

# A Dozen Latin American Countries Issue “Moral Sanctions” Against Venezuela

The So-called Lima Group Shows a Breakdown of the OAS Principle of Non-intervention

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*Criticism of another country is largely allowed. Criticism of the constitution of a country by any individual may also be acceptable if constructive. Any government may also question the legislation of another country as long as it's done within diplomatic standards and protocols. But making official pretentious and misleading statements, and using false arguments to then justify economic sanctions against another country, must be openly criticized. That behaviour becomes unethical when a group of a dozen countries in the American hemisphere, known as the Lima Group, takes it upon them to issue moral sanctions against Venezuela accusing it of “serious deterioration of democratic institutions” and “violation of the constitutional order” without a shred of evidence.*

Those same countries, supposedly with intelligent heads of state, well-informed foreign ministers, experienced legislative institutions, supreme courts versed in legal matters, and the best legal brains at the UN and OAS, among other organizations, have not singled out one article of the Venezuelan constitution or other legislation that has been violated. Their announcements are just unproven statements that they use investing themselves with a pompous air of authority as reflected in official photos for their infamous posterity.

Case in point, last October 5 the group raised an unfounded alert and warned to “consider that the regional elections to be held on October 15 in Venezuela to elect governors must be held in a manner fully respectful of the Constitution and the Organic Law of Electoral Processes of that country.” There is no mention of which article of the law would not be respected. The elections were fully legitimate, uneventful and transparent. Four candidates of the opposition were elected to state governorships.

In the more recent statement of February 13, where the group says that Venezuela is not welcome at the 8<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas to take place in April in Lima, Peru, they insist on the issue of elections and “Urge the Government of Venezuela to reconsider the call for presidential elections.” A matter that is usually considered an internal decision, and in this particular case the Venezuelan opposition had agreed to before it refused to go along with it under international pressure.

In that same statement there seems to be an attempt to at least refer to an international legislation to justify its decision. Point 6 states

“Given the continued and serious deterioration of democratic institutions in

Venezuela, and based on the Quebec Declaration adopted at the III Summit of the Americas in 2001, which states that ‘...any unconstitutional alteration or interruption of the democratic order in a state of the Hemisphere constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to the participation of that state’s government in the Summit of the Americas process’, the Government of Peru has decided to reconsider the participation of the Government of Venezuela in the VIII Summit of the Americas, in Lima.”



Source: teleSUR

The quote of the Quebec Declaration refers to Chapter 4, Article 19 of the 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter, which begins with the following sentence conveniently omitted in the previous quote: *“Based on the principles of the Charter of the OAS and subject to its norms...”*

Consequently, the Quebec Declaration does not supersede the OAS Charter. Therefore, the coincidentally equally numbered, Chapter 4, Article 19 of the OAS Charter stands fully. The article says:

“No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic, and cultural elements.”

This is the crucial article that the “Lima Group” chooses to break.

The “Lima Group” forgets that the OAS failed to apply the Democratic Charter for lack of the required votes to condemn Venezuela for “unconstitutional alteration or interruption of the democratic order.” It is important to highlight that the “Lima Group” is the minority group of countries that voted against Venezuela within the OAS and therefore decided to take their “show” on the road contravening the basic OAS Charter statute of no intervention or *“any other form of interference” “for any reason whatever.”*

The decision to reconsider Venezuela’s participation at the Summit, therefore, collapses, and becomes a contradiction precisely of the same democratic institutional principle they try to represent and enforce. Eventually, we have learned that the final decision was not based on any legal principle, but as surrender to the pressure of the minority Venezuelan opposition that admitted to have lobbied Peru to ban Maduro from the upcoming Summit. A clear case of interference.

On the issue of deterioration of democratic institutions and violation of the constitutional order, it would be taking a cheap shot detailing the humiliating political recent histories of some of the countries in the “Lima Group”. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru, come immediately to mind. Similarly can be said on the issue of violations of human rights of which Venezuela is also unfairly accused.

In contrast to the Summit host country closing the door to prevent Venezuela from having the rightful opportunity to make its case with a group of peer countries in the region,

Venezuela is opening the door to international *acompañantes*, “More than to inspect, [to] be able to learn from the flawless electoral system we’ve built”, tweeted President Maduro.

For the sake of transparency, Venezuela has established two modalities to participate in the electoral process as a non-voter. One is *acompañante* (companion), which is reserved to international witnesses in order to get to know the specifics of the Venezuelan system, watch at polling stations, and even contribute to improvements, within the framework of respect and sovereignty of the country. *Acompañante* can be an electoral official of another country, a rep of an organization or an individual properly accredited by the National Electoral Council. The second modality is *national observer*, which is only reserved to Venezuelan individuals or organizations. Venezuela has already received international *acompañantes* in previous elections.

Interestingly, countries of the “Lima Group” that do not allow international observers at polls are Argentina, Brazil, Canada and Chile.



The ministers at the gathering of the Lima Group. (Source: El Pais)

In conclusion, the so-called Lima Group is a self-appointed group with an unconvincing single country focus: Venezuela. It was set up with a somewhat pretentious purpose of addressing “*the critical situation in Venezuela and explore ways to contribute to the restoration of democracy in that country through a peaceful and negotiated solution; ... with full respect for the norms of international law and the principle of non-intervention.*” The whole existence of such a group is problematic. It has the immediate appearance of twelve countries ganging up on another, and so it is in reality. If for a moment we accept the intention of the group as stated, we observe a major gap between the intention and the practice.

Its declaration does not give any analysis of the possible causes of the “critical situation” except that there is a “breakdown of the democratic order.” That should be a conclusion following an investigation, but no legal or factual basis is provided to make that deduction.

All the standard democratic processes are in place in Venezuela: free speech, freedom of the press, multi-party system, free and secret ballots.

The statements issued by the group reflect condemnation rather than contributions to the “restoration” of democracy in Venezuela. All the actions are punitive rather than negotiated solutions. Consider for example the series of accusatory declarations and votes called at the OAS to castigate Venezuela, or Canada’s vocal criticism of Venezuela on behalf of the “Lima Group”, or the more recent unsupported exclusion of Venezuela to the Summit in Lima.

The “Lima Group” has never responded to the repeated calls by the Maduro government to dialogue with the opposition while under way in the Dominican Republic, and offered negotiated solutions. On the contrary, the group has squarely sided with the Venezuelan, often violent, opposition. This is an aggressive attitude towards Venezuela rather than a position conducive to the proclaimed peaceful solutions. It is meant to force a sovereign country to their will.

Finally, we have indicated that the respect for the norms of international law is virtually non-existent, but a real breakdown is shown by the “Lima Group”, a breakdown of the principle of non-intervention as established by the OAS Charter. This is indicative of a more hidden, serious and dangerous agenda against Venezuela.

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