



Since February of 2014 violent demonstrations, limited to the wealthy districts of some cities, among them Caracas, have been shaking Venezuela. The opposition coup mongers have suffered four electoral defeats in one year and in 18 of 19 elections since 1998, in elections praised by all of the world's institutions, from the Organization of American States (OAS) to the European Union. This opposition has organized these actions which have cost the lives of more than 30 persons, among them various members of the forces of order (1).

Unable to take power through legal and democratic means, the opposition has decided to return to the violent methods that they employed in 2002 that ended with a coup d'état against the legitimately elected president Hugo Chávez. The international community condemned these new attacks against constitutional order and supported the government of Nicolás Maduro.

Thus the Organization of American States expressed its "full support for the democratically elected government of Venezuela" (2) with 35 members supporting the resolution. Only three votes were cast against the resolution: the USA, Canada and Panama. The twelve members of the Union of South American Nations unanimously declared their "solidarity" with the "democratically elected Government of this nation" and condemned "the recent acts of violence" on the part of the opposition (3).

Amnesty International is an organization that defends human rights, democracy and legally established states in the world. It would appear natural and logical that it would have denounced that violent attacks against Venezuelan democracy orchestrated by the extreme right of the country, and that AI would have indicated its support for the legitimate authorities of the nation. This was not to be.

Worse still, on March 12 2014, Amnesty International published a communiqué on Venezuela in which it asked the Government and the opposition to "guarantee the respect for human rights" (4) This meant placing the legitimate authorities, which had suffered violence and attempted to restore order within the framework defined by law, on the same plane as the coup mongers of the extreme right, whose actions caused the death of thirty-one persons and material damage amounting to tens of millions of dollars (food shops serving popular classes set on fire, offices of the public television VTV sacked, ministerial offices attacked, etc.) (5).

To illustrate their communiqué, Amnesty International published a photo of a young student arrested by the National Guard. The organization could have chosen to publish one of many photos showing the same students with incendiary bombs in their hands, destroying public offices, or armed with pistols and marching on the streets, masked and sowing terror among the inhabitants, in order to present a balanced image of the situation in Venezuela. This did not happen and the partisan choice cast a shadow over the impartiality of Amnesty International, and because of this, cast a shadow over their own credibility (6).

Amnesty International, through Guadalupe Marengo, joint director of the Americas programme, went further. She denounced the “increasingly violent proclamations of the authorities”, that “threatened to terminate respect for human rights and the State of law.” At no time did Amnesty International cite exact words nor did they name these authorities. There is a reason for this: the reality is opposed to the image presented by this organization for the defence of human rights (7).

In fact, all the Venezuelan authorities, without exception, from President Nicolás Maduro, to ministers and members of Parliament, have called for dialogue and calm and invited the opposition to express their disagreement through democratic channels. Thus Maduro multiplied his calls for agreement and expressed his rejection of violence: “Our victory will be peace and we shall consolidate justice. We must maintain unity and win with peace” (8).

The Organization of American States did not fall into the same error, and contrary to Amnesty International, expressed their “full support and encouragement to the initiatives and efforts of the democratically elected Government of Venezuela [...] in order that they continue [...] advancing the process of national dialogue” (9). UNASUR, for their part, expressed their support and decided to “back the efforts of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic to initiate a dialogue” (10).

Amnesty International decided to ignore all the declarations of the legitimate Government in favour of dialogue and respect for institutions and demanded “that the authorities indicate in an absolutely clear way that their priority was the respect for human rights and the State of law” (11) confusing the roles of those responsible for violent acts and President Maduro, who attempted to establish order in the framework envisioned by the law, thus fulfilling his executive duties. In addition to the calls for a peaceful resolution of political differences, the Bolivarian administration repeated several times – from the start of the demonstrations – that the Constitution would prevail. “Nothing will separate us from the paths of the Patria and the way of democracy”, said Nicolás Maduro (12). Amnesty International deliberately refused to echo these declarations.

The communiqué of Amnesty International refers to the opposition with a diplomatic tone that is in sharp contrast to the virulence employed towards the legitimate authorities: “We ask the leaders of the opposition to call on their supporters not to use violence, especially against those persons whose political opinions differ from their own.” At no time did Amnesty International mention or condemn the declarations of the principal leaders of this opposition who publically call for breaking constitutional order (13).

Thus the Organization for the defence of human rights might have quoted the words of Leopoldo López, leader of the Voluntad Popular party, which had taken part in the coup d'état of April 2002, and which launched an appeal for insurrection in January of 2014. "We want to call on Venezuelans [...] to rise up. We call on the Venezuelan people to say "Enough!" [...] with the goal of discussing "the way out". What is the way out of this disaster?" (14). While acts of violence have caused the death of thirty-one persons, on March 19 2014, López called on his followers to perpetrate more acts of violence: "I call on the whole country to maintain and increase the pressure in order to break the dictatorship" (15). Amnesty International could have condemned this public appeal to overthrow a democratically elected Government. This did not happen.

Amnesty International could also have mentioned the declarations of opposition deputy María Corina Machado, who exhorted Venezuelans to rebel. "The people of Venezuela have an answer: 'Rebellion, rebellion'. There are some who say that we should wait for elections in a few years. Can those who can't get food for their children wait? Can public employees, campesinos, businessmen who have had their right to work and property stolen wait? Venezuela cannot wait any longer." (16). Did Amnesty International condemn these declarations? In no way.

By supporting the Venezuelan opposition coup mongers, by remaining silent in the face of crimes committed by the extreme right, by manipulating facts, by taking position openly against the legitimate government of Nicolás Maduro, against Venezuelan democracy and against the majority will of the Venezuelan people expressed in elections, Amnesty International mocks their own principles and their reason for being, that is, the struggle for human rights. The international organization is deliberately deceiving public opinion and betraying the values adhered to by hundreds of thousands of militants for human emancipation in the whole world. (Translation from the Spanish version: Jordan Bishop)

Tue, 25 Mar 2014

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Source of the Spanish version: Opera Mundi

<http://operamundi.uol.com.br/conteudo/babel/34527/amnistia+internacional+venezuela+y+los+derechos+humanos+.shtml>

Notes:

[1] Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, «Fallece otro efectivo de la GNB por violencia fascista en Táchira», 19 de marzo de 2014.

[2] Organisation des Etats américains, «Consejo permanente aprobó declaración sobre la situación en Venezuela», 7 de marzo de 2014.

http://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-084/14 (consulted 18 March 2014).

[3] Union des nations sud-américaines, «Resolución», 12 de marzo de 2014.

<http://cancilleria.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/RESOLUCI%C3%93N-UNASUR-MARZO-2014.pdf> (consulted March 18 2014).

[4] Amnesty International, «Climat de violence au Venezuela : le gouvernement et l'opposition doivent garantir le respect des droits humains», 12 de marzo de 2014.

<http://www.amnesty.fr/AI-en-action/Violences/Armes-et-conflits-armes/Actualites/Venezuela-les-droits-humains-etouffes-11151> (consulted March 18 2014).

[5] Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, «Grupo fascista encapuchado atacó sede del Ministerio del Ambiente en Táchira», 20 de marzo de 2014.

[6] Amnesty International, «Climat de violence au Venezuela : le gouvernement et l'opposition doivent garantir le respect des droits humains», op. cit.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, «Maduro: Nuestra victoria será la paz», 19 de marzo de 2014.

[9] Organisation des Etats américains, «Consejo permanente aprobó declaración sobre la situación en Venezuela», op. cit.

[10] Union des nations sud-américaines, «Resolución», op. cit.

[11] Amnesty International, «Climat de violence au Venezuela: le gouvernement et l'opposition doivent garantir le respect des droits humains», op. cit.

[12] Salim Lamrani, «25 verdades sobre las manifestaciones en Venezuela», Opera Mundi, 23 de febrero de 2014.

[13] Amnesty International, «Climat de violence au Venezuela: le gouvernement et l'opposition doivent garantir le respect des droits humains», op. cit.

[14] Salim Lamrani, «25 verdades sobre las manifestaciones en Venezuela», Opera Mundi, op. cit.

[15] EFE, «Opositor Leopoldo López pide a venezolanos aumentar presión 'hasta quebrar la dictadura'», 19 de marzo de 2014.

[16] Salim Lamrani, «25 verdades sobre las manifestaciones en Venezuela», Opera Mundi, op. cit.

<http://alainet.org>