



Paris, July 3rd, 2017

Références : LB/MF/cc

Objet :

The economic and social situation in Venezuela

For the attention of :

- Sharan Burrow, general secretary of the ITUC
- Victor Baez, general secretary of the TUCA
- Joao Felicio, president of the ITUC
- Hassan Yussuff, president of the TUCA

Dear friends,

CFDT and CISL have a long history of cooperation with trade union organizations in South America and the Caribbean region. They have always supported trade union organizations that have fought for workers' rights and for democracy in this continent, which has known very hard authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. They continue to do it today.

This is particularly the case in Venezuela, where they are committed to supporting the Independent Trade Union Alliance (ASI) since this organization was established as an autonomous trade union confederation in December 2015. We recall that ASI is affiliated to ITUC and TUCA.

Over the last few months, the economic and social situation in Venezuela, already a cause for concern in 2015, has become much worse. According to the IMF, inflation was 720% in 2016. GDP fell from 8 to 10% over the same period. The purchasing power of Venezuelan workers has collapsed, severe shortages affect all commodities: food, hygiene products, and medicines. Venezuelans are obliged to spend very long hours in queues to access the few supplied stores.

The country is affected by a real humanitarian crisis. The lack of pharmaceuticals, antibiotics, medical equipment causes many deaths. An illness like malaria that was virtually eradicated has claimed more than 130.000 deaths in 2016.

Despite this difficult context, ASI is developing an action among the Venezuelan workers to help them cope with their difficulties. In October 2016, a CFDT's delegation visited Venezuela and noted the dynamism of the ASI management team and the mobilization of its activists with the workers. This in spite of the obstacles the Government imposed against the exercise of independent trade unionism. No less than seven laws have been promulgated to criminalize trade union action if it does not come to reinforce government action in its will to control workers.

The attitude of the Venezuelan government is only aggravating the situation, provoking a deep political crisis. Indeed, it refuses to draw the consequences of its electoral defeat in the legislative elections of December 2015, which gave two-thirds of the seats of Parliament to the opposition. Since then, President Maduro has used the judiciary power to block the activity of Parliament. The judiciary power is tightly controlled by the executive. In early April 2017, the Supreme Court of Venezuela even tried to confiscate the legislative power.

This last attempt triggered the Venezuelans' anger. The population, already exasperated by the huge difficulties of everyday life and the lack of prospects for a political solution, came out massively on the street to demand presidential elections, the only way out to restore democracy. The demonstrations have been daily for almost three months.

The government's response was brutal repression. To this day, this repression has caused 85 deaths, including many young people shot dead by Chavista militias or anti-riot police, hundreds of wounded, thousands of arrests. More than 300 civilians have been tried and sentenced by military courts, which is contrary to the Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela. Amnesty International denounces the "disappearance" of people for several days during which they would be tortured.

The Venezuelan government has failed all attempts at international mediation and is locked in repression and confrontation. It denies the gravity of the humanitarian crisis and obstinately refuses to open a humanitarian channel which would alleviate the suffering of its people. The refusal of any dialogue crystallized in his attitude to the OAS, announcing his withdrawal from the organization and leaving the Cancun summit.

A new step towards the aggravation of the conflict was reached when he announced the convening of a Constituent Assembly for July 30th. This convocation is violating the Bolivarian Constitution since it provides that such an assembly can only be convened with the consent of the Venezuelan people by means of a referendum. By its way of proceeding, particularly as regards the mode of appointing representatives in this Constituent Assembly, it is clear that this is a maneuver of the government to retain power and trample the universal suffrage. Worse, the Supreme Court initiated process to remove the Attorney General of the country, Luisa Ortega, who considers the convocation of the Constituent Assembly illegal and questioned the appointment of several judges of this Tribunal. Carlos Navarro, President of ASI warned us that if the Constituent Assembly is held on July 30, violence will increase tenfold. The ASI demands the suspension of the Constituent Assembly and the return to universal suffrage.

Dear friends, international trade unionism cannot remain silent about the dramatic situation of Venezuela, the outbreak of violence and repression, the sufferings of workers and the unacceptable attitude of the Venezuelan authorities. ITUC and TUCA must support its

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Venezuelan affiliates (ASI and CTV) in their struggle for justice and democracy. As a follow-up to the TUCA press release of April 13th, we believe that ITUC and TUCA must intervene in the public debate in order to foster a constructive dialogue for a political exit from the crisis. Any delay results in suffering and death.

In Venezuela, as in Brazil or in other parts of the world, overcoming the crisis goes through the celebration of democratic elections and universal suffrage. We believe that, as trade unionists, we need jointly to ask President Maduro:

- urgently open of a humanitarian channel to alleviate the sufferings of the populations;
- respect the right to demonstrate, stop repression and illegal detention, prosecute responsible for crimes and violence against people;
- suspend the Constituent Assembly and organizing democratic elections.

Our Venezuelan trade union friends are fighting a very difficult and courageous struggle for the respect of the rights and for the dignity. They deserve our full support. We must respond present.

Thank you for your attention to our request. Waiting for your answer,

Sincerely yours,

Laurent Berger
General Secretary of CFDT



Annamaria Furlan
General Secretary of CISL

