recognise Mr Guaidó also.

The UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt released a [statement](#) saying: "it is clear that Nicolás Maduro is not the legitimate leader of Venezuela", and "the United Kingdom believes Juan Guaidó is the right person to take Venezuela forward. We are supporting the US, Canada, Brazil and Argentina to make that happen".

While not explicitly endorsing Mr Guaidó's claim, the EU's diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini said in a [statement](#) that "the EU strongly calls for the start of an immediate political process leading to free and credible elections, in conformity with the Constitutional order." The statement called for the full restoration of the National Assembly's powers and asked for "the civil rights, freedom and safety of all members of the National Assembly, including its President, Juan Guaidó", to be observed and fully respected.

Russia has [condemned](#) Mr Guaidó's attempt to assume the Presidency as a move to "usurp power". Russia strongly criticised countries that have supported this action, saying such moves violated international law and were a "direct path to bloodshed", and further: "destructive outside interference, especially in the current extremely tense situation, is unacceptable". Venezuela is one of Russia's closest allies in the region, and it has lent the country billions of dollars. Russia maintains that "Maduro is the legitimate head of state".

China has also condemned outside intervention in Venezuela. A Foreign Ministry spokeswoman [said](#) that all parties to the conflict should "remain rational and level-headed and seek a political resolution on the Venezuelan issue through peaceful dialogue within the framework of

the Venezuelan Constitution.” She went on to say China “opposes external intervention in Venezuela. We hope that the international community will jointly create favourable conditions for this.” China has also invested heavily in Venezuela.

Protests and the role of the military

Months of mass protests against the Government occurred in 2014 and again in 2017. These eventually died out, in part because of a strong crackdown by the country’s security forces. As protests both in opposition to and in support of the government have broken out again, and President Maduro and his supporters have shown no signs that they are willing to cede power, the role of the armed forces and security services has once again come into focus.

The security forces have so far been loyal to President Maduro and his government. Mr Maduro has kept them on his side by [regularly raising](#) their wages. Senior figures from the military and security forces have been rewarded with senior positions in the government, including Cabinet positions and Governorships. The military [controls](#) important parts of the economy, including food imports and distribution. They effectively control the country’s borders and are [reported](#) to be profiting from the narcotics trade and other corrupt practices.

Over the last several years there have been isolated incidents of small-scale revolts in the security forces. Most recently, on 21 January twenty-seven members of Venezuela’s National Guard were [reported](#) to have been arrested after they allegedly revolted against the government.

On 23 January, President Maduro [called on](#) the military to maintain unity and discipline.

Juan Guaidó has [said](#) he would reach out to “all sectors” including the military to end the crisis and has hinted he would consider an amnesty for President Nicolás Maduro if he cedes power. Most commentators agree that it would be very difficult for any political grouping to maintain power without the support of the military.

Economic and social crisis

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization said in [a report](#) in November 2018 that 3.7 million people — 11.7 percent of the population — are malnourished. Caritas, a Catholic charity working in Venezuela, [states](#) that the average Venezuelan lost 10kg in weight in 2018.

Venezuela’s government blame food shortages on an “economic war” waged by the United States and its allies. Diosdado Cabello, President of the government-controlled National Constituent Assembly, [said](#) in October 2018: “I insist here there is no humanitarian crisis; there is a war on the country”, and “those who speak of humanitarian crisis are the ones who have created war against our country”.

The country’s economy remains in turmoil. To try and counter rampant hyperinflation the government [launched](#) a major currency overhaul in August 2018. Steps included removing five zeroes off newly printed banknotes. Government official figures submitted to the IMF (these

were only submitted when the IMF [threatened sanctions](#) against Venezuela) calculated that in 2017 GDP fell nearly 16% and inflation was 860%. However, external organisations [believe](#) that these figures were worse.

Many Venezuelans have fled the country to escape the crisis. In November 2018 the United Nations [announced](#) that the number of refugees and migrants had reached 3 million.

2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[**Trump White House's plan for Venezuela regime change far from clear**](#)

Guardian
Julian Borger
25 January 2019

[**Venezuela crisis: How the political situation escalated**](#)

BBC News Online
24 January 2019

[**The Times view on Venezuelan protests against Maduro: paradise lost**](#)

The Times
24 January 2019

[**Trump says 'All options on table' as Venezuela crisis deepens**](#)

Guardian
Joe Parkin Daniels, Mariana Zúñiga and Julian Borger
24 January 2019

[**Russia and key allies vow to stand by Maduro in Venezuela crisis**](#)

Guardian
Andrew Roth, Lily Kuo, David Agren, Ed Augustin and Peter Walker
24 January 2019

[**Venezuela crisis: what happens now after two men have claimed to be president?**](#)

Guardian
Tom Phillips
24 January 2019

[**Venezuelan army disavows self-proclaimed leader, will defend national sovereignty – defense minister**](#)

RT
24 January 2019

[**Six dead as Venezuela braces for massive rival protests**](#)

Daily Telegraph
23 January 2019

[**Venezuela: who is Juan Guaidó, the man who declared himself president?**](#)

Guardian
Joe Parkin Daniels and Mariana Zúñiga
23 January 2019

[U.S. to defy Venezuelan order for American diplomats to leave Caracas in 72 hours](#)

Washington Post
Mariana Zuñiga, Anthony Faiola and Carol Morello
23 January 2019

[Why the new protests in Venezuela are different](#)

Washington Post
Francisco Toro
23 January 2019

[This is Venezuela's struggle. Trump should act with caution](#)

Washington Post
Frida Ghitis
23 January 2019

[Venezuela 'foils national guard rebellion' against Maduro](#)

BBC News Online
21 January 2019

[Head of Venezuela's congress briefly detained amid political tensions](#)

Miami Herald
Jim Wyss
13 January 2019

[Venezuela President Maduro sworn in for second term](#)

BBC News Online
10 January 2019

[Nicolas Maduro celebrates start of second presidential term as devastating economic crisis worsens in Venezuela](#)

Independent
Samuel Osborne
10 January 2019

[Venezuela: nearly 2m people have fled country since 2015, UN says](#)

Guardian
1 October 2018

[Venezuela crisis: Brazil to send army to safeguard border](#)

BBC News Online
29 August 2018

[Neighboring South American countries stiffen borders as chaos in Venezuela triggers exodus](#)

CNN
Amir Vera, Susannah Cullinane, Marilia Brocchetto, Rafael Romo and Ana Maria Canizares
20 August 2018

3. Press Releases

[Foreign Secretary statement on situation in Venezuela, January 2019](#)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
25 January 2019

Speaking ahead of his meeting with US Vice President Mike Pence and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

We are extremely concerned about the situation in Venezuela, but it is clear that Nicolás Maduro is not the legitimate leader of Venezuela.

The election on 20th May was deeply flawed; ballot boxes were stuffed, there were counting irregularities and the opposition was banned. This regime has done untold damage to the people of Venezuela, 10% of the population have left Venezuela such is the misery they are suffering.

So the United Kingdom believes Juan Guaido is the right person to take Venezuela forward. We are supporting the US, Canada, Brazil and Argentina to make that happen. I will be meeting Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo later this afternoon to discuss this further. But for anyone in the UK who thinks that Venezuela is an example, who thinks that we should be adopting the policies supported by the discredited Maduro regime, they need to look at their TV screens and think again. This regime has caused untold suffering to its people.

[Foreign Secretary stresses importance of democratic values](#)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
25 January 2019

Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt is returning from Washington following meetings with Senior US Administration figures focused on the UK and US's shared efforts to tackle the increasing challenges to democracy throughout the world.

During his visit Jeremy Hunt met Vice-President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton, National Security Agency Director General Nakasone, acting Presidential Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and Senior Advisor to the President Jared Kushner.

The Foreign Secretary discussed the developing situation in Venezuela and condemned the announcement by Nicolas Maduro that Venezuela would end diplomatic ties with the United States. He also thanked the US Administration for their support for the two recent UK-drafted resolutions on Yemen in the UN Security Council. The Foreign Secretary

and Secretary Pompeo agreed to host a meeting of the 'quad' group on Yemen in the margins of the upcoming Ministerial meeting on the Middle East in Warsaw in February.

The Foreign Secretary's visit came as the UK and US jointly announced their intention to impose travel restrictions and other sanctions on any individual found to be illegally interfering in the upcoming Nigerian elections including by using or encouraging violence in an attempt to influence the elections.

Speaking following his visit, the Foreign Secretary said:

The enduring relationship between the UK and US is not a product of coincidence or historic accident, it is the result of our shared values. These values are at the heart of the foreign policy of both of our countries. And none of these values is more important than respect for democracy – the invisible chain that has bound our countries together throughout history.

Given the threats to democracy we are seeing throughout the world – from the rigged election last year in Venezuela to appalling violations of human rights in Syria to the Houthi coup in Yemen four years ago that gave rise to a devastating civil war – the relationship between the UK and US is more important than ever before. I was pleased to have the chance to discuss that relationship, and the challenges to democracy around the world that we are working together to overcome, in Washington today.

With Secretary Pompeo we agreed today that we would host a meeting in February with Saudi Arabia and the UAE to bolster our support for the Stockholm process and agree next steps for further progress on a political settlement.

Lima group declaration

4 January 2019

In light of the beginning, on January 10, 2019, of the illegitimate presidential term of Nicolas Maduro and his regime in Venezuela (2019 to 2025), the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Saint Lucia express the following:

1. We reiterate that the electoral process that took place in Venezuela on May 20, 2018, lacked legitimacy as it neither included the participation of all political actors in Venezuela, nor did it have the presence of independent international observers, nor did it comply with the necessary guarantees or international standards for a free, fair and transparent election. Accordingly, we do not recognize the legitimacy of the new presidential term

- of Nicolas Maduro, or his regime, which commences on January 10, 2019.
2. We ratify our full support and recognition of the National Assembly, which was legitimately elected on December 6, 2015, as a democratically elected constitutional institution in Venezuela.
 3. We urge Mr. Maduro to not assume the office of president on January 10, 2019, to respect the powers of the National Assembly and to provisionally transfer executive powers to the National Assembly until new democratic elections are held.
 4. We highlight the importance of respecting the integrity, autonomy and independence of the Supreme Court of Justice, which was legitimately formed according to the Venezuelan Constitution, for the full application of the rule of law in Venezuela.
 5. We reaffirm our firm and unequivocal condemnation of the rupture of the constitutional order and the rule of law in Venezuela, and highlight that only through the full restoration, as soon as possible, of democracy and respect for human rights in that country will the causes of the political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis that is taking place in that country be addressed.
 6. We express our conviction that the solution to the political crisis in Venezuela must come from the Venezuelan people and, as such, reiterate our permanent determination to support political and diplomatic initiatives that are conducive to the reestablishment of the constitutional order, democracy and the rule of law in Venezuela through holding a new electoral process with democratic guarantees.
 7. We express our determination to continue fostering initiatives in multilateral forums, especially the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations Human Rights Council, to help re-establish democratic order and the respect for human rights in Venezuela.
 8. We call on all member states of the OAS to reaffirm their support for the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter in order to contribute to the reestablishment of democracy in Venezuela.
 9. We condemn any provocation or military deployment that threatens peace and security in the region and call upon the Maduro regime and the Venezuelan Armed Forces to refrain from any actions that violate the sovereign rights of neighboring countries. In this regard, we express our deep concern about the interception of a seismic research vessel in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana by the Venezuelan Navy on December 22, 2018.

10. We reiterate our grave concern for the serious political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, which has caused the massive exodus of migrants and asylum seekers from Venezuela. This has occurred as a result of the anti-democratic, oppressive and dictatorial actions and policies undertaken by the Maduro regime, which will only be resolved with the full restoration of democracy and respect for human rights. Similarly, we renew our commitment, within our capabilities, to continue to offer assistance to migrants from Venezuela and to promote and develop initiatives for regional coordination in response to this crisis. In this regard, we welcome that, for the first time, the Venezuelan migration and refugee crisis has been included in the UN Global Humanitarian Overview for 2019. We also welcome the appointment the Joint Special Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.
11. We express our concern for the impacts on the economies and the security of countries in the region caused by the political crisis in Venezuela.
12. We urge the Venezuelan regime to allow humanitarian aid for the people of Venezuela to enter its territory to prevent the worsening of the humanitarian and public health crisis currently taking place and its cross-border effects.
13. We agree on the following measures:
 - A. Reassess the status or the level of diplomatic relations with Venezuela with a view to the re-establishment of democracy and the constitutional order in Venezuela and the need to protect our own nationals and other interests.
 - B. In accordance with respective national legislations, prevent high-level Venezuelan officials from entering the territory of Lima Group members and establish lists of natural and legal persons with whom financial and banking institutions of member countries should not conduct operations or should undertake special due diligence, preventing their access to the financial system, and, where applicable, freezing their funds and other assets or economic resources.
 - C. Evaluate restricting the granting of loans to the Maduro regime at international and regional financial organizations of which Lima Group countries are members.
 - D. Suspend military cooperation with the Maduro regime, including the transfer of armaments in light of articles 6 and 7 of the UN Arms Trade Treaty, and assess the granting of overflight permits for Venezuelan military aircraft in cases of humanitarian assistance.

- E. Intensify engagement with countries that are not part of the Lima Group to keep them informed of the measures adopted by the Lima Group, the seriousness of the situation in Venezuela and the need to work together for the reestablishment of democracy in that country.
- F. With regard to the request submitted to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court by Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay and Peru for an investigation into the possible commission of crimes against humanity in Venezuela, we encourage other countries to support the submission, and urge the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to proceed expeditiously with the corresponding procedures.
- G. Urge other members of the international community to adopt similar measures to those agreed upon by the Lima Group against the Maduro regime in order to promote the re-establishment of democracy in Venezuela.

[Chatham House Latin America Conference 2018: Sir Alan Duncan speech](#)

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
25 October 2018**

Minister of State for the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, gave a speech on Venezuela at the Chatham House Latin America Conference 2018:

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to speak about Latin America, and an honour to be in such good company. The United Kingdom is expanding its outreach and activity in the region, and one good example is our evolving relationship with the Latin American Development Bank whose Secretary General, Victor Rico, here this morning.

The United Kingdom wants to be a close partner in the next stage of Latin America's development. We have been impressed by economic success in countries like Chile, Mexico, Colombia and Peru, and in smaller economies like the Dominican Republic and Paraguay. Economic policies based on free trade and greater economic open-ness have contributed to steady growth and the rise of a growing middle class.

I am also delighted to be sharing a platform with Jorge Faurie, and would like to register here the United Kingdom's strong support for President Macri's reform agenda and economic stabilisation plan, and the determination of the Argentine authorities to manage current challenges to achieve long term economic stability. Over the last 2 years our relations with Argentina have improved dramatically, we want to keep it heading in that direction.

That's the good news – but I want to focus my remarks today on a country that offers a striking contrast, that's Venezuela. I will do so because it is a failing state presenting the deepest man-made economic and humanitarian crisis in modern Latin American history. Its negative impact, vividly illustrated by the exodus of more than two million people who have fled to other countries, represents an unprecedented challenge for the region. I want to take the time to ask how Venezuela got here, and what can be done about it.

We cannot talk about Venezuela without understanding the central role played by oil since the early 20th Century, I speak as a former oil trader myself. Venezuela was a founding member of OPEC. A publication in 1961 by Chatham House's predecessor, The Royal Institute for International Affairs, noted that "Venezuela over the past quarter century has been one of the most dynamic economies in the world". The 1960s and 1970s saw it enjoying relative political stability and one of the highest per-capita GDPs in the region.

But, it was also a period that saw Venezuela become increasingly dependent on oil, in a way that stunted the potential for development in other sectors of its economy. Even the country's then Oil Minister, Juan Pablo Perez, referred to oil as the "devil's excrement" citing the waste, corruption and debt so often associated with it. As successive governments became addicted to oil, and the price fluctuated, the 1980s and 1990s saw Venezuela lurch back and forth between boom and bust.

This was hardly surprising as oil came to account for nearly three quarters of Venezuela's total export revenue at the same time as economic policy was mismanaged, and governments failed to deliver structural change. Once the oil price in 1999 hit pretty much \$9 a barrel, its people, of course, were ready for change. Through this turbulent economic period the traditional two party system lost credibility. Hugo Chavez, as a populist "outsider" who challenged the status quo, seemed to offer something new.

To begin with, what he offered seemed to work. His initial policies could be characterised as relatively moderate and broadly orthodox, a mixed model not unfriendly towards foreign capital. He sought to increase ordinary non-oil incomes, to reduce the size of the public sector, and invest in capital projects. He introduced incentives to encourage private investment, and he used economic growth to reduce inequality through the better distribution of oil revenues. He was, of course, helped by a sharp increase in oil prices, to over \$100 a barrel by mid-2008. So in his early years, the Venezuelan economy was in reasonable shape, with rising GDP, falling unemployment, and a stable fiscal deficit. UN figures suggest poverty levels in Venezuela halved between 1999 and 2012.

Unfortunately, the relatively positive statistics masked deeper structural problems that Chavez's increasingly radical ideology, his hubristic "socialism of the 21st century", was in fact making it far worse. Even in the 'good times', spending outstripped revenue, and between 2001 and 2011, Venezuela and the state oil company PDVSA issued nearly \$50 billion of new debt at increasingly high interest rates. The inevitable

then followed: fiscal imbalances led to devaluation which led to rising prices.

To control inflation, Chavez introduced exchange rate and price controls, over-valuing the Bolivar against the Dollar and reducing the competitiveness of non-oil exports. Greater political radicalisation, including the expropriation of foreign companies, began to scare away foreign investors and encourage the middle classes to invest elsewhere, or look for jobs outside Venezuela even while domestic consumption seemed to be booming.

By 2012, Chavez was running an economy that was volatile and unstable, with high inflation and an overvalued currency. It was ever more dependent on an oil industry whose output was falling despite an unusually long period of high global oil prices. It was inefficient and unsustainable. In short, Chavez had squandered the massive oil revenues that could have built lasting economic success.

Let's be really clear about this: the economic meltdown was entirely self-inflicted. The rot that had begun under Chavez set in more deeply under the Maduro regime. PDVSA was destroyed by political meddling and the sacking of thousands of competent oil experts.

Mismanagement led to the halving of oil production as the price of oil fell. Hyperinflation set in as import controls and fixed exchange rates reduced the supply of goods. The government printed money to finance its deficits. The black market boomed and the rest of the economy collapsed.

Foreign exchange and price controls created huge economic imbalances, which in turn generated massive incentives for corruption, and illegal but lucrative activities within government circles. According to the Financial Times, the Venezuelan government received \$1.0 trillion in windfall revenue from the oil price boom between 2003 and 2012, of which it is said \$300 billion was stolen or misappropriated.

Unsustainable levels of debt forced the government in November 2017 to skip interest payments on two sovereign bonds, and that led to an accumulated default which has now reached over \$6 billion. The bloated state sector has squeezed out what was left of the private sector. What remained of the domestic manufacturing and agricultural sectors has been destroyed or expropriated.

Although the Venezuelan government practises statistical deceit, like all authoritarian regimes keen to hide the negative impact of their policies, we know that exports have fallen by half since 2008. Debt has tripled. GDP has fallen by a third.

This economic decay has translated into deep misery for most Venezuelans. The purchasing power of anyone outside the privileged few who can manipulate price distortions and multiple exchange rates has been shattered by levels of hyperinflation not seen in Latin America since the 1980s.

The recorded social cost of this gross economic mismanagement is stark. By 2014, poverty rates were back to 1999 levels, and now, according to the UN, over four fifths of Venezuelans are on the poverty line. The poor are poorer, more exposed to disease, and more vulnerable to malnutrition than at any time since the 1990s.

From all classes of society, those who can, are leaving. Over 2.3 million Venezuelans have taken refuge abroad – 1.6 million since 2017 according to the International Organisation for Migration - with 5,000 a day crossing the bridge at just one border post, Cucuta in Colombia. This is one of the greatest migrant crises ever faced by Latin America. It is comparable in scale to what has happened in Yemen or Syria, and it is a tragic reversal of the generosity shown by Venezuela to refugees and migrants from elsewhere in Latin America during the last century.

In addition to doing damage in his own country, Maduro is also accused of allowing illegal armed groups and criminal gangs to take refuge in Venezuela. These include dissident FARC who have refused to take part in Colombia's peace process, and also the ELN, another guerrilla group which is waging a brutal campaign of violence in vulnerable communities. He has also stoked tensions with reckless military incursions across the borders in Colombia and Guyana.

Maduro's double crime is that his destruction of the economy has been followed by the systematic undermining of democracy. We now see increasing political repression under Maduro, as the regime seeks to ensure that its inner circle continues to enjoy exclusive access to slices of an ever-diminishing economic cake. To do so, others have to be shut out. He allows no room for genuine democracy, nor space for political challenge from a free opposition. We have seen the manipulation of election after election over the last two years, culminating in a Presidential election last May that few apart from the government itself considered free and fair.

We have also seen a systematic effort to bypass and browbeat the National Assembly. This was elected in 2015, in a vote that saw the first major electoral defeat of Chavismo. The political opposition secured a majority with 56% of the vote on a high turnout, in a clear sign that the Venezuelan public did not want to follow the regime down the ruinous path along which Maduro and his cronies wished to take them.

The opposition's victory threatened the state-facilitated kleptocracy of the Maduro model. So he concocted an artificial Constituent Assembly, wholly lacking in democratic legitimacy, which was set up to do the regime's bidding. And we saw a systematic effort to undermine or control what remained of Venezuela's democratic institutions, including the judiciary, the national electoral authorities and local government. What is left is a corrupt, authoritarian regime presiding over a bankrupt economy.

We have recently been shocked by the death of opposition politician Fernando Alban, whilst detained by the Venezuelan Intelligence Service. Also by the unlawful detention of National Assembly deputy Juan Requesens. These, along with the recent brutal suppression of

demonstrations in Venezuela, are symptoms of an increasingly intolerant government turning to repression to cling onto power.

It did not have to be like this. There are plenty of other middle income developing countries in the world, also dependent on oil or another single, dominant resource, which have continued to grow. Chile relies heavily on copper. Colombia depends substantially on oil, and in addition suffered devastating internal conflict for decades. Yet both have maintained growth and shown impressive results in social and economic development even through the recent economic downturn in Latin America. Looking further afield, the Gulf States have withstood the impact of lower oil prices since 2014, in no small part due to large financial reserves they built up during the good times.

In recent years, low interest rates in advanced economies have fuelled record levels of capital flows into emerging markets. Venezuela, with its ideologically-driven governments and mismanaged economy, has missed out entirely.

[political content removed]

A man-made catastrophe requires man-made solutions, and preferably ones which are originating in Venezuela. That would require a different attitude, and perhaps different people at the helm. Venezuela can return to sensible economic policies, with support from regional and international organisations like the Latin American Development Bank, the IMF, or the World Bank.

It can reverse the brain drain by once again attracting the wealth of talent available in the Venezuelan diaspora. It can rescue PDVSA from its collapse by tapping into the expertise of an international oil and gas sector who are ready to work with a country with the world's largest oil reserves and substantial gas deposits. The revival of the oil industry will be an essential element in any recovery, and I can imagine that British companies like Shell and BP, will want to be part of it.

It will also require political consensus, rather than polarisation; it will need transparent governance, not state-sponsored deceit; and a willingness to hear those who disagree with the government, rather than deciding to persecute them for dissent.

In November 2017, the EU unanimously agreed a sanctions regime. We have imposed targeted measures on 18 senior individuals responsible for human rights abuses, and for undermining democracy and the rule of law. We have always made it clear that these measures can be lifted as soon as the government of Venezuela puts these things right. We are continuing to work closely with EU, regional and international partners and urge the Venezuelan government to engage in serious, credible negotiations with the opposition; to respect democratic institutions; to ensure free and fair elections; and to release all political prisoners. We call for respect for freedom of the media and for journalists working in Venezuela.

In an unprecedented response, Venezuela's regional neighbours have sought an ICC investigation into accusations of crimes against

humanity. Citing over 8000 extrajudicial executions, 12,000 arbitrary arrests and the detention of 13,000 political prisoners.

Economic stabilisation and recovery will not happen overnight. It would require one of the biggest ever international bail-outs and a huge mobilisation of international resources. The UK is ready to play its part. Our commitment to Venezuela goes back a long way – to the birth of the Republic in the early 19th century, when we provided more material and diplomatic support than any other foreign power to the Great Liberator, Simon Bolivar. British companies have a long history of investing in Venezuela's economic development, and remain committed to continuing this when conditions are right.

Of course we would prefer a Venezuelan solution, but this has become a regional crisis that will require a concerted regional and global response. The situation needs an intensification of outside pressure.

We are fully behind the Lima Group of countries in their efforts to seek a regional solution to the crisis.

We will continue to support the EU sanctions regime and indeed would consider fresh regimes in concert with our international partners. All options remain open.

This should include, I hope, a determination by Caribbean states which receive Petrocaribe supplied Venezuelan oil to resist inappropriate influence over their foreign policies. For the moment, we are committed to working with UN agencies, with the EU, and with Venezuela's neighbours to help mitigate the humanitarian impact of the crisis overflowing the country's borders into their neighbours.

I have painted a sombre picture today of one corner of the extraordinary region that we know as Latin America. I have done so, in part, to highlight the contrast with what is happening elsewhere.

We should celebrate, for example, the increasing resilience of Latin American democracy as seen by the successful democratic transfers of power this year in Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Chile, Paraguay, and, shortly, Brazil. We should praise the region's growing commitment to free trade, which offers wonderful opportunities for the United Kingdom as we leave the EU. We must also recognise, despite some exceptions, Latin America's steady adoption of policies that reflect the liberal, values-based concerns of an increasingly well-educated population – from intolerance of inequality and corruption, to support for LGBT rights and generosity towards migrants, of which Venezuelans fleeing their country are notable beneficiaries.

Since William Hague, as Foreign Secretary, launched the Canning agenda in 2010, the United Kingdom has sought to increase its investment, its attention and its focus on Latin America. This is a consistent policy, in a policy of outreach and partnership, which we shall continue to build after we have left the EU. As Minister for Europe and the Americas, that is a commitment I am happy to leave with you here today.

G7 Leaders' Statement on Venezuela

Council of the European Union

23 May 2018

We, the G7 Leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the European Union, are united in rejecting the electoral process leading to the May 20, 2018, Presidential election in Venezuela.

By failing to meet accepted international standards and not securing the basic guarantees for an inclusive, fair and democratic process, this election and its outcome lack legitimacy and credibility. We therefore denounce the Venezuelan Presidential election, and its result, as it is not representative of the democratic will of the citizens of Venezuela. The Venezuelan government has missed the opportunity for an urgently needed political rectification.

While the regime of Nicolas Maduro solidifies its authoritarian grip, the people of Venezuela continue to suffer human rights abuses and serious deprivation, causing increasing displacement which is affecting countries throughout the region.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela and call on the Maduro regime to restore constitutional democracy in Venezuela, schedule free and fair elections that can truly reflect the democratic will of the people, immediately release all political prisoners, restore the authority of the National Assembly and provide for full, safe and unhindered access by humanitarian actors.

We remain committed to supporting a peaceful, negotiated, democratic solution to the crisis in Venezuela and to support the Venezuelan population through humanitarian assistance.

Foreign Secretary statement on Venezuela elections

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

21 May 2018

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson makes a statement following Nicolas Maduro's win in the Venezuelan Presidential elections.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

I am disappointed, but not surprised, that Maduro pressed ahead with deeply flawed elections to secure his own survival. They were neither free nor fair, and have further eroded Venezuelan democracy. There is an urgent need to restore democratic order, release political prisoners, and respect the National Assembly and political opposition.

The condemnation of the international community is loud and clear. We shall work closely with our EU and

regional partners in the coming weeks to determine how we can continue to support a political resolution.

I remain deeply concerned by the man-made humanitarian and economic crisis, which is growing worse by the day. I urge the Venezuelan government to take immediate action, and let the international community deliver essential food and medicines. The suffering of ordinary Venezuelan people cannot be allowed to continue.

[Inter-Parliamentary Union calls on the government of Venezuela to respect the rule of law and human rights](#)

**Inter-Parliamentary Union
7 November 2017**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) expresses concern over the decision of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to request that the Constituent Assembly remove the parliamentary immunity of Mr. Freddy Guevara, Deputy, First Vice-President of the National Assembly of Venezuela.

The National Assembly is the only body empowered to issue a decision of this nature. In this regard, the IPU strongly urges the Government to respect the constitutional order in Venezuela, and in this context, the principle of the separation of powers, the privilege of parliamentary immunity and human rights, including freedom of expression and the right to due process.

The Organization expresses the hope that through dialogue, the parties involved can find a swift and viable solution to the humanitarian and democratic crisis that is negatively impacting the Venezuelan people and Latin America as a whole.

Within its purview, the IPU, through its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, will continue to closely monitor this issue, and in due course, will determine how best it can contribute to strengthening democracy in our countries and ensure the independence of the institution of parliament, including the National Assembly of Venezuela.

Draft decisions taken by the IPU [Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians](#) during the 137th IPU Assembly can be found [here](#).

[Minister appalled by developments in Venezuela](#)

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
21 August 2017**

Statement following announcement that the new Constituent Assembly will take over the established National Assembly's powers.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, said:

I am utterly appalled by the decision of the sham-democratic Constituent Assembly in Venezuela to remove legislative powers from the elected National Assembly. This is a shocking blow to democracy in Venezuela, and a direct attack on a legitimate democratic institution. It ignores the will of the Venezuelan people and will only further undermine confidence in Venezuela's democracy. The National Assembly and its Deputies must be respected and their rights honoured.

Poverty in Venezuela continues to rise, with more Venezuelans being forced into poverty every day by bad governance. This is a tragedy in a country with such enormous resources. This move will do nothing to tackle the urgent economic challenges that ordinary Venezuelans face.

It is time for President Maduro and the Venezuelan Government to act responsibly. They need to reduce tension, respect democracy, and take responsibility for working with the Opposition to agree a positive way forward for all Venezuelans. The UK stands with the people of Venezuela and will work with international partners in our collective response to the gravity of this situation.

4. PQs

[Venezuela](#)

24 Jan 2019 | 795 cc813-5

Asked by: Baroness Northover

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to reports that the government of the United States have recognised the Venezuelan opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, as the interim President of that country.

Asked by: Baroness Northover

My Lords, I beg leave to ask a Question of which I have given private notice.

Answered by: Baroness Goldie

My Lords, we are aware of announcements by the United States, Canada and a number of other Lima Group countries recognising Juan Guaidó as interim President of Venezuela. We support the Venezuelan people's loud call for democracy and freedom, supporting a credible, peaceful political process leading to free and fair elections. The United Kingdom fully supports the national assembly as a democratically elected institution whose powers need to be restored and respected. We believe that Venezuela needs a carefully constructed political process to bring moderate factions together for negotiations on a peaceful transition. We and our EU partners are seeking to assist such activity through an international contact group.

Asked by: Baroness Northover

My Lords, I thank the Minister for that reply. Does she agree, as I am sure she does, that Venezuela is in a desperately unstable situation? Some 3 million people have already fled the country while up to a further 7 million might flee if Maduro stays, and inflation runs at 10 million per cent. Is she concerned about not only the dire situation of those in the country but, and especially, the destabilising effect of refugees on the countries around it, countries whose democracies are not yet deep-rooted? We are a permanent member of the Security Council and still a member of the EU. That combination gives us global influence. Are we supporting the US action—this was not clear from the Minister's Answer—which is supported by certain Latin American countries and Canada but not by Russia and Cuba? If not, how does she think this crisis will be addressed?

Answered by: Baroness Goldie

The noble Baroness is right to highlight the profound nature of the problems confronting Venezuela. There is widespread concern, not just in the UK but globally. It is the case that the UK recognises states, not Governments. We have made clear that we think this has to be resolved by free, credible and fair elections. We are doing everything we can to influence debate towards that end. We have also made clear our support for the national assembly. We are working in concert with our global partners, not least the EU. For example, together with our European partners the UK has applied targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for serious human rights abuses and for undermining democracy and the rule of law. We remain ready to support our global

partners if, for example, this matter is raised at United Nations Security Council level.

Asked by: Lord Collins of Highbury

My Lords, the obvious priority must be to avoid a repeat of the violence in 2017. Therefore, the Secretary-General's call for the international community to encourage all sides, the Government and the opposition, to adopt a peaceful approach is obviously the right one. We need to uphold the rule of law and respect human rights and democratic freedoms. I agree with the Minister, but can she be a little clearer in her response? Will she and the Government support the United Nations Secretary-General and his work in building the coalition for peace, or will they jump to the side of Trump, who seems to operate on the basis that adding oil to the fire is the way to go forward?

Answered by: Baroness Goldie

I agree in large part with everything the noble Lord said. As he is aware, the United Kingdom exercises its own role on the global stage. We make our own decisions on circumstances that arise. We are always willing, where we can, to work constructively with our partners. I indicated that we are doing that already with the EU, and we are certainly doing it with the United Nations. We are extremely concerned about the situation. As the noble Lord might be aware, we offer help to Venezuela, and not just in the form of supporting other international programmes working there. We have a bilateral programme budget of approximately £500,000 this financial year to support Venezuelan democracy, human rights, economic reform, regional stability and security.

The UK is very conscious of the serious nature of the situation. It is profoundly concerning, not just for stability in the area but for the residents and inhabitants of Venezuela, many of whom have been treated appallingly. The United Kingdom is quite clear about that. We are doing what we can, either on our own, bilaterally or in concert with global partners, to improve the situation.

Asked by: Lord Campbell of Pittenweem

My Lords, I have listened carefully to the noble Baroness's answers, in particular regarding recognition. Those answers are well judged. The notion of recognising leaders of opposition seems to set a precedent that might prove extremely uncomfortable in other circumstances. The Government's position as outlined by the noble Baroness is, at least for the moment, exactly the correct one. The announcement today as to what has been done unilaterally by the United States, in concert with other countries including Canada, raises for some of us recollections of the actions of President Reagan and Mr Oliver North.

Answered by: Baroness Goldie

I am grateful to the noble Lord for his very helpful comments. The Chamber recognises his undoubted knowledge of, expertise in and wisdom about such matters. It is important that these issues are handled with a degree of judgment, sensitivity and delicacy and that there is not a rush of blood to the head. As I said, in its international affairs the United Kingdom conducts a carefully constructed, carefully

thought out programme of response and, where possible, substantive help. That is the course we shall pursue.

Asked by: Lord West of Spithead

My Lords, I also agree that we are handling this very sensitively politically, but the problem, and the reason for the vast flow of people, is that people are starving to death in Venezuela—those pouring into Colombia are avoiding starvation. The noble Baroness talked of £500,000. What are we actually doing to try to mobilise something to try to recover this dreadful situation? I am afraid it has to be done more rapidly than some of these political manoeuvrings.

Answered by: Baroness Goldie

As I indicated to the Chamber, the UK has its own bilateral programme of help with Venezuela, but we are also significant supporters of, and contributors to, international responses. The humanitarian agencies in Venezuela have a very difficult role, partly because the Government deny that the crisis exists. Notwithstanding all that, the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund has been an important component in trying to contribute to the alleviation of the very conditions to which the noble Lord refers. The UK has contributed financial assistance through the EU's contributions to that fund, and has also contributed through Start Fund, which has activated urgent programmes in both Ecuador and Peru in response to the Venezuelan crisis. The UK has also deployed humanitarian advisers to the region, to monitor the situation and consider options for UK assistance.

Asked by: Lord Wallace of Saltaire

My Lords, given the Prime Minister's recent strong commitment to cross-party working in a number of areas, and given the leader of the Opposition's expertise and experience on Venezuela, has the Prime Minister consulted the leader of the Opposition on what the British response should be?

Answered by: Baroness Goldie

I wish the leader of the Opposition were a more co-operative respondent to invitations to become involved in important discussions—he has shown a certain recalcitrance in that respect. But when we are dealing with a situation of the gravity of that in Venezuela, there is a desire, as indicated by the noble Lord, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, to work across parties, if we can, and to recognise that there are problems in that area; that way all minds can contribute to improving the situation. That is a desirable way to approach the matter.

[Venezuela: Politics and Government](#)

22 January 2019 | 908708

Asked by: John Spellar

What diplomatic steps he is taking to tackle the constitutional and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and the effect of that crisis on the political and economic situation in neighbouring countries.

Answered by: Sir Alan Duncan | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are all concerned about the situation in Venezuela, a crisis of growing regional magnitude. Only yesterday 25 members of the National Guard revolted against Maduro's leadership. In October 2018, speaking at Chatham House, I called for a concerted regional and global response to what has become a man-made regional crisis. The UK is standing alongside American, EU and Lima Group partners to ensure a robust response to the crisis; all options remain open including further targeted sanctions.

[Venezuela: Politics and Government](#)

03 December 2018 | 196846

Asked by: Graham P Jones

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions has he had with representatives of Lima Group countries on the political and economic situation in Venezuela.

Answered by: Sir Alan Duncan | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The political and economic crisis in Venezuela continues to raise concern. On 18 October, I met representatives of the Lima group - the Ambassadors of Peru, Chile, Colombia, Argentina and Paraguay, and the Canadian High Commissioner - to discuss the situation before my speech on Venezuela at Chatham House on 25 October.

I also discussed the situation in Venezuela with the Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodriguez, on 12 November.

[Venezuela: Sanctions](#)

19 Nov 2018 | 189833

Asked by: John Spellar

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will take steps with his international counterparts to impose sanctions on the leading figures in the Venezuelan Maduro regime.

Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK does not have its own domestic sanctions regime but does act with the international community to implement UN and EU sanctions.

We agreed a tough EU sanctions regime on Venezuela in November 2017. Travel bans and assets freezes were imposed on seven government officials in February 2018 and a further 11 officials in July 2018.

[Venezuela: Politics and Government](#)

12 November 2018 | 188713

Asked by: John Spellar

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations his Department has made to the Government of Venezuela in respect of the killing of and assaults made against opposition politicians; and if he will make a statement.

Answered by: Sir Alan Duncan | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

As I stated in my Chatham House speech on 25 October, we are extremely concerned at the Venezuelan government's continued attacks on opposition politicians, a number of whom have been imprisoned, exiled or stripped of their political rights. The illegal detention of National Assembly MP Juan Requesens and the death of Fernando Alban whilst detained by the Venezuelan Intelligence Service are both particularly disturbing.

In October, our Ambassador met the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Jorge Arreaza, and the Vice-Minister for Europe, Yvan Gil, and expressed our concerns. In London, the Head Latin America Department, FCO, called in the Venezuelan Ambassador to express our concern about Mr Requesens and to urge the Venezuelan government to release all political prisoners.

[Topical Questions](#)

26 Jun 2018 | 643 c754

Asked by: Diana Johnson

In the past few days, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has said that Venezuelan security forces have killed more than 500 people, and at least some of those killings can be directly connected back to the Maduro regime. What discussions have Ministers been having with the authorities there about human rights, freedom and the rule of law?

Answered by: Boris Johnson | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The hon. Lady's concerns are shared by all the countries surrounding Venezuela, and the UK signed up to the conclusions of the Lima Group. Yesterday, in the Foreign Affairs Council, the European Union agreed further targeted sanctions against individuals in the Maduro regime.

[Venezuela: Elections](#)

08 Jun 2018 | 147364

Asked by: Nigel Dodds

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the transparency and legitimacy of the electoral process in Venezuela.

Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK, together with EU and other international partners, have serious reservations about the transparency and legitimacy of the electoral process in Venezuela. We regret that the recent Presidential elections were convened without wide agreement on the date or on the conditions for a credible and inclusive process. We are also concerned at the government's continued attacks on opposition politicians, a number of whom have been prosecuted, imprisoned or stripped of their political rights.

The impartiality of the National Electoral Council (CNE) is questionable, having failed to guarantee a level playing field for all candidates and political parties in the 20 May Presidential elections. Elections were clearly not free, fair or transparent. These elections have only created further obstacles to a peaceful, negotiated political solution. We believe that Venezuela should hold new elections which meet international democratic standards.

Condemnation of the Presidential elections has been swift and loud. The Foreign Secretary, who was in the region at the time of the elections, issued a strong statement criticising the elections. The EU, US, G7 and G20 also issued similar statements. We will continue to judge the Venezuelan government on its actions. It needs to take immediate steps to restore the democratic order and release political prisoners. EU foreign Ministers issued a statement to this effect following the Foreign Affairs Council on 28 May.

**[Venezuela: Politics and Government](#)
28 November 2017 | HL3174**

Asked by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent representations they have made to the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela regarding (1) respecting the constitutional order in Venezuela, (2) the separation of powers, (3) the privilege of parliamentary immunity, and (4) human rights including freedom of expression and the right to due process.

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Ministers and officials regularly raise these issues with their Venezuelan counterparts. On 10 October, the Minister for Europe and the Americas raised our concerns regarding the deteriorating socioeconomic situation in Venezuela with the Foreign Minister, Jorge Arreaza. We also work with like-minded Governments to raise our concerns publicly through international bodies. Recent examples include the September Human Rights Council and the EU Foreign Affairs Council, which issued new Council Conclusions on Venezuela on 13 November, and the UN Security Council.

Venezuela: Politics and Government**28 November 2017 | HL3173****Asked by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the statement of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, published on 7 November, that the National Assembly of Venezuela is the only body empowered to issue a decision to remove the parliamentary immunity of Mr Freddy Guevara, Deputy First Vice-President of the National Assembly of Venezuela.

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK, together with EU Member States, does not recognise the Constituent Assembly. The UK believes that strong, independent, and democratically elected institutions, such as the National Assembly, are key to democracy. The Constituent Assembly's removal of parliamentary immunity from Mr Guevara is further evidence of its erosion of democratic processes in Venezuela.

Venezuela: Politics and Government**19 October 2017 | HL1774****Asked by: Lord Patten**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 25 September (HL1520), what is their long-term vision for Venezuela.

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Our long-term vision is a stable, democratic and prosperous Venezuela. We are working to support that where circumstances allow, through our project working on priority issues such as human rights, democracy, counter-narcotics and climate change, as well as efforts to protect UK commercial interests.

Venezuela: Politics and Government**29 September 2017 | HL1603****Asked by: Baroness Hooper**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the informal meeting of foreign affairs ministers of EU member states on 8 September in Gymnich, and in advance of the UN General Assembly, what action is being taken at the national and EU level to find a sustainable solution to the current political crisis in Venezuela.

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are working closely with partners, including the EU and UN, to consider a range of options to promote an end to the crisis in Venezuela. The most recent discussion at EU level took place on 12

September. The Lima Group of Foreign Ministers met in the margins of the UN General Assembly on 20 September and will re-convene in Canada in October. Any solution to the current crisis in Venezuela must come from the region. The Minister for Europe and the Americas is working closely with Peru's Foreign Minister, Ricardo Luna, in support of Peru's regional leadership. We will continue to work with partners to consider a wide range of options to prevent further violence and alleviate the suffering of ordinary Venezuelans.

Venezuela remains a Human Rights Priority Country for the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe and the Americas met the President of the National Assembly, Julio Borges, and Antonieta Lopez, the mother of opposition leader, Leopoldo Lopez, on 7 September and stressed the UK's unwavering support for the National Assembly as a democratic institution.

5. Other Parliamentary material

5.1 Debates

[Venezuela: Political Situation](#)

05 Sep 2017 | House of Commons | 628 cc1-24WH

Motion that this House has considered the political situation in Venezuela.

5.2 Statements

[Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report 2017](#)

16 July 2018 | HCWS858

Jeremy Hunt (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office): I have today laid before Parliament a copy of the 2017 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Report on Human Rights and Democracy (Cm number:9644).

The report analyses human rights developments overseas in 2017 and illustrates how the government works to promote and defend human rights globally.

The report assesses the situation in 30 countries, which the FCO has designated as its Human Rights Priority Countries. These are Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

This year marks the 70th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The report I have laid before Parliament today demonstrates that the principles and values enshrined in the Universal Declaration remain as crucial as ever.

It also serves as a reminder that ensuring universal respect for those principles remains a difficult task.

The UK Government will continue to play a significant part in this endeavour to protect the 'inherent dignity' of 'all members of the human family'.

**The FCO report can be read in Chapter 6, below.*

5.3 Early Day Motions

VENEZUELAN ELECTION

EDM 1335 (session 2017-19)

5 June 2018

Graham P Jones

That this House notes the recently held presidential election in Venezuela and worldwide condemnation of its legitimacy and subsequent outcome, the deteriorating human rights situation and collapse of democracy along with constitutional changes that mean effective opposition is impossible in the country; joins with the rest of the international community to condemn the legitimacy of the result and the continued presidency of Nicolas Maduro; supports the sanctions by the US and EU to prevent senior figures in the regime from profiting from their political power; and calls on the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to continue to press for further sanctions against that regime.

6. FCO Human Rights report

[Human Rights and Democracy: the 2017 Foreign and Commonwealth Office report](#) [Extract]

16 July 2018

Cm 9644

Venezuela

The human rights situation in Venezuela deteriorated markedly in 2017. A wide range of civil and political rights violations, against a backdrop of reduced access to food and healthcare, were issues of particular concern.

The economic crisis, with hyper- inflation and continuing shortages of food and medicines, severely reduced the capacity of Venezuelans to meet their basic needs. According to Caritas International, the Global Acute Malnutrition Index, which measures the percentage of children under the age of five with acute to severe malnutrition, stood at 15.6% in November. Medical and pharmaceutical associations reported a sharp increase in cases of malaria, diphtheria, measles, and a lack of medication. Criminal violence remained a serious problem. One local NGO, Venezuelan Observatory of Violence, estimated more than 26,000 violent deaths in 2017. UNESCO figures suggest that nearly 50% of girls are not in primary education.

The International Migration Laboratory of the Simon Bolivar University calculated that the number of Venezuelans living overseas doubled between 2015 and 2017, growing from an estimated 1.4 to 3.2 million. UNHCR reported that the number of Venezuelan asylum-seekers increased from 34,200 in 2016 to 52,000 in 2017.

In March, Venezuela accepted 193 and noted 81 recommendations out of the 274 it had received from 102 countries during its Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in November 2016. The UK's recommendations on outcomes- based political dialogue and enhanced cooperation with the UN OHCHR were not accepted.

Political violence soared in Venezuela, especially between April and August when there were sustained protests against the government. An OHCHR report published in September reported at least 124 deaths and the arbitrary detention of more than 5,000 individuals during the protests. Patterns of ill-treatment were reported, in some cases amounting to torture. OHCHR also highlighted that more than 600 civilians had been tried at military courts for offences including treason, rebellion and theft of military equipment, following anti-government protests between April and July 2017.

Protests started following two rulings by the Venezuelan Supreme Court at the end of March. By these rulings, the Supreme Court gave itself new powers to exercise the legislative powers of the National Assembly and to restrict the parliamentary immunity of MPs. The opposition declared this an attack on the autonomy of parliament. The Supreme

Court announcements provoked strong international reactions, including from the UK and the EU.

On 1 May, President Maduro called for a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the Venezuelan Constitution. He said that the Constituent Assembly would transform the state and bring about peace, dialogue and elections. On 30 July, despite internal and international criticism, a vote took place to select the members of the Constituent Assembly. The opposition dismissed it as a fraudulent process and did not take part in the vote. Several countries, including the UK and EU member states, refused to recognise the Constituent Assembly, and called for negotiations to ensure a lasting solution to any disagreements. Following the election, the Constituent Assembly took on a supra-constitutional authority, taking away legislative capacity from the National Assembly. It replaced the Prosecutor General who had spoken against the government during the protests, and ordered the electoral authorities to call for overdue gubernatorial and municipal elections before the end of the year.

Despite having no constitutional powers to write laws, on 8 November, the Constituent Assembly passed a Law against Hatred, which imposed further restrictions on media outlets and political parties. The Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Edison Lanza, said that the law would fuel repression and self-censorship. The NGO Freedom House ranked the internet in Venezuela as "not free". The Venezuelan press workers' union reported a total of 498 violations to freedom of expression during 2017, an increase of 26.5% compared with 2016. Venezuela continues to lack legislation and policies to protect LGBT communities, and impunity for hate crime is high.

In November, the EU Foreign Affairs Council unanimously adopted a sanctions regime on Venezuela. The EU expressed its concerns about the lack of respect for and erosion of democratically elected institutions, violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the urgent needs of the population that affected their rights such as the right to food and to health.

The UK maintained dialogue on human rights with diverse actors. In May, the then Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay of St Johns, visited Caracas and held meetings with senior government representatives, including the then Foreign Minister, Delcy Rodríguez, in which she encouraged respect for civil and political rights for all Venezuelans, including the holding of free and fair elections. She also met the National Assembly's Board, as well as representatives of civil society organisations and high-profile human rights defenders. In March and November, we organised two major events: Women of the Future, Venezuela, and the inaugural meeting of the Business Forum of the Venezuelan Alliance for Women's corporate leadership.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation is likely to have increased Venezuelans' vulnerability to modern slavery, particularly to neighbouring countries (including islands in the Caribbean). These practices include sex trafficking (especially of women, girls and LGBT), domestic servitude and forced labour.

In 2018, the UK will continue to focus on concerns over the erosion of political freedoms and the adverse impact of the social and economic crisis, including modern slavery, girls' access to education and women's rights, with a special focus on eliminating violence against women and girls.

7. Further reading

Library Briefing Papers

[The 2018 Venezuelan Presidential elections](#)

Commons Briefing paper CBP-8315
18 May 2018

[Political situation in Venezuela](#)

Commons Debate pack CDP-2017-0157
1 September 2017

Committee inquiries

[Global Britain and South America inquiry](#)

Foreign Affairs Committee

In such a large and diverse region, with significant political and economic changes afoot, the Foreign Affairs Committee asks how the UK can ensure its policy towards South America is targeted most effectively.

This page has the inquiry's terms of reference and links to inquiry news and evidence sessions, including details of future meetings.

Websites

[Venezuela homepage](#)

UN Human Rights

[Venezuela homepage](#)

Amnesty International

[Venezuela homepage](#)

Human Rights Watch

Reports / publications

[Venezuela 2017 Human Rights Report](#)

US Department of State

[World Report 2019: Annual View of Human Rights Around the Globe](#) [Venezuela chapter]

Human Rights Watch

[Venezuela 2017/2018](#)

Amnesty International

[The Corruption of Democracy in Venezuela](#)

CATO Institute
March 2018

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