

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 31, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Secretary Blinken:

We write to express our concerns about the ongoing deterioration of democratic principles and the rule of law in Venezuela in advance of presidential elections scheduled in that country in 2024.

The Venezuelan people cannot afford to see another fraudulent election, which will only bring further suffering to their nation and foment greater instability in the Americas. More than seven million Venezuelans have already fled the country in desperation, and more political volatility will only add to those numbers. Unfortunately, with a presidential election scheduled for 2024, the Maduro regime is already doing everything possible to undermine prospects for a credible vote.

Notably, on June 14, the Maduro regime demanded the resignation of the members of the National Electoral Council (CNE). A new council was just appointed through a process brazenly headed by Maduro's spouse, Cilia Flores (who has been sanctioned by the U.S. Government). Moreover, over multiple years, the Maduro regime has pre-emptively banned multiple opposition candidates from running for office, including the likely frontrunner Maria Corina Machado. Most recently, the Maduro regime announced that international election observers will not be permitted in the country for next year's general elections.

Despite these setbacks, Venezuela's opposition parties are taking steps to hold primary elections in October to democratically choose a candidate who will challenge Nicolás Maduro in next year's elections. Given the challenges with the dismantled and discredited CNE, the Venezuelan opposition announced that it will manage its own primary process.

Given these dynamics and persistent efforts by Maduro to destroy any semblance of a legitimate primary or general election process, we the undersigned want to stress the following:

- 1) The primaries must be allowed to take place as planned, as designed by the National Commission for Primaries, without interference from the regime.
- 2) All candidates must be allowed to participate and the Maduro regime cannot pick its own opponents (the regime's practice of arbitrarily issuing administrative bans on candidates of their choosing is unacceptable).

- 3) Whoever wins the primary must be allowed to run in the general election, in a legitimate election that credible international election observers confirm represents the will of the Venezuelan people.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



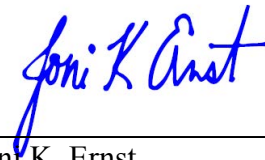
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



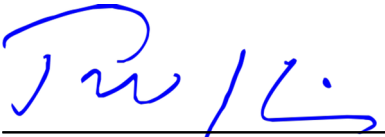
Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



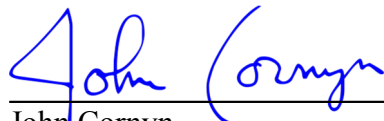
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Rick Scott
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Benjamin L. Cardin
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Jeffrey A. Merkley
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Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator