

Electoral Process in Venezuela: “The Best in the World”

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*The renowned sociologist **Maria Páez Victor** at Law Commission of Ontario in Canada, deeply analyses the Venezuela’s Constituent Assembly to be voted on July 30, in the context of the Caribbean nation, and speaks on the biggest challenges the Bolivarian Revolution faces today.*

Edu Montesanti: Professor Doctor Maria Páez Victor, thank you so very much for granting me this so important interview; it is an honor to me. What is the importance of the upcoming National Constituent Assembly in Venezuela? The opposition claims it is undemocratic: how do you respond to it?

Maria Páez: The parties and leaders of the violent protests that for three months have disturbed the peace of Venezuelans, are the very same who in 2002 supported the *coup d’état* against **President Chávez**. During those tense 48 hours, one of the very first things they did was to abolish the Constitution of 1999 – the one they now purport to defend. (See the film, available on the internet: “*The Revolution will not be Televised*”)



During 18 years, the opposition has denigrated the Constitution. So intense has been this revolt against it that even after winning the majority at the National Assembly they insisted that the government was illegitimate, ignored the rule of law, disregarded sentences of the Supreme Court, refused to legislate, and declared the main purpose of the Assembly was to “get rid of Maduro”.

These paragons are now pretending to be arbiters of democracy and opposing any constitutional amendment by an elected Constitutional Assembly. They are now opposing, not the government, but the people themselves.

The day of reckoning has come. The opposition has orchestrated economic sabotage, corporate smuggling, black market currency manipulations, full scale hoarding of food and

essential products. They have closed highways, burned public buildings including a packed maternity hospital, have dropped grenades from a helicopter on to the Supreme Court offices, have assaulted, lynched and even burned alive young men of dark skin “who looked Chavista”. This is a violent opposition steeped in racism and classism against their own people and in the service of foreign powers and big oil.

The opposition parties refused to negotiate with the government, despite a Peace and Dialogue Table having been established facilitated by 3 former presidents of Latin America. The opposition insisted on having the Vatican there; when the Nuncio arrived they still refused. **President Maduro** then decided that if the opposition did not want to negotiate with the government, they would have to negotiate directly with the people – and called for a Constitutional Assembly to amend the constitution. And they are terrified.

Constitutional articles 437,438,439 clearly indicate that the president has the right to call a Constitutional Assembly to amend the constitution. It is undisputedly a legitimate process. President Chávez himself spoke of the need to amend the constitution as a living work to enable facing whatever new circumstances may come. President Maduro has called for an amendment now, at this time because it is the very last resort towards a peaceful solution to the violence in the streets that to this day the opposition continues to promote.

In 1999, Venezuela was not facing the series of dangers it is facing now, and it has a dysfunctional National Assembly that refuses to legislate to face these challenges. At that time paramilitary forces were not rampant on its western borders, there was no terrorism on the streets, there was no economic and financial war against the economy, a post-oil economy was not seriously contemplated, government employees were not being assassinated, opposition mayors and governors were not harboring street violence, the Attorney General was not actively supporting impunity of crimes, there was no blatant abuse of parliamentary immunity, with officials openly asking foreign powers for their intervention to overthrow the government, there was scant attention to the environmental and climate dangers of the country and the Planet. These have now become serious issues pertaining to the security of the state.

The representatives to the Constitutional Assembly will be elected on July 30 by a direct and secret vote that has electronic, paper and digital safeguards against fraud. Former US president and Nobel Prize winner, **Jimmy Carter** lauded this electoral process as: “the best in the world.” They will deliberate and amend nine specific areas:

- (1) Mechanisms for peace: to counter those who carry out violence, reaffirm the values and mechanisms for justice
- (2) Promote a new post-petroleum economy that is productive, diversified, integrationist, safeguard against economic war
- (3) Enshrine anti-poverty programs (“misiones”) with constitutional status, securing the state’s social investment
- (4) Revise the justice, security and protection system, promote a preventative and investigative police system and the penitential system, a stronger penal code against rape, kidnapping and homicide, strengthen the fight against terrorism, paramilitaries, narco-traffic and impunity

(5) Promote further participatory democracy by strengthening communal councils and communes giving them further constitutional status

(6) Promote a sovereign foreign policy defending the integrity of Venezuela in a multipolar world

(7) Promote the new Venezuelan identity and spirituality based on pluri-cultural and diversity of the people, art and culture

(8) Guarantee the future for youth, their social rights: cultural, educational, work and technology.

(9) Work towards countering climate change and protect the environmental conditions of life in the Planet.

The constitutional changes do not contemplate “making Maduro president for life” or “eliminating elections forever” as the opposition propaganda machine accuses.

Edu Montesanti: What are the big challenges facing Venezuela today, and what are the best ways to win such challenges?



María Páez: The biggest challenge to Venezuela is that international forces could back opposition groups and paramilitary groups to militarily overthrow the government. Big oil is behind this. They lobby the USA and its allies because they want to solely control the largest oil reserve in the planet that lies in Venezuela. With a former CEO of Exxon Mobil at the head of the US State Department, the danger to Venezuela became greatly enhanced. The wealthy upper classes of Venezuela are playing the role they have always historically had since Independence: being the lackeys of whatever world power is dominant. Their country is money and they want to control the oil money that flows to the state. When they ruled Venezuela during the previous 40 years, the equivalent of 15 Marshal Plans disappeared into their pockets.

The best way to counter the dangers that face Venezuela is clear.

(1) Firstly, as long as the Bolivarian government is onside of its people, defending their human rights, their sovereignty as a people, promoting their participation in democracy and promoting equality and social justice, the Bolivarian Revolution will have their support.

(2) Secondly, President Chavez transformed the armed forces - no longer is their main function a repressive one (learned at the sinister School of the Americas), but one that sees itself as defender of the people and their Constitution, their identity is now that of the descendants of Bolívar's liberation army.

(3) Thirdly, Venezuela has amply proven to be a real Good Neighbour with ALBA, Petrocaribe, Telesur, UNASUR and CELAC. It is organically linked to its region. It has also developed close relations with Russia, China, India, Africa and parts of Europe: it is no longer a backwater country. The USA may have undisputable military might, and a dangerous ally in Colombia, but an attack on Venezuela would create significant international and internal domestic strife for the USA.

Edu Montesanti: Facing a violent opposition, its principal supporter, that is, the US, and the media war, what has made possible for the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela to survive to date almost 19 years after Hugo Chávez took power?

María Páez: The opposition cannot overthrow the government of Venezuela without significant backing of the majority, without backing of the Armed Forces and without international backing. That is the sane, rational view.

However, the USA empire, with a dangerously ignorant and erratic president at its helm could take the insane path of arming the opposition to provoke a full scale civil war, possibly with Colombian troops. My prediction is that such an evil adventure, while painful, will ultimately fail.

The Spanish Empire also consistently underestimated the resiliency and resolve of the Venezuelan people, not for nothing they are called “el bravo pueblo”.

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