

## Check against delivery

Mr President, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank Ms DiCarlo for the information she provided. Belgium considers that the situation in Venezuela is a clear threat to stability in the region and today's discussions clearly fall within the mandate that the Charter confers on this Council.

In order to prevent the further deterioration of the situation, we are calling upon all the members of this Council to work together to **promote a peaceful solution** to recent events. We call for violence to be avoided at any price.

In this context, I would like to pass on **three messages**: (1) a call for restraint and de-escalation; (2) the importance of full humanitarian access in accordance with humanitarian principles; and (3) the need to launch a peaceful political process as soon as possible, to pave the way for free, transparent elections that allow the population to freely express their will and also lead to reconciliation in Venezuela.

Firstly, I wanted to appeal to those who have an influence over these events to **show restraint**. We call for calm and invite all stakeholders to spare no effort in reducing the tensions. We strongly condemn the excessive use of force by the security forces and the pro-government factions. The High Commissioner for Human Rights counted four deaths and more than 300 people injured, including among the indigenous Pemon community. Belgium extends its deepest condolences to the victims' families. We call for the launch of an independent inquiry and recall the importance of respecting the rights of demonstrators and the freedom of the press.

Secondly, the regime's refusal to recognise **the humanitarian emergency** is causing the tension to escalate. Belgium calls on all the stakeholders to authorise the entry of aid and facilitate the movement of humanitarian workers. We would like to stress the importance of humanitarian aid for relieving the suffering of the most vulnerable, under the leadership of the relevant United Nations bodies and in full compliance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is

unacceptable for irregular armed groups to intimidate civilians and members of the National Assembly who are distributing aid.

Thirdly, Belgium calls for the rapid launch of a **peaceful political process** to pave the way for free, transparent elections that allow the population to express their will and also lead to reconciliation in Venezuela. The current crisis in Venezuela has political origins, which means that the solution must also be political. The presidential elections last May were not free, fair or credible, thus depriving Nicolás Maduro's government of its democratic legitimacy. We support Juan Guaidó in his constitutional mission to hold free, fair and democratic presidential elections. The EU has created a Contact Group to accompany and support this process during this transition period.

Mr President,

The Venezuelan people have suffered too much already. It is high time that we let them decide on their future. Belgium advocates a peaceful democratic transition, restraint and de-escalation by all parties and the respecting of political rights and human rights in the broadest sense. These are all vital for moving towards sustainable reconciliation within Venezuelan society. Belgium will continue to monitor closely the development of the situation on the ground.

Thank you, Mr President.