



# Recommendations for Dialogue and Negotiation in Venezuela

A Discussion Paper by Francisco Alfaro Pareja

*Translated into English from the original Spanish version published October 8, 2018*

## The Conflict and Context of the Crisis in Venezuela

The current conflict in Venezuela is political in nature. The progressive undermining of liberal principles and replacement of the representative democratic regime with one of illiberal characteristics and, subsequently, revolutionary tenor has led to a quasi-existential struggle. Over time, this has generated a complex and multidimensional crisis with dramatic consequences at national, regional, and hemispheric levels.

The Venezuelan regime has been rapidly transforming from a competitive authoritarian system toward one of a hegemonic nature with totalitarian inclinations, systematically violating freedoms and human rights. However, working against the government's authoritarian interests are its own inefficiency, high levels of corruption, the promotion of parastatal organizations, and its collusion with criminal organizations—all of which reduce the government's capacity.

On an economic level, the crisis is reflected in the drop in oil production, an increase in hyperinflation, decreasing wages, failure to fulfill international commitments, the printing of fiat money, and the implementation of contradictory and/or insufficient economic measures, among other things. This has had a direct social impact, including the collapse of public services; increased poverty; misery and hunger at historic levels; an increase in homicide rates; increased infant morbidity and mortality due to untreated diseases; and a shortage of medical supplies and food. All of these issues are at the root of the current humanitarian crisis and mass forced migration.

The impossibility of transforming the conflict via institutional means has led the governing coalition and the opposition coalition to resort to four separate alternative mechanisms for dialogue and negotiation (AMDN) between 2002 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> Common elements of these four AMDNs include:

- They have arisen in the face of escalating violence when presidential power has been threatened.
- The negotiations have been centered on an electoral solution.
- Appeasement has been used as a constant variable, either as a deliberate action by the governing coalition or as a result of dealing with adversaries who have unlimited goals and aspirations.
- Actors from the international community have been involved.

However, the following elements differ for each AMDN: (a) the governing coalition has altered its form; (b) the internal strength and unity of both coalitions has changed; (c) the behavior of the international community has varied in relation to strategy, unity, and strength; and (d) the methodology, rigor, and commitment of the delegations has not been the same. Only under the first mechanism was there a signed agreement. While the referendum to recall President Hugo Chavez in 2004 led to a quick end to one crisis, the other promises agreed upon, which are crucial for a sustainable solution, were not fulfilled.



## Recommendations for a New Alternative Dialogue and Negotiation Process

**General and actor-specific recommendations.** In light of the common elements of the prior AMDN, it is fundamental to:

- Be proactive and not wait for a critical escalation of violence to trigger the need for negotiating a new AMDN, since the priority is to return to constitutional democratic order (the true cause of the conflict).
- Decentralize the focus of negotiations on electoral processes and first require prior concessions in other areas of power.
- Avoid the use of AMDN as an element of appeasement. Only the existence of a real incentive to the governing coalition (whether negative or positive) will entice it to negotiate and comply with the agreements reached.

### Recommendations related to the opposition coalition:

- Encourage any process that contributes to the reestablishment of the opposition coalition's unity and strengthens its capacities so that the international community has an internal interlocutor that can exercise effective leverage.
- Strengthen the role of the opposition coalition as a mediator between the governing coalition and the international community. The opposition coalition can also set the conditions to establish an AMDN.

### Recommendations related to the governing coalition:

- Those outside of the governing coalition, whether within the opposition coalition or broader international community, should identify the coalition's weaknesses and internal divisions to increase the persuasive capacity of the international community and opposition coalition in a new negotiation and dialogue mechanism.
- Engage with governing coalition members who are willing to be more tolerant of the opposition coalition despite the potential political costs.

### Recommendations related to the international community:

- Unify the criteria and ongoing plans (of countries and hemispheric and regional multilateral organizations) related to the Venezuelan crisis. Uncoordinated efforts reduce the effectiveness of the action.

- Based on this precondition, analyze the possibility of involving influential actors from the international community that have connections to the governing coalition, with influence in the Venezuelan conflict given a possible AMDN.

### Recommendations related to third parties (potential facilitators, guarantors, witnesses, mediators):

- They must be actors with the proper influence, accepted by both parties in their role.
- Include nonimpartial actors, but with a reach to the parties, who may have a useful role within the AMDN.
- Rethink the role of private companies and civil society as revitalizers of relations between political actors.

**Promote and strengthen high-level, low-profile spaces on par with (or beyond) a new AMDN.** This is important because these spaces can be governed by trusted networks and discuss matters of mutual interest with low or no political cost. They can also serve as opportunities for political learning that contributes to the rebuilding of the country's institutions. Finally, as opposed to the AMDN, they can have increased utility in periods of greater stability.

**Additional important agenda items.** Each AMDN has consolidated a list of preliminary matters that must be addressed at the same time. They include:

- The less complex but urgent need to implement reforms to slow the economic and humanitarian crisis and address the issue of political prisoners.
- Of intermediate complexity but of great importance are the need for mutual recognition and agreed reestablishment of Venezuelan institutions, a return to electoral processes, and a progressive withdrawal of sanctions in exchange for redemocratization.
- The complex and long-term need for the installation of a rigorous truth commission and the development of a transitional justice policy for crimes committed.

It is important to develop a strategy to address these matters simultaneously and/or sequentially, in high-level and low-profile convenings and/or in AMDNs. Also, an agreement must be formed on governance that restores Venezuelan institutions in order to tend to the economic and humanitarian crisis.

**Avoid violent options as a way to regulate political conflict.** In Venezuela, violent responses have demonstrated their brutal impact in recent years. However, Venezuelan institutions and structures (despite their weakening) have so far limited their use of violence. Still, the authoritarian leadership is building



expectations among the general public that a violent solution is inevitable.

Additionally, the governing coalition is building a narrative that includes the threat of an external enemy that has coordinated with the internal enemy. This narrative, combined with high levels of criminal violence and the fragility of the state, is creating conditions for escalation of the crisis, particularly if there were to be events such as a social uprising, divisions in the armed forces, or a conflict with any country in the region.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> These four AMDNs include the Forum for Negotiation and Agreements (2002-2005), the National Conference for Peace (2014), the National Dialogue Forum (2016-2017), and the Dialogue Forum in the Dominican Republic (2017-2018).

---

## About the Author

Francisco Alfaro Pareja is a doctor and international master in peace, conflict, and development studies from the Universitat Jaume I in Spain. He has a master's degree in Venezuelan history from the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, a political science degree from the Universidad Central de Venezuela, and is currently an external researcher for the Institute of Social Development and Peace of the Universitat Jaume I, the Institute of Peace and Conflict of the Universidad de Granada, and the Historical Research Institute of the Universidad Simón Bolívar. He has been a consultant to international organizations such as the Carter Center, the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives, and the One Earth Future Foundation. With Dr. Mireya Lozada, he was executive director of the Venezuela Project, building future scenarios toward an inclusive and sustainable peace.



## About Us

The Stanley Center for Peace and Security partners with people, organizations, and the greater global community to drive policy progress in three issue areas—mitigating climate change, avoiding the use of nuclear weapons, and preventing mass violence and atrocities. The center was created in 1956 and maintains its independence while developing forums for diverse perspectives and ideas. To learn more about our recent publications and upcoming events, please visit [stanleycenter.org](https://stanleycenter.org).



## CRIES

The Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES) is a network of research centers and nongovernmental organizations that acts as a regional think tank, promoting analysis, debate, and policy creation about topics of regional, hemispheric, and global relevance, from the perspective of civil society. CRIES is an independent nonprofit institution that promotes pluralism and citizen participation. It is not affiliated with any political or religious organization. For more information about its activities and its virtual publications, please visit [www.cries.org](http://www.cries.org).

