

Fraud on the UN: Venezuela's Corruption of its 2016 UPR Human Rights Review

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Executive Summary

The UN's examination today of Venezuela's human rights record, in a periodic review conducted every five years by fellow UN members states at the Human Rights Council, is severely compromised by the Maduro regime's manipulation of the non-governmental contribution to the record, which is supposed to consist of "credible and reliable information."

The UN Secretary-General and High Commissioner for Human Rights must investigate how their officials failed to screen out submissions that clearly do not meet this standard.

While the other ten countries being reviewed this month have 10 to 50 submissions per country, Venezuela has more than 500. Many of the groups are not real NGOs as contemplated by the system, or have no connection to the issues under discussion. Instead the submissions are replete with praise, absurdly hailing Venezuela's "freedom of religion, belief, expression of ideas and thought, association, assembly and peaceful demonstration."

Among the 500 groups absurdly praising Venezuela's alleged human rights accomplishments include the Bolivian Baseball Association, the Cuban Federation of Canine Sports, and the "Association for Obvious Things," a group in Slovenia that hailed Venezuela's record on combating hunger.

The result is that the review today of Venezuela's human rights record is being conducted based on a massive amount of manifestly false information.

Background

Today Venezuela is having its human rights record reviewed by the United Nations Human Rights Council, under an automatic procedure that takes place once every five years, known as Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Regrettably, as this UN Watch study reveals, Venezuela has deliberately corrupted and abused the process.

The UPR mechanism was the central feature in the UN's creation of the new and reformed Human Rights Council in 2006. A key element of the UPR review is consideration of independent information submitted by non-governmental organizations. Of all the evidence before the Council when a country's human rights record is being

reviewed, the NGO submissions are typically the most candid and thorough examinations of the country under review.

The governing resolution, HRC 5/1 of 2007, provides in paragraph 15(c) that all member states are to have their human rights records scrutinized under a proceeding which will include “*credible and reliable information*” provided by “other relevant stakeholders,” understood to mean NGOs. These submissions are featured in full on the website of the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). A 10-page summary of the submissions is compiled by OHCHR and circulated to all delegates.¹ The individual NGO submissions are also available online.²

The groups making or endorsing manifestly false submissions about Venezuela’s alleged human rights accomplishments, or purporting to comment or endorse statements on Venezuela’s human rights situation that bear a questionable connection to their stated expertise, include:

- The Bolivian Association of Plastic Arts (Cochabamba, Bolivia)
- The Association for Obvious Things (Murska Sobota, Slovenia)
- The Association of Softball and Baseball (La Paz, Bolivia)
- The Cuban Association of Animal Production
- The Cuban Federation of Underwater Activities
- The Cuban Society for Philosophical Investigations
- The Cuban Meteorological Society
- The Cuban Federation of Canine Sports
- The Cuban Society for Anesthesiology and Reanimation,
- The Cuban Society for Urology
- The Cuban Society for the Multidisciplinary Study of Sexuality
- The Arab Union of Cuba

Key Findings

- Fraud on the system in Venezuela’s UPR is immediately suggested by the astronomical and unprecedented amount of NGO submissions made to the UN. According to the OHCHR report ([A/HRC/WG.6/26/VEN/3](#)), the document is “a summary of 519 stakeholders’ submissions.”
- The abnormal amount of 519 submissions for the Venezuelan report is 20 times the amount of submissions received in this session for the review of Syria, the world’s most urgent human rights situation. The amount of submissions in this

¹ The UN summary of NGO submissions is here: <http://www.unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/NGO-submissions-for-2016-UPR-venezuela.pdf>.

² For full submissions, visit <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRVEStakeholdersInfoS26.aspx>.

UPR session, in which 11 countries are reviewed, include: 10 submissions for Timor-Leste, 12 for Iceland and Lithuania, 20 for Zimbabwe, 23 for South Sudan, 26 for Syria, 54 for Uganda—and then the numbers soar to 519 for Venezuela.³ See chart below.

- The abnormal amount of 519 submissions immediately raises a red flag as to fraud being perpetrated on the system. The last time numbers of this magnitude were seen was when Cuba, Venezuela’s close ally, was reviewed in 2013, as was documented by UN Watch and in various media reports.⁴ However, the 519 submissions for today’s Venezuela review even surpasses the previous record of 454 NGO statements set by Cuba in 2013. Venezuela, like its mentor, has effectively hijacked the United Nations compilation of NGO submissions and turned it into a farce.

Countries Reviewed <i>October 2016 UPR Session</i>	Amount of NGO Submissions
Timor-Leste	10
Iceland	12
Lithuania	12
Togo	20
Zimbabwe	20
South Sudan	23
Haiti	25
Syria	26
Moldova	38
Uganda	54
Venezuela	519

Recommendations

- The UN Secretary-General and High Commissioner for Human Rights must investigate how and why their officials failed to screen out submissions that clearly do not meet the official standard of “reliable and credible information.”
- The U.S., the EU and its member states, and other stakeholders concerned for the human rights mechanisms of the UN, should denounce Venezuela’s subversion of

³ The numbers are extraordinary by any measure. In 2013, UN Watch examined 28 UPR country reviews from that time period, and found a similar average, with 9 NGO submissions on Turkmenistan, 12 on Romania, 23 on Germany, 32 on Russia, and, the highest, 48 on Canada. (This is apart from the 454 Cuban submissions, mentioned below.)

⁴ “Havana ‘cheated’ on its UN human rights review,” *Gulf Times*, May 6, 2013, www.gulf-times.com/story/351632/Havana-cheated-on-its-UN-human-rights-review.

today's review, and take action to ensure that the UN prevents a recurrence, bearing in mind that Cuba perpetrated the same fraud in 2013.

Analysis of the NGO Submissions on Venezuela in the UN Summary

While important critiques of Venezuela's record by genuine NGOs do appear in the UN compilation, they are undermined by an overwhelming amount of fraudulent submissions engineered by Venezuela and its allies abroad, which do not meet the UN standard, under par. 15 of Resolution 5/1, of "credible and reliable information."

These submissions are not good faith comments, but rather use various forms of praise of the Maduro regime, along with other uncritical statements designed to divert attention to government violations of human rights, which together serve to compromise the document and the UPR review proceeding.

The submissions praise the government's alleged dedication to human rights, freedom of expression, peaceful demonstration, strengthening of civil society, and the success of its social policy. Examples follow below.

Praise of Venezuela in the UN Compilation

While there are many more examples in the full NGO statements that are available online⁵, following are some of the statements engineered by the government of Venezuela which the UN should have rejected for failing to meet the minimal standard, provided under HRC Resolution 5/1, of "credible and reliable information":

1. "A total of 487 organizations" called for "the continuation of social investment policies and programmes focused on education, health, housing, economic activity, development and the environment."
2. Despite Venezuela's mass hunger, a group called the "Association for Obvious Things," from Murska Sobota, Slovenia, noted that in June 2013 Venezuela "was recognized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization for surpassing the first

⁵ For full NGO submissions, visit <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRVEStakeholdersInfoS26.aspx>.

Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger.” ([See full submission here.](#))⁶ Likewise, the “Asociación Civil Defensores De Derechos Humanos” recommended “continuing to implement food distribution plans.”

3. “A total of 238 organizations” welcomed “the reinforcement of people’s power and popular governance” and recommended “further extending the work that civil society organizations and movements perform in partnership with the various government entities.”
4. “A total of 40 organizations” reported “advances in the provision of free education at all levels.” They welcomed educational programmes such as the Mission Robinson “Yo sí puedo” (yes, I can) programme, the Ribas and Sucre missions, the Simoncito project, and computer literacy and online training initiatives.”
5. Desarrollo Humano Integral stated that in Venezuela “there is freedom of religion, belief, expression of ideas and thought, association, assembly and peaceful demonstration.”
6. Joint Submission No. 31, by 24 organizations, reported “positive outcomes” including a “reduction in school dropout rates and the introduction of a school meals programme.”
7. A total of 21 organizations reported that “progress had been made in adopting health legislation to ensure compliance with constitutional provisions prescribing free, high-quality health services for all.”
8. “Frente De Mujeres Bicentenario 200 (Anzoategui) stated that social investment remains a priority”.
9. Joint Submission No. 28, submitted by 19 organizations, “noted that the commitment to respecting human rights is reflected in the policies and operation of the Social Missions.
10. Joint Submission No. 41—by 154 organizations—“underscored the progress made in implementing recommendations on poverty eradication.”
11. A total of 29 organizations mentioned “the adoption of the Act on Community and Alternative Media” and the “creation of around 1,200 Internet information centres called Infocentros, many of which are Government-sponsored and free of charge for users, for disadvantaged communities and population groups.”

⁶ Association for Obvious Things, “Voluntary Contribution to the Second Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for the 26th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review,” available at <http://www.unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/AfOT UPR26 VEN E Main Rev.pdf>.

12. “Asociación Boliviana de Artistas Plásticos Cochabamba” drew attention to the “cultural policies and increase in the cultural budget which have improved access to cultural goods and services.”
13. Joint Submission No. 28, by 19 organizations, noted that “the commitment to respecting human rights is reflected in the policies and operation of the Social Missions.”
14. Joint Submission No. 41, by 154 organizations, “underscored the progress made in implementing recommendations on poverty eradication.”
15. A group called “Frente De Mujeres Bicentenario 200 (Anzoategui)” stated that in Venezuela, “social investment remains a priority.”
16. “Four organizations commended [Venezuela’s] cooperation and solidarity programmes agreed with other countries in the areas of education, health and energy.”
17. Joint Statement No. 24, by two organizations, acknowledged Venezuela’s “efforts to implement recommendations to promote the rights of women.”
18. Género Con Clase acknowledged in particular “the public policies designed to eliminate obstacles linked to sociocultural stereotypes.”
19. A total of 102 organizations recommended “continuing efforts to strengthen people’s power” by means of technical water.

Venezuela’s Own National Report

The dubious NGO submissions above echo the narrative of the Venezuelan government’s own report submitted for today’s UPR proceeding.⁷ Rather than provide critical reflection of the human rights situation in the country, the document offers an “account of its major human rights advances.”

Venezuela claims a “continuous effort” in promoting human rights. Abuses are either omitted completely, or any troubles are blamed on the manipulation of “the opposition” and the “economic war waged by foreign powers.” Reports of Venezuela’s violations are claimed to be the result of conspiratorial “corporate media power.”

Venezuela claims the government has improved the situation of its citizens on all levels. The report claims that there is less poverty and inequality, more health coverage and better health care, less infant mortality, more drinking water, more food, less child

⁷ See <http://www.unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Venezuelas-own-report-to-2016-UPR-.pdf>.

malnutrition, more housing, more technical items and users, more radio stations, more mobile phones, more TVs, more cultural institutions, more security, more gun control, and better detention conditions. The reality, sadly, is very different.

Statements from Venezuela's report include:

- “Venezuela is making progress in the implementation of human rights for good living (buen vivir) and has been working in a participatory manner with all movements, social organizations and civil society in general, thereby confirming that the State is always open and willing to engage in dialogue and accept criticism in human rights matters, but always in a context of unconditional and constructive cooperation and within the framework of respect for sovereignty and self-determination of peoples.”
- “Certain less tolerant opposition groups — pardoned under the 2007 amnesty and now united in the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) party — in collusion with the national and international media corporations and foreign Powers, decided to ignore the results of these unexpected elections, again creating situations of violence and tension.”
- “In 2013, certain sectors of the opposition, intent on destabilization, launched a socioeconomic boycott based on the planning of systematic shortages by the national and international private sector, which impacted on the distribution and availability of medicines and food.”
- “The State's response to this harassment, however, has been to boost social inclusion even more and to try to establish solid safeguards for human rights in working-class sectors and among the most vulnerable groups.”
- “To counter the effects of economic warfare, the Great Mission on Food was stepped up in 2013 in order to facilitate access to basic commodities for the population as a whole and strengthen the public food distribution networks. In 2014, 95.4 per cent of Venezuelans had three or more meals a day.”
- “Venezuela has been confronted with the consequences, direct and indirect, of various types of unconventional warfare, and interference of all kinds by foreign Powers, intended to destroy the country's economy and reverse all the great advances in the realization of rights achieved in recent decades. However, Venezuela has a people and a State committed to the values and overriding principles of dignity and social justice.”