



NGO
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UPR Venezuela

To: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

From: NGO
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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION
ZDRUŽENJE ZA OČITNE STVARI – ZOS

1. Association for obvious things is an NGO that was established in April 2013, although its founders were active members in other civil society organizations.
2. The main objectives of the association include the development and promotion of sustainable and transdisciplinary development in the field of culture, tourism, agriculture, ecology, non-formal education, publishing, promotion and development of ICT technologies and the field of informatics, promote intergenerational and social dialogue, organization of musical, cultural and educational events in the local, national and international environment.
3. **In the last years we dedicated our work on the promotion of food cultivation on the basis of permacultural principles that lead to alimentation self-sufficiency. In regarding to this we organized numerous activities in teaching permacultural gardening, especially with youngsters, design public or private permacultural gardens and other activities to promote the importance of growing one's own food.**

Advances in Venezuelan Human Rights in the area of food security public policy.

4. *Food is life, food is freedom, thus parting from our main field of activities that focuses on alimentation self-sufficiency, we would like to highlight good practices and advances of Venezuela in the field of alimentation.*
5. The foundation for Venezuela's current food sovereignty efforts was laid in a series of articles in its newly reformed constitution, passed by popular referendum in 1999.
6. Article 305 states: *The State shall promote sustainable agriculture as the strategic basis for overall rural development, and consequently shall guarantee the population a secure food supply, defined as the sufficient and stable availability of*

food within the national sphere and timely and uninterrupted access to the same for consumers (...). Food production is in the national interest and is fundamental to the economic and social development of the Nation.

7. Today, a broad range of both government and citizen-led institutions and initiatives are aimed at carrying out the provisions of Article 305. On the production end, there are numerous programs to bolster domestic agriculture and provide support to small and midscale farmers.
8. Such measures include a land reform process that has redistributed large landholdings to over 200,000 farming families,⁷ totaling more than a million people—roughly half of the rural population. Once land is secured, farmers then have government assistance to access tools, inputs, credit, training and technical assistance, and support in receiving fair prices for their products. Similar support structures exist for fisherfolk, who have also benefited from a ban on environmentally destructive, large-scale bottom trawling boats off the coast.
9. Other advances for Venezuela's long-marginalized food providers include a debt eradication program and the unprecedented granting of pensions to farmers and fisherfolk.
10. Through this reinvestment in domestic food production, Venezuela has reached self-sufficiency in several foods of strategic importance, such as corn and pork.
11. Furthermore, the country has taken some important steps toward sustainable agriculture, including the availability of credit earmarked specifically toward agroecological purposes, such as seed saving and exchange and the use of biological pest control in place of pesticides. Agroecology advocates point out, however, that state support remains skewed toward industrial agriculture and are pushing for a more wholesale paradigm shift.
12. On the distribution end, perhaps the most far-reaching initiative is **Mercal, a national network of government-run supermarkets selling foods at affordable, subsidized prices**. With an emphasis on reaching the most underserved areas, Mercal outlets range from large supermarkets to small mobile markets and have distributed 12 million tons of food in the decade since their inception. A variety of other initiatives complementing Mercal bring the total number of government-run food retail outlets in Venezuela to 22,000.
13. **A recent addition is the piloting of mobile fish markets in collaboration with local fisherfolk.**
14. **Yet another critical program is *casas de alimentación*, or 'feeding houses,'** run through community-government partnerships in which community members lend their homes and labor and the government provides food and supplies. Through the *casas*, people provide those most vulnerable in their communities—pregnant/nursing mothers, children, elderly, and the sick—with nutritious meals free of charge. To date, 6,000 *casas* across the country are serving 900,000 people.
15. Venezuela is already an international benchmark with significant food and nutrition improvements. Free nutritious meals are also spooned out to 4.3 million

public school children through the **School Feeding Program** in *Fermin Toro* High School, which offers breakfast, lunch and snacks to more than 4 million children and teenagers studying in public institutions across the country. **The activity is part of the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean 2025 Initiative, developed by the Food and Agricultural Organization from the United Nations.** The program is also a tool to overcome learning problems due to malnutrition.

16. **Many workplaces additionally arrange free meals for their workers through [the Worker Nutrition Law](#).** Along with free meals for those who need them, there is an effort to make affordable meals more universally available.
17. A growing chain of over 250 worker-run, government-supported *Arepas Venezuela* restaurants serves Venezuela's most popular traditional cuisine, the corn flour-based arepa with a variety of fillings, as an affordable and healthier alternative to corporate fast food. These restaurants pride themselves in supporting food sovereignty through using predominantly Venezuelan-grown ingredients produced through socialist production chains.
18. **Together, these programs and others have dramatically reduced hunger and food insecurity. Venezuela was recognized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for surpassing the first Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger in advance of 2015. According to a national census, 96.2 percent Venezuelans now eat 3 to 4 meals per day, and the government has pledged to reach the remaining 3.8 percent who do not, with the goal of achieving 'Zero Hunger' for Venezuela by 2019.**
19. **As a summary of the achievements of public feeding program we emphasize:**
 - 22.8 million tons of foodstuffs have been distributed among 21 million people, which represent 69% of the total of the population in Venezuela.
 - The organization of 491,000 special events throughout the country, while offering more than 2.5 million tons of foodstuffs for the Venezuelan population.
 - Implementation of 10 social food programs in penitentiaries, school programs, hospitals, shelters, kitchen tables, Communal, Mercal, among others.
 - Creation of a fleet consisting of 3,741 vehicles and 21,000 facilities to maintain the food distribution capacity throughout the country.
 - Serving 900,000 people daily through 4,599 Food Houses, where people can get lunch and a snack free of charge. More than 3,800 million dishes have been served.
 - Managing 34 silos, which have dry storing capacity of 1.2 million tons of food.
 - Developing - along the National Nutrition Institute (INN) - a series of campaigns highlighting nutrition information at special events held

outdoors, educational institutions, facilities of the state, mass media, as well as in presentations in order to foster a new food culture for all Venezuelans.

- Increasing height in children under seven years of age by 1.8 centimeters.
- 96% of the population consumes animal protein on an everyday basis.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has recognized Venezuela as a country that has strived the most worldwide in order to eradicate the problem of hunger. Venezuela increased the availability of calories by 36%, thus surpassing the level recommended by the FAO.
- Venezuela is one of 38 countries that effectively met the goal of hunger eradication worldwide.

Recommendations.

20. Given the continued power of private companies in the supply chain, connecting the many dots between the production and distribution remains a major challenge for the Venezuelan government, and shortages of particular food (and some nonfood) items in retail outlets are still a regular occurrence.
21. While some attribute this to government-set price regulations creating disincentives for companies to sell food products in the country, others point to politically motivated hoarding and withholding of products as a way to destabilize the government. The government has taken a series of measures to combat these shortages, including dialogue with the private sector, cracking down on illegal practices, and increasing imports of certain goods from neighboring countries. Venezuelan food activists say that the government's ability to ensure that the population's nutritional needs are not impeded by the periodic shortages demonstrates that Venezuela has reached food security but is still far from food sovereignty.
22. We know that food security is achieved through resources but food sovereignty has to be a process coming from the bottom up—from the peasant, from the communities.
23. Change must also happen at the community level. One of the main vehicles for this must be communal councils: local, self-organized governing bodies through which communities determine their own priorities, manage their own budgets, and interface with the government.
24. By September 2014, the number of registered comunas had reached 803. We see the construction of the comunas as the cornerstone of the latest stage of the Bolivarian Revolution and has vast implications for food sovereignty.
25. One of the ways in which comunas and other citizen-led efforts in Venezuela are working and have to work toward food sovereignty is through attempts to bridge the urban–rural divide. In a country as highly urbanized as Venezuela, where

upwards of 90 percent of the population lives in cities, food sovereignty will not be possible without the active participation of urban inhabitants. This is being addressed, not only through the creation of direct marketing channels such as farmers markets, but also through the co-construction of food sovereignty as a common political project shared by rural and urban Venezuelans.

26. That is, people are increasingly seeing themselves as connected via the process of constructing food sovereignty. In this process, they are not only changing their relationships to one another, but also their relationship to food and to the processes of food and how it is produced, distributed, and consumed. Some Venezuela can achieve by promoting comuna's practices are:

- to grow food on rooftops, in patios, and in community gardens (practices for which communities can receive free technical assistance and supplies via state-supported programs)
- to create 'productive corridors' of traditional conuco-style agriculture that extend from the cities to the countryside (the conuco is a traditional form of small-scale agriculture with indigenous origins)
- to acquire land on the outskirts of the city that is designated for agricultural production and to partner it with rural producers on a large weekly farmers market, to complement distribution of staple goods coming from state channels.
- to promote training and educational components that enable comuna members to connect (or reconnect) to agricultural production.
- to be convinced that the people power and food processing infrastructure in cities such as Caracas provides ample possibility for partnership with rural producers in this area.

Sources:

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