

MIKE COFFMAN
6TH DISTRICT, COLORADO

ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
MILITARY PERSONNEL
SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0606

2443 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-7882
(202) 226-4623 FAX

DISTRICT OFFICE:
3300 SOUTH PARKER ROAD
CHERRY CREEK PLACE IV; SUITE 305
AURORA, CO 80014
(720) 748-7514
(720) 748-7680 FAX

COFFMAN.HOUSE.GOV

May 9, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I write to you today out of my grave concern regarding the ongoing civil unrest, violence and instability in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

As numerous news reports make clear, the Venezuelan economy is in shambles and public order and the rule of law is rapidly evaporating. President Nicolas Maduro is using the nation's security forces and police to suppress massive and largely peaceful protests. Recent reports tell us that up to 37 people so far have been killed during these protests, while hundreds more have been seriously injured. Critical shortages of food, medicine and basic essentials are becoming ever more critical with many Venezuelan citizens teetering on the edge of starvation. In the meantime, the nation's financial system is verging on collapse with a rapidly rising rate of inflation destroying the savings of millions. This, ironically, is all occurring in a nation who possesses substantial natural resources and a well-educated populace. Venezuelans are presently enduring these hardships due to a government that has nationalized virtually every sector of the economy, imposed price controls and grossly mismanaged every aspect of the country.

Despite the suffering of millions of his country's citizens, Maduro's government appears to function in a different universe. Maduro is ignoring and even exacerbating these accelerating problems. Maduro has packed the Supreme Court with loyalists, maintains tight control over the military and now controls the governance of a majority of the municipalities in Venezuela. In March, the Venezuelan Supreme Court, packed with his supporters, stripped the democratically elected National Assembly of its power, effectively nullifying it as a democratically-elected institution. Now, he is pushing to draft a new constitution and elect a "constituent assembly" that would be made up representatives loyal only to him, to further consolidate his power.

In desperation, the Venezuelan people have taken to the streets to make their voices heard at great personal risk to their safety and to the safety of their families. Venezuelans seek an end to the devastating economic policies that Maduro has imposed and which are directly responsible for the steady deterioration of every segment of Venezuelan civil society. These protesters seek a restoration of the power and authority of their National Assembly and the return to a Supreme Court that is not controlled by the nation's President.

Most recently, I closely followed the decision of Venezuela to commence the process of withdrawing from the Organization of American States (OAS)—a move I not only fear would weaken the OAS, but also that could trigger further regional instability, as Venezuela’s regional allies could follow suit. I encourage our envoy to that organization to maintain steadfast diplomatic pressure in conveying U.S. concerns and to keep defending the right of Venezuelans to demonstrate peacefully, without the fear of repression and violence.

Finally, I should note that news reports also indicate that while millions of Venezuelans are suffering through these economic privations, many officials within the Maduro regime are not. Widespread corruption and personal enrichment of government officials and of individuals and businesses that support his regime is rampant.

Accordingly, I also ask that your Department of State seriously consider the implementation of targeted sanctions not only against individuals in the Venezuelan government responsible for the continuing egregious violations of the human rights of Venezuelan citizens, but also to those officials, people and corporations, wherever they reside, who continue to profit from and prop up this repressive regime.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mike Coffman
U.S. Representative
6th District, Colorado

CC: The White House
U.S. Treasury Department