

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 18, 2017

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenues
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President:

We write to express our concern with the Government of Venezuela's attempt to rewrite the country's constitution through the formation of a Constituent Assembly, expected to take place on July 30th. We urge your Administration to oppose this action, which promises to further exacerbate an already deteriorating political, social, and economic crisis, making it harder for the Venezuelan people to achieve the peaceful outcome for which they are struggling.

Venezuela's regime has mismanaged the economy, undermined democracy, and committed widespread human rights abuses against the Venezuelan people. This has resulted in food shortages and over three months of street protests that have left over 100 people dead. The Maduro regime has used both loyalists in the Supreme Court and armed groups to undermine the opposition-held National Assembly. In May 2017, Maduro called for a Constituent Assembly under the guise of rewriting the constitution but with the goal of further consolidating power and control. This is a clear violation of Venezuela's own laws, as the current constitution already includes a mechanism for recourse and reform, including a national referendum which Maduro has repeatedly ignored.

In June, Venezuela's attorney general and long-time Chavez loyalist, Luisa Ortega, called on the Supreme Court to annul the process used to form the Assembly. The court swiftly dismissed the call and banned Ortega from leaving the country, froze her assets, and held a pre-trial hearing on July 4, 2017. Maduro has already begun to handpick loyalists to this Assembly, including former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Delcy Rodriguez and Iris Varela, the former Minister of Venezuela's corrupt and criminal prison system.

A Constituent Assembly would lead to the creation of a new constitution that would likely eliminate any semblance of institutional democracy in Venezuela, as well as any hope for free and fair elections under credible international observers. This new mechanism would also strengthen and entrench a regime that is inherently corrupt, commits widespread human rights abuses, and is tied to narco-trafficking and transnational criminal organizations. We believe that this Constituent Assembly could push the already-volatile situation into a broader conflict, resulting in more deaths and a wider humanitarian and refugee crisis. The effects of this would not only overwhelm countries bordering Venezuela but would directly compromise the interests of the U.S. and those of our regional partners.

We firmly believe the U.S. should continue to work with the OAS and the United Nations to pressure the Venezuelan regime to end the violence and restore democracy. We urge your administration to condemn the Constituent Assembly and work with like-minded international

partners before July 30th to pressure the Maduro regime to suspend it, consistent with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to which Venezuela is a party.

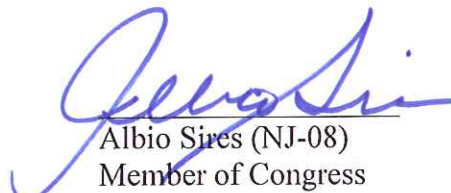
Further, if the Maduro regime moves forward with the Assembly or takes other anti-democratic actions that disrupt peace and stability, we urge you to work with our international partners to take additional meaningful actions commensurate with the disruption of democratic principles. We also urge you to leverage our relationships with neighboring countries to support democracy and human rights in Venezuela in order to advance U.S. interests in the region and uphold the Inter-American Democratic Charter at the OAS. We reiterate our call to the Maduro regime that it should hold free and fair elections as soon as possible, release all political prisoners, release U.S. citizens, adhere to democratic principles, permit the delivery of humanitarian food and medicine, and cease ties to drug trafficking activities.

Thank you for the attention and support on these matters. We welcome opportunities to work with you to strengthen U.S. engagement on Venezuela to ensure a better future for the Venezuelan people.


Sincerely,




Jeff Duncan (SC-03)
Member of Congress




Albio Sires (NJ-08)
Member of Congress




Edward R. Royce (CA-39)
Member of Congress




Eliot L. Engel (NY-16)
Member of Congress




Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27)
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro (TX-20)
Member of Congress



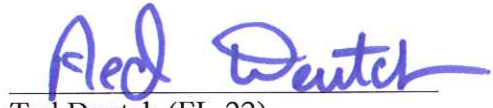
Michael T. McCaul (TX-10)
Member of Congress



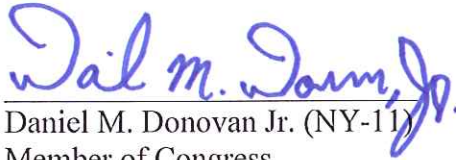
Norma J. Torres (CA-35)
Member of Congress



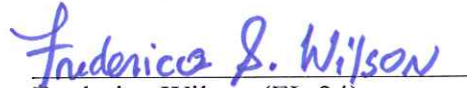
Ron DeSantis (FL-06)
Member of Congress



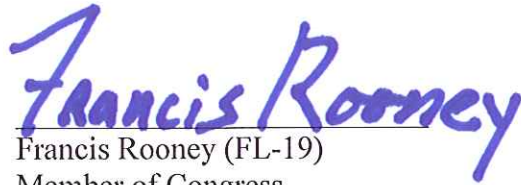
Ted Deutch (FL-22)
Member of Congress



Daniel M. Donovan Jr. (NY-11)
Member of Congress



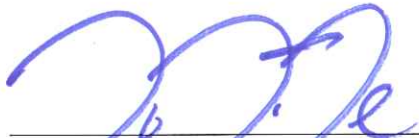
Frederica Wilson (FL-24)
Member of Congress



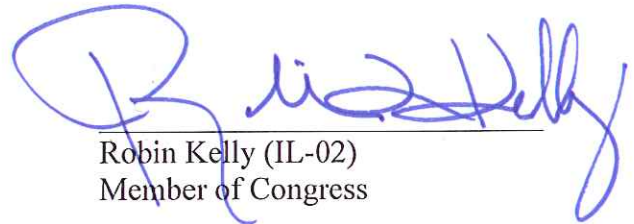
Francis Rooney (FL-19)
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)
Member of Congress



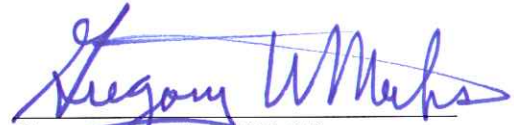
Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-25)
Member of Congress



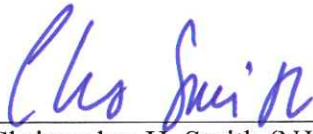
Robin Kelly (IL-02)
Member of Congress



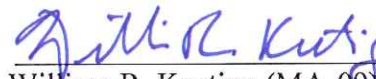
Mo Brooks (AL-05)
Member of Congress



Gregory Meeks (NY-05)
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith (NJ-04)
Member of Congress



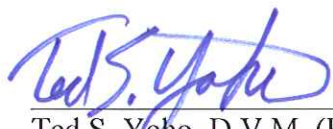
William R. Keating (MA-09)
Member of Congress



Carlos Curbelo (FL-26)
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-23)
Member of Congress



Ted S. Yoho, D.V.M. (FL-03)
Member of Congress



Dina Titus (NV-01)
Member of Congress



Paul Cook (CA-08)
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel (FL-21)
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline (RI-01)
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson, U.S. Secretary of State