

UN Report on Human Rights in Venezuela Faulty by Design

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Global Research, July 06, 2019

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)
Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [United Nations](#)

Following Michelle Bachelet visit to Venezuela last June, the official report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) on the situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was released on July 4, a day before initially scheduled. Judging by the quick review I made, the mainstream media is gloating on the uncritical details of reported violations. It appears to be the perfect gift for the US Fourth of July celebration. But one that will not stop Venezuela to celebrate the 208th anniversary of its independence from Spain on July 5th and its 20th from US domination.

The headline of the New York Times said, “Venezuela Forces Killed Thousands, Then Covered It Up, U.N. Says.” Reuters said, “UN details Venezuela torture, killings to neutralize opposition.” The Washington Post said, “UN: 5, 287 killings in Venezuela security operations in 2018.”

The reaction of a typically unsympathetic media towards Venezuela is all too predictable, which makes all wonder if there was a second motive for the release of the report on this date and with this content.

To be clear, the UNHCHR is an independent entity and its report [1] is not short on details of violations committed by the government of Venezuela. However, we must question the UNHCHR undiplomatic disclosure with uncorroborated facts. Not to imply that the UNHCHR should have hidden the facts it believed to be true, albeit alleged, but also balance those with many other facts that the government of Venezuela claims to have provided but were omitted in the report.

If the overall intention of the UNHCHR with this report was to use the opportunity of the visit to Venezuela in order to strike a rapprochement between the two contending parties, it totally missed the chance. It could have achieved that goal by telling the full truth instead of lying by omission. I recently wrote about the Washington Post lying by omission precisely in reference to the upcoming visit by Michelle Bachelet to Venezuela. [2] That is not too surprising, but we would expect better from the UNHCHR.

The UNHCHR had the “courtesy” to publish simultaneously on its website what the government of Venezuela titled “Comentarios Sobre Errores de Hecho del Informe de la Alta Comisionada de Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos sobre la Situación de Derechos Humanos de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela.” (Comments on Errors in Facts of the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.) [3]

The document contains 70 paragraphs. It begins with the statement *“The [UNHCHR] report presents a selective and openly biased view of the true human rights situation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.”* Eight paragraphs question the methodology used in the collection of the “evidence” on human rights violations in Venezuela, and 59 paragraphs state *“Errors in facts of the [UNHCHR] report.”*

The Venezuelan report details the omissions by the UNHCHR one by one. We refer to the document in Spanish for details [3]. What makes the omissions problematic is the fact that most of the information omitted was apparently provided by the Venezuelan government to the UNHCHR in a written form as requested, or was available in official public documents. One such example is the UNHCHR report allusion to the violation of the right to food in Venezuela.

The Venezuelan report questions the gross omission of seven different public programs – aside from the Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP) – destined to responsibly guarantee food to the population, from school meals for 4 million children, to special meals for 750,000 vulnerable individuals. It further says

“As evidence of the above, it is necessary to emphasize that the Venezuelan Government invests 3,906 million dollars annually in the purchase of food to be distributed to the population. This amount includes 2,826 million dollars for the acquisition of CLAP products and 1,080 million dollars for the importation of various food items not produced in the country. All these data were delivered to the UNHCHR mission during their stay in Venezuela.”

Similar objections were raised by the Venezuelan government about the misrepresentation by omission of relevant information about the *“violence exerted by the demonstrators, especially during the years 2013, 2014 and 2017,”* being responsible for many deaths including police officers. Also missing is the acknowledgment that all cases of abuses by the police are being investigated and there is no “cover up”.

We find the lack of due emphasis in the UNHCHR report on the unilateral coercive measures and the link with the economic crisis in Venezuela striking. This is clearly of the competence of the UNHCHR given its Resolution A/HRC/40/L.5 of this year where the Human Rights Council *“Urges all States to stop adopting, maintaining or implementing unilateral coercive measures not in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States, in particular those of a coercive nature with extraterritorial effects, which create obstacles to trade relations among States, thus impeding the full realization of the rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, in particular the right of individuals and peoples to development.”* [4] Not even a reference to that document is provided.

But even more importantly we share the Venezuelan government legitimate concern that the UNHCHR report on human rights in Venezuela is faulty from design with a questionable methodology where 82% of the interviews used by the UNHCHR were conducted with people located outside Venezuela. Was Bachelet’s trip to Venezuela necessary?

In fact, the UNHCHR report itself states that it *“conducted 558 interviews with victims, witnesses and other sources, including lawyers, health and media professionals, human*

rights defenders, and former military and security officers.” Then in a footnote it specifies, “460 interviews were conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, and Peru, and 98 remotely.”

Further, the report states, “between September 2018 and April 2019, UNHCHR conducted nine visits to interview Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico and Peru.”

What makes the UNHCHR report questionable is the simple observation that if you want to make sure that you get the most anti-government comments all you have to do is ask the Venezuelan “refugees and migrants” or any of the government actors in those countries declaredly opposed (Mexico being the exception) to the Maduro government. None of the thousands of migrants who returned to Venezuela were interviewed. I would like to know what made them return to a country with such “poor” human rights record.

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Notes

[1]

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session41/Documents/A_HRC_41_18_SP.docx

[2] <https://www.globalresearch.ca/lying-omission-still-lying/5681538>

[3] https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session41/Documents/A_HRC_41_18_Add.1.docx

[4] http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_40_L5.docx

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