

Tensions escalate in Venezuela, civilians killed and injured: top UN officials lament excessive use of force by authorities

As tensions escalated on Saturday at various points along Venezuela's borders with Colombia and Brazil, as well as within the country itself, resulting in the death and injury of various civilians, the United Nations chief, António Guterres, and the head of the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)), Michelle Bachelet, expressed their shock and appealed for calm.

The UN Secretary-General [called](#) for violence to be "avoided at any cost and for lethal force not to be used in any circumstances". He urged "all actors to lower tensions and pursue every effort to prevent further escalation".

Ms. Bachelet condemned "the excessive use of force used by the Venezuelan security forces, as well the involvement of pro-government elements", which have resulted in at least four confirmed deaths and more than 300 injuries on Friday and Saturday, according to OHCHR.

"People have been shot and killed, others have reportedly received wounds from which they will never completely recover, including losing eyes," she deplored. "These are disgraceful scenes. The Venezuelan government must stop its forces from using excessive force against unarmed protesters and ordinary citizens."

Ms. Bachelet said she had received reports of numerous and, in some cases prolonged, violent incidents, at different points along the borders with Colombia and Brazil, as the Venezuelan security forces tried to halt the aid supplies coming into the country through closed border points.

OHCHR also received several reports pointing at the involvement of armed pro-government elements in the violent attacks on protesters, and Bachelet urged the Government "to rein in these groups and arrest those among them who have used force against protesters".

"The use of proxy forces has a long and sinister history in the region," she added. "And it is very alarming to see them operating openly in this way in Venezuela. The Government can, and must, stop them from exacerbating an already highly inflammable situation."