

OAS Permanent Council
Regular Meeting

Washington, D.C. January 21, 2026
10 AM – 1 PM

Commissioner Gloria de Mees, Country Rapporteur for Venezuela

I. Opening remarks

Good morning,

- Ambassador Luis Ernesto Vargas, President of the Permanent Council
- Mr. Albert-Ramdin Secretary General of the Organization of American States
- Ms. Laura Gil, Assistant Secretary General
- Honorable Permanent and Alternate Representatives of Member States and Observers
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation for the invitation to attend this session of the Permanent Council. Likewise, I take this opportunity to express my solidarity with the Venezuelan people.

II. Core speech

As of December 2025, publicly available information indicates that 914 people remain arbitrarily detained for political reasons in Venezuela. For decades, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has closely monitored, with deep concern, the systematic use of arbitrary detention and the instrumentalization of criminal law to persecute individuals who hold political or ideological views contrary to those of the authorities, as well as those who legitimately exercise their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, including human rights defenders.

These practices must be understood within a broader context of democratic erosion and lack of institutional legitimacy, which the Commission has consistently highlighted since the electoral process. The absence of free, fair, and credible elections, combined with the concentration of power and the lack of judicial independence, has undermined the

democratic legitimacy of the authorities currently exercising power, severely weakened the rule of law and enabled widespread human rights violations.

During its monitoring work throughout 2025, the IACR received information regarding the deaths of Reinaldo Araujo, Lindomar Jesús Amaro Bustamante, and Alfredo Díaz, all of whom were arbitrarily detained by State authorities. These cases bring the total to at least 17 individuals detained for political reasons who have died in custody since 2015, reflecting a pattern of severe neglect, denial of medical care, and conditions incompatible with human dignity.

In this context, the Commission took note of the release of 99 people on December 25, 2025, and subsequently of the releases announced on January 8. As of January 18, the release of 143 political prisoners has been confirmed. However, the IACR has also observed that, for more than a week, relatives of detained persons have gathered outside detention centers, demanding the effective implementation of the releases announced by the authorities.

At the same time, we have received information indicating the continued operation of clandestine pretrial detention centers, a matter previously documented by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela and by organizations such as Human Rights Watch. The persistence of these facilities underscores the structural nature of the violations and the absence of effective institutional oversight.

The Commission reiterates the urgent need for transparent, updated, and verifiable information regarding the conditions under which political prisoners are being released. This includes clarity on the precautionary or restrictive measures imposed, any limitations on freedom of movement or expression, their current legal status and access to medical and psychological care for released individuals and their families.

With regard to the State of External Commotion and Detentions under Decree No. 5,200, published on January 10 and validated by the Supreme Court of Justice, the Commission reiterates its request for detailed and updated information on its implementation. In particular, clarification is required regarding the number of people detained under this legal provision and the detention centers where they are currently being held.

The Commission recalls that states of exception must strictly comply with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and temporality, and cannot be used to justify generalized repression or the suspension of non-derogable rights.

III. Closing remarks

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights remains fully committed to its mandate to monitor the situation in Venezuela, adopt precautionary measures, and give visibility to ongoing human rights violations across the country.

In light of the persistent lack of democratic legitimacy, the absence of effective separation of powers, and the systematic repression of dissent, the Commission reiterates that a genuine, peaceful, and inclusive democratic transition—grounded in respect for human rights, the rule of law, and international standards—is essential to overcoming the current crisis and preventing the recurrence of grave violations.

The IACtHR also reiterates its standing request to conduct an on-site visit to Venezuela, with the objective of engaging in constructive dialogue with State authorities and independently assessing the human rights situation. The Commission emphasizes that such visits constitute a fundamental mechanism of cooperation, transparency, and accountability, and reiterates its willingness to carry out the visit at the earliest opportunity, under conditions that guarantee full access, independence, and compliance with its mandate.

Thank you.