

Speech: Presidency of Maduro no longer rests on democratic foundations

Mr President,

Thank you for convening this meeting.

There are probably only a few moments in history when a country's rate of inflation has to be measured in millions of percent. But in the case of Venezuela, this is such a moment. And beneath that stark statistic rests a scene of total economic collapse, and with it, a comprehensive picture of human misery and degradation from which only the corrupt Venezuelan elite are able to escape.

People are starving, children are malnourished, essential items are absent from the bare shelves of bankrupt stores. And from this wretchedness, millions have fled to seek refuge in neighbouring countries where they have been rescued by an outpouring of human generosity.

This inexcusable and wholly avoidable wasteland, Mr President, is entirely the creation of one man and his cronies.

The ranting socialism of Nicolas Maduro has destroyed an entire country and despite his self-congratulatory moral posturing, his enduring legacy will be to have made the poor, not just poorer, but destitute.

And it is our concern for the plight of Venezuela and the country's people that motivates us here today, not the sentiments of anything that can possibly be described as colonial. How indeed can any self-respecting government possibly justify supporting the poisonous regime of the nation-destroying Mr Maduro?

But, in addition to holding the opinion we do because of our concern for the people of Venezuela, this United Nations and we the Security Council are also here to resolve the world's worst sins. And to do so we must all uphold the rule of law which we firmly believe should govern the affairs of all.

And that rule of law has collapsed in Venezuela. Worse, it has been continuously eroded, undermined and eradicated by the dictatorial abuses of Nicolas Maduro.

Hand in hand with economic devastation, caused by this man, has come the parallel removal of liberty, justice and freedom.

We have seen the theft from the Venezuelan people of its very democracy. Maduro has attempted to delegitimise the National Assembly; he has created the artificial and illegitimate Constituent Assembly; and he has ruthlessly put an end to free and fair elections by stuffing ballot boxes and corrupting democratic decision.

The political opposition has been suppressed and intimidated, its leaders have fled or been imprisoned, and we will never forget that the opposition activist Fernando Alban, mentioned just now by Secretary Pompeo, was detained and then found dead beneath the windows of the National Intelligence facility.

The world can now see that the Presidency of Nicolas Maduro no longer rests on democratic foundations – the Presidency of Nicolas Maduro is not legitimate.

We the UK unreservedly praise and support the extraordinary courage of Juan Guaidó in his stand against Maduro's fraud, corruption and undemocratic status. We applaud Juan Guaidó's decision to assert the legitimate authority of the National Assembly.

Mr President, it is therefore right that we should now respond robustly to the courageous steps taken by the Venezuelan people and the political opposition by bringing this critical issue here to the Security Council. Council members must recognise their responsibility to ensure that the UN uses its leadership to help achieve positive change in Venezuela. Our efforts must now focus on finding a way out of the crisis that has devastated the country.

Mr President, let me make our position clear.

The UK stands with the EU in demanding urgent, free and fair elections at the earliest opportunity and in calling for a legitimate government to be established.

We stand with the Organisation of American States and we stand with the Lima Group, whose members last September referred the Venezuelan Government to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. Citing over 8000 extrajudicial executions, 12,000 arbitrary arrests, and the detention of 13,000 political prisoners, they made history by making it the first ever case in which an entire state has been referred to the ICC.

Mr President, we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States in saying that the National Assembly and its President, Mr Juan Guaidó, are best placed to lead Venezuela to the restoration of its democracy, its economy and its freedom.

Therefore we believe that Juan Guaidó is the right man to take Venezuela forward and we will recognise him as constitutional interim President if new elections are not announced within 8 days.

We should today all stand together against the tyranny of Nicolas Maduro and in support of legitimate democratic forces in Venezuela. Venezuela can and must recover from the depths of its current despair. To do so it needs an end to tyranny, an end to corruption, and an urgent return to freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

This Security Council must make its view clear and we must urgently help pave the way to a brighter future for the Venezuela which Maduro has so culpably

ruined.

Thank you.