

Economic and Social Council

“Measures Targeting the Current Food Shortage in Venezuela”

Forum: ECOSOC
Issue: Measures Targeting the Current Food Shortage in Venezuela
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Table of Content

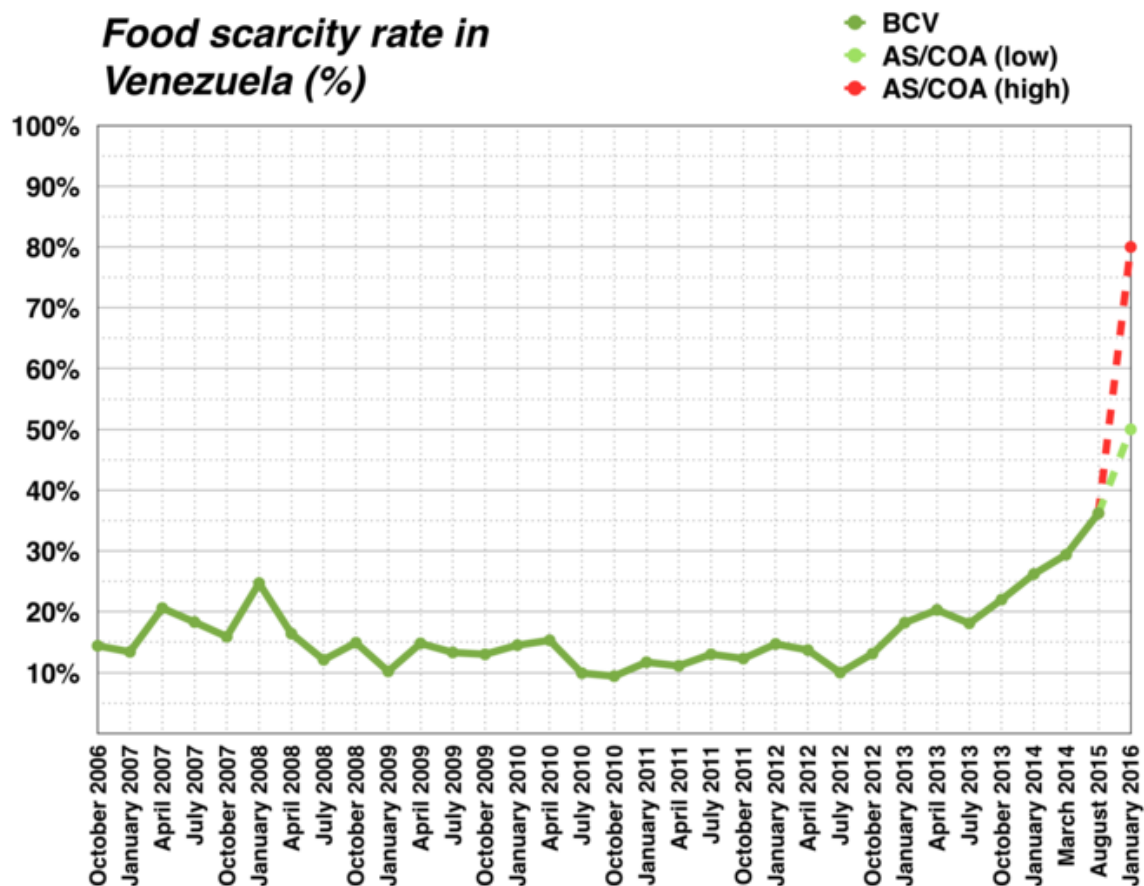
Context & Historical background	Page 3 - 4
United Nations Involvement	Page 4
Different Perspectives	Page 5
Key Terms & Phrases	Page 5 - 6
Questions to Consider	Page 6
Work Cited	Page 7

Context & Historical Background

Since the 1990's, the Venezuelan leftist, or Bolivarian, government has encountered a continuous drop in food production and supply, forcing them to import food using profits from oil exportation. This crisis, which has extended from previous president Hugo Chavez's presidency to Nicolas Maduro's presidency; is currently the worst in Venezuelan history. In 2016, consumer prices rose by 800%, the economy contracted by 18.6%, and hunger escalated to the point that the Venezuela's Living Conditions Survey (ENCOVI) found nearly 75 percent of the population had lost an average of at least 8.7 kg in weight due to a lack of proper nutrition. This crisis has impacted all aspects of daily life and society in Venezuela, leading to the rise of unemployment and the creation of several groups that started protesting in the streets. These groups denounce Maduro's policies and call for a democratic renewal in the nation. However, the current president blames capitalism for speculation that it is driving high rates of inflation and creating widespread shortages of staples while often saying he is fighting an "economic war" and leading "economic offences" against his political opponents.

The crisis is said to have been triggered by several factors and has devastating effect on the social, economic, and political environment in Venezuela. First off, Venezuela's foreign debt has been a huge liability to its ability to recover. It is estimated at \$105 Billion, while currently, Venezuela's reserves are estimated at \$10 Billion. Furthermore, Venezuela has also been experiencing shortages due to price controls ever since Hugo Chavez's presidency. Consequently, occur in regulated products, such as milk, various types of meat, chicken, coffee, rice, oil, pre-cooked flour, butter prices; and also basic necessities like toilet paper, personal hygiene products and medicine. This leaves thousands of Venezuelans scouring trash, waiting hours in line, or simply not having any food and hygiene.

The Venezuelan Government, which denies the existence of a crisis, has however planned to implement certain measures to reduce shortages in areas such as medicine and food by increasing local production. If properly implemented, some of these initiatives could help reduce the shortages. So far, however, they have not significantly alleviated the severity of Venezuela's humanitarian crisis.



UN and International Involvement

The Venezuelan government has initiated limited action to seek the help of international and foreign assistance considering the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for humanitarian relief. In fact, the government has blocked the attempt made by the opposition party in Venezuela to seek foreign assistance. In light of current policies enacted by the government, it is clear that Maduro's focus is on eliminating political opposition and consolidating his power as president of Venezuela. Furthermore, the Venezuelan government has faced abundant criticism by the Human Rights Watch in regards to a number human rights violations during the period of protests. So far, most attempts by foreign bodies to send relief to the victims of the Venezuelan food crisis have been impeded upon by the Venezuelan government, leading to a further deterioration of the socio-political climate. "But what I can tell you is that we need people, the international community, to look this way. I know a lot of countries are suffering crises, but this is something without precedent in Venezuela. We need to find a way out." (USNews). Although the United Nations and many other international bodies have urged the Venezuelan government to hear out the protestors' demands and seek help for the deplorable living conditions, Maduro has neither invited or authorized any intervention, foreign or domestic, with the aim of resolving the crisis.

Different Perspectives

United States : As of now, the US government has severely criticized the actions of the Venezuelan government in regards to its people and overall stability. The Us has taken a strong stance against Maduro and his regime through several sanctions on high end political members of Maduro’s administration. Furthermore, The US Secretary of State ordered all of Maduro’s assets that lie within US jurisdiction to be frozen. In general, the US has taken a strong stance against the political figures in Venezuela however have taken few measures to benefit the people and alleviate the food, medical, and humanitarian crisis.

Colombia : Colombia, as a neighboring state, has fallen victim to a progressively increasing rate of immigration from Venezuelans fleeing the conditions in Venezuela. The Colombian President, who , during a talk with American Vice President Mike Pence, formally spoke out against US military action in Venezuela. In the President’s words : "But a transition in the Venezuelan regime toward democracy must be a peaceful transition. It must be hopefully a democratic transition. And it must be done quickly." All in all, the President of Colombia is against military action as it would only increase instability in the nation.

Venezuela: It is important to consider Venezuela in this section because of the divided state of the nation. The Venezuelan are currently in revolt against their government and president, who in turn, continues acting according to his own reach for power. The President has continuously denied the existence of a crisis within the country to the disaccord of the people, who continue to suffer daily. Furthermore, Maduro has denied and refused any external help regarding the socio-economic degradation in Venezuela, as he would, by doing so, be confirming the existence of a crisis.

Human’s Right Watch and the UN Human’s Rights Council: Both these international bodies, in addition to many others, have denounces the many human rights violations that have taken place in Venezuela. From the government’s denial of basic necessities to the people to the deaths of protestors in the streets, these bodies have increasingly called for action to be taken. Several relief organizations have also extended help and supplies to the Venezuelan government, but to no avail.

Key Words

1. Economic Crisis: The current state of the economy of Venezuela leaves 82% of the Venezuelan population living in poverty. The current hyperinflation progressively leads to increasing costs of life, which are unaffordable by the majority of the population who live without basic needs such as food, medical supplies, basic hygiene, running water, and much more. Currently, “the government has declared a state of emergency, food is now being transported under armed guard, and basic necessities are being rationed”.
2. Acquisition of Power: In addition, the current president of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro, who “narrowly wins the presidential election with 50.8% of the vote, defeating opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski” is now trying to reaffirm and maintain his power

within parliament through a new election that will serve to elect his political supporters and further solidify his grasp on the nation.

3. Protests: In response to the worsening economic and social environment in Venezuela, a large majority of the population started protesting in the streets. The protests, which started out peacefully, were met by a show of force and violence by the police, leading to a current toll of 74 deaths in the several months of protesting. The young base of protestors are desperately crying out for a change in authority, only furthering Maduro's paranoia concerning an opposition-led upheaval.

Further Vocabulary and Dates

1. Hyperinflation
2. Human Rights Watch
3. Shortage (Food, Medical, etc...)
4. Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act
5. December 6, 2015 – opposition party wins majority of seats in parliament
6. January 15, 2015 – Maduro declares state of economic emergency
7. April 17, 2017 – Maduro's armed forces swarm following deadly protests
8. May 1, 2017 – Maduro announces new changes in Venezuela constitution

Questions to Consider:

1. Considering the government's refusal of external help and intervention, what are some ways that external bodies can help the people of Venezuela?
2. According to the right of sovereignty of every nation, can the UN act on the current political crisis that is overshadowing the country's economic meltdown?
3. Will sanctions on the Venezuelan government ameliorate the crisis or only serve to worsen it?
4. What are the fundamental aspects of the country that need to be addresses in order to allow for better living conditions? (Ex. Economic, Political, Social)
5. How do neighboring countries impact, or are impacted, by the current crisis?

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