

Venezuela's crisis from up close

An open letter from Lisa Sullivan
Dear friends,

Greetings from the state of Aragua in Venezuela where we are concluding a small US delegation focused on grassroots solutions to the massive food crisis here.

I am reaching out to you to share my grave concerns about what is happening here in Venezuela, my home for over three decades where I worked for 21 years as a Maryknoll Catholic lay missionary, then as Latin America Coordinator for the School of the Americas Watch.

It is out of concern for the most vulnerable sectors in Venezuela, such as my neighbors, that I break my silence to write. As I watch their efforts to obtain food for their families become more desperate and more futile, and as I witness pounds dropping from their bodies, I think the time has come to do more than share from my own scarce cupboards and gardens as they share with me.

These people, my friends and neighbors and family, are literally being swallowed up by massive economic and political interests. A perfect storm of a collapse of global oil prices combined with massive internal economic errors leading to unbridled corruption on all levels of society has left these vulnerable sectors literally almost starving.

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The reaction of the US and other global interests seems clearly based on Venezuela's enormous oil reserves (the world's largest). Those interests are circling our nation like vultures, ready to swoop in and devour.

I have spent countless hours leading delegations to Venezuela over the past 12 years to share the enormous advances in education, health care, housing and nutrition that returned dignity to millions of Venezuelans under the Bolivarian revolution. Throughout those years there was an almost total boycott of the international media to acknowledge these advances that led to Venezuela becoming the most equal society in the Americas, to its surge to 5th place worldwide for college enrollment and to building new homes for a fifth of its families.

The achievements of the Bolivarian revolution were real, palpable and inspired a continent. Today our reality is widespread hunger. The current government points to an economic war unleashed by wealthy business owners with international support from the US that has led to hoarding and shortages of food.

The US points to mismanagement and poor planning on the part of the Bolivarian government that led to a nation totally renter economy dependent on food imports.

My neighbors point to their stomachs while simultaneously planting corn and beans and bananas in any tiny space, beseeching the heavens for rains that have also been in dire shortage this season.

I wish that I could share a simple message or solution with you, such as "close the SOA". Observing such complicity in this crisis all around me , near and far, I can offer no simple slogan

However, having spent a decade traveling the continent witnessing the horrors unleashed by US- trained Latin American military upon their own people, I want to at least alert you to the possibility of a similar scenario here.

Unfortunately, because the Bolivarian government has already experienced this very reality of outside complicity in a military coup in 2002, they are ultra sensitive (understandably so) towards any critiques and suggestions, even within their own ranks. Unwittingly that may contribute to an eventual military or outside solution rather than allowing for an internal democratic resolution to this grave humanitarian crisis.

As the political configuration of South America quickly shifts to the right and the global alignment of power is in active play , Venezuela is in the cross-hairs. The grave humanitarian crisis in Venezuela today is real and not an invention of the press. And the contributions to this crisis lie on multiple shoulders. And the solution to this problem needs to be determined by the Venezuelan people with support from other Latin American peoples.

Hoping that these days don't bring worse scenarios. Thanks for your support through the years.

Abrazos
Lisa