

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Speech by

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of Belgium to the United Nations

**Briefing on Venezuela**

New York, 26/1/2019

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Mr President, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

When 3 million people flee their country because of economic and political collapse, there is obviously a threat for the region's stability. For Belgium, it is clearly the responsibility of the Council to address the situation in Venezuela, which poses a threat for international peace and security.

In order to prevent a deterioration of the situation, we are calling upon all the members of this Council to work together to promote a peaceful solution to the crisis. I also wish to express my appreciation to the countries in the region which have shown great solidarity and generosity to Venezuelans who have sought refuge in their countries. Belgium expresses its support to these countries as well as to Mr Eduardo Stein, Joint UNHCR-IOM Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Although the situation on the ground is very unstable, I wish to convey four messages in line with today's declaration by the European Union: (1) a call for restraint and de-escalation; (2) underline the need to re-establish constitutional order in Venezuela and start a process of reconciliation; (3) the importance of listening to what Venezuelans have to say; and (4) respect for the fundamental rights of the Venezuelan people.

Firstly, I wanted to appeal to those who have an influence over these events to **show restraint**. The large-scale popular demonstrations in Venezuela in recent days have seen indiscriminate violence by the authorities, resulting in the tragic deaths of many people with many others injured. Belgium extends its deepest condolences to the victims' families. We strongly condemn the excessive use of force by the security forces and, in the same way as Ms Bachelet, we ask for an independent inquiry to be opened.

Secondly, Belgium calls for the **restoration of constitutional order** in Venezuela. The presidential elections held last May were not free, fair, nor credible, thus depriving Nicolás Maduro's government of its democratic legitimacy. Venezuela urgently requires a government that truly represents the will of the people and initiates a process of reconciliation. Belgium recognises and fully supports the National Assembly as a democratically elected institution and we ask that its powers are restored and respected

immediately. I also call upon the authorities to guarantee the civil rights, freedom and security of all the members of the National Assembly, including its President, Juan Guaidó, in line with the immunity guaranteed by the Constitution.

Thirdly, we must **listen to the people of Venezuela**. In recent years, the citizens of this country have had the courage to make their voices heard on several occasions. Some of them have paid for this with their lives. When they voted for change, their voice was not heard. Today, they are in the streets of Caracas demanding the right to choose their future. Belgium confirms its profound belief that a peaceful and inclusive democratic solution is the only way to overcome the current political deadlock and serious social crisis which this has caused. With the European Union, we are calling for the urgent organisation of free, credible and transparent presidential elections in full accordance with the Constitution and in accordance with democratic standards. Failing the announcement of the organisation of new elections, along with the necessary guarantees, within the next eight days, we will take additional measures, in particular, according to article 233, the recognition of the constitutional role of the President of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó.

Fourthly, **the fundamental rights of the Venezuelan people must be respected**. The imprisonment of demonstrators and acts of violence against them are a source of serious concern. Belgium calls upon the authorities of Venezuela to put an end to the arbitrary detention of demonstrators and presumed political opponents, and ensure the fundamental rights of those detained. Freedom of the press must be guaranteed. Similarly, we call upon the authorities to take concrete measures to reduce the impact of the crisis and facilitate access to humanitarian aid in order to meet the population's most pressing needs.

Mr President,

In conclusion, we are appealing for a non-violent and democratic solution to be found to the crisis. We recall that this crisis can only be resolved through dialogue and that only dialogue can lead to a process of reconciliation.

Thank you, Mr President.