



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Parliamentarians at Risk Around the World

**Briefing organised by the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
and the Inter-Parliamentary Union
co-hosted by the House Democracy Partnership**

Capitol Building (room H-313), Thursday, September 19, 2019
10:30-11:30 a.m.

**Ms. Delsa Solórzano, Member of the National Assembly of Venezuela,
President of the Committee on Justice and Peace, Vice-President of the
IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the global organization of national parliaments, which come together to promote inter-parliamentary cooperation. This global organization has established a mechanism to defend and protect parliamentarians worldwide who are victims of violations of their human rights in the exercise of their mandate.

To this end, in 1976 the IPU set up the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, made up of 10 men and women parliamentarians who represent the main regions of the world. The elected members of the Committee serve in a personal capacity for a five-year term. The current President of the Committee is Ms. A. Jerkov (member of parliament from Serbia); I, Delsa Solórzano, from Venezuela, am honoured to be the Committee Vice-President.

Between receiving a complaint and issuing its decision, the Committee takes a serious and in-depth approach to its work. It endeavours to determine the facts of each case by checking and verifying the allegations and information submitted to it with the authorities of the countries in question and the sources or complainants. The Committee examines the case file and seeks a satisfactory solution in accordance with both the country's domestic legislation and applicable regional and international human rights standards. The Committee's decisions vary widely, from determining that a detained parliamentarian should be released, to calling for a parliamentarian who was arbitrarily stripped of their mandate to be restored to office.

The Committee notes with profound concern the increase in violations of the human rights of parliamentarians around the world. Clearly, when a parliamentarian comes under attack in the exercise of their mandate, this is not just an attack on those who elected them, it is an attack on democracy itself, as there is no democracy without parliament, and there is no parliament without parliamentarians. At this time, the situation in figures is as follows: the rights of 564 parliamentarians in 43 countries have been violated, distributed as follows: 203 in the Americas, 151 in Asia, 91 in Africa, 63 in Europe, 53 in the Middle East and North Africa, and 3 in the Southern Pacific. The most frequent violations are: undue suspension and loss of parliamentary mandate; lack of fair trial and other unfair proceedings; violation of freedom of expression; and torture, ill-treatment and other acts of violence. It must be pointed out, with considerable consternation, that the majority of cases of violations of the human rights of parliamentarians take place in Venezuela. Of the 203 cases being dealt with in the Americas, almost 95 per cent are in Venezuela. In the Americas, the IPU is actively processing 64 cases in Venezuela, 1 in Brazil, 1 in Ecuador and 1 in Colombia.

The situation in Venezuela is increasingly critical. Currently, 123 Venezuelan parliamentarians are subject to harassment or political persecution. Two have been wrongfully detained: these are the cases of Juan Requesens and Edgar Zambrano; four have sought refuge in various embassies; two have gone into hiding; 25 are in exile; and another 25 have been stripped of their immunity, with no respect for due process. Several of us stand accused, with zero evidence and solely for political reasons, of terrible crimes, and we are harassed and hounded constantly. A significant proportion of parliamentarians have had our passports rescinded and we are unable to leave the country through regular international air travel. None of us have received a salary in four years. Armed paramilitary groups harass parliamentarians entering or leaving the National Assembly building.

But this situation is not the only thing happening to Venezuelan parliamentarians. President Juan Guaidó has also suffered severe harassment and persecution. He has been stripped of his parliamentary immunity and disqualified for political reasons, without any legal proceedings being taken against him. The President's chief of staff, the lawyer Roberto Marrero, has been in political detention for six months. And President Guaidó's brother has been forced into exile as a result of political persecution.

The terrible situation in the Venezuelan Parliament is characteristic of an anti-democratic system, which erodes freedoms of all kinds and seeks to control all State powers with a view to clinging on to power eternally.

Faced with this, we, parliamentarians of the world, must not remain silent. We must mobilize global parliamentary solidarity. To this end, we can raise awareness of the cases we know about and the decisions of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, organize public debates about these cases and denounce violations of the human rights of any parliamentarian.

Defending parliament means defending democracy. These efforts are not in vain; parliament is the constitutional body that, in democratic countries, delivers the broadest possible popular representation. In our globalized world, where the struggle to uphold human rights has no borders, we must speak up in defence of parliament and of parliamentarians suffering harassment and persecution. Fighting for democracy and freedom is the duty of all parliamentarians, as President Lincoln said, in order "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." This is our responsibility.