

## Human rights chief calls for international probe on Venezuela, following 'shocking accounts of extrajudicial killings'

In Venezuela, “credible, shocking accounts of extrajudicial killings” and impunity for perpetrators, indicate that the rule of law “is virtually absent”, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) said on Friday, in a call for an international inquiry into the alleged violations.

Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein’s appeal to the UN Human Rights Council to mount a high-level investigation, follows the publication of a new report by his office into the Latin American country, detailing serious abuse allegations.

“For years now, institutional checks and balances and the democratic space in Venezuela have been chiseled away,” the High Commissioner said in a statement.

Briefing journalists in Geneva, OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani confirmed that the new OHCHR report provides an update on alleged abuses committed amid bloody demonstrations held against constitutional reforms, proposed by the government of President Nicolas Maduro.

“This report...spotlights the failure of Venezuelan authorities to hold accountable perpetrators of serious human rights violations that include killings, the use of excessive force against demonstrators, arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment and torture,” Ms. Shamdasani said.



Protesters in La Castellana, an eastern Caracas neighborhood in Venezuela, run away from the tear gas bombs, fired by the National Guard and the National Bolivarian Police. 18 May 2017.

On the subject of extrajudicial killings since 2015, the OHCHR spokesperson said that the report contained “credible, shocking accounts” that young men in poor neighbourhoods had been targeted “who fit the profile (of) so-called criminals”.

In some cases, they had been killed in their home, Ms Shamdasani noted, adding that the OHCHR report detailed how security forces “will tamper with the scenes, so that the killing would appear to have occurred in an exchange of fire”.

The report also highlights the grave impact of the social and economic crises gripping Venezuela.

Families are “having to search in rubbish bins”, Ms Shamdasani said, adding that 87 per cent of the population is now affected by poverty.

“The human rights situation of the people of Venezuela is dismal,” she continued. “When a box of blood pressure pills costs more than the monthly minimum salary and baby milk formula costs more two months’ wages – but protesting against such an impossible situation can land you in jail – the extreme injustice of it all is stark.”



Meridith Kohut/IRIN

Shoppers wait in line for five hours to buy a ration of bread from a small bakery in Cumaná, Venezuela. June 2016.

The High Commissioner’s call for an international Commission of Inquiry will be heard by the Human Rights Council – the UN’s principal human rights organ – which is currently in session in Geneva.

It has previously created two such probes following allegations of serious rights violations in Syria and Burundi.

Vast numbers of Venezuelans are starving, deprived of essential medicines, and trying to survive in a situation that is spiralling downwards with no end in sight – *Special Rapporteur Philip Alston*

Beyond the Human Rights Council, Zeid said that there was also a “strong case” for the matter to be passed to the International Criminal Court (ICC), “given that (Venezuela) appears neither able nor willing to prosecute serious human rights violations”.

Spokesperson for the Human Rights Council, Rolando Gomez, confirmed that no State is immune from scrutiny of its rights record “regardless of whether they are a member of the Council or not”.

Although there have been no special sessions on Venezuela at the Council, States and NGOs have delivered no fewer than 40 statements during general debates at the Council since last March sharply criticizing the human rights situation there.

The issue of Venezuela’s rights record overlapped into a presentation of a report on extreme poverty by Council-appointed Special Rapporteur Philip Alston.

He told Member States: “I and several other Special Rapporteurs reported earlier this year that ‘vast numbers of Venezuelans are starving, deprived of essential medicines, and trying to survive in a situation that is spiralling downwards with no end in sight’.”