

Ahead of Sunday's consultation in Venezuela, UN voices concern for demonstrators

14 July 2017 – The United Nations today expressed concern about the situation in Venezuela, where nearly 100 people have died since April and more than 1,500 were injured in connection with ongoing protests.

Briefing journalists in Geneva, a spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), noted that it has received accounts from several sources that some members of the Venezuelan security forces have used repressive tactics, intimidating and instilling fear, to try to deter people from demonstrating.

In addition, thousands of demonstrators have reportedly been arbitrarily detained.

"We are [very concerned](#) that more than 450 civilians have reportedly been brought before military tribunals," OHCHR spokesperson Liz Throssel said.

"We urge the Government to immediately end this practice, which is against international human rights law, particularly due process guarantees. Civilians accused of a crime or an illegal act should appear before a civilian court," Ms. Throssel said, urging all those who have been arbitrarily detained to be released.

This Sunday, Venezuela is scheduled to hold a public consultation organized by the opposition-led National Assembly and other groups. Questions will include President Nicolas Maduro's plans to rewrite the constitution.

The OHCHR spokesperson urged authorities "to respect the wishes of those who want to participate in this consultation and to guarantee people's rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly."

An independent human rights expert today echoed the concerns, urging Venezuelan authorities to comply with international rights standards.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, Annalisa Ciampi, said she was also worried about alleged intimidation of protesters and opposition members by police.

"Coercion is never an answer to the legitimate demands for democracy and to people's expression of frustrations against the background of economic and social unrest triggered by increasing poverty and deteriorating living conditions," Ms. Ciampi said.

As the situation in Venezuela continues, the number of asylum applications by citizens of that country has soared and is projected to continue growing,

according to UNHCR.

Last year, there were some 27,000 Venezuelan asylum seekers worldwide; this year, over 52,000 have applied for asylum.

UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler said even this figure represents only a fraction of the total number of Venezuelans who may be in need of international protection, as many do not register as asylum seekers, despite fleeing because of violence and insecurity.

Due to bureaucratic obstacles, long waiting periods and high application fees, many Venezuelans opt to remain in an irregular situation instead of using asylum or migratory procedures to regularize their stay, Mr. Spindler told journalists in Geneva.

He added that the large influx of Venezuelans has posed challenges, including international protection and physical security considerations, lack of documentation and exploitation, among others.

UNHCR is [also concerned](#) that indigenous groups living along Venezuela's borders with Brazil and Colombia are being increasingly affected by the situation and have fled their home territories, Mr. Spindler said.

Particular attention to the rights of these communities as well as a differentiated and targeted protection and humanitarian response is required, he added.