



## **A MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY TO THE MISSIONARIES AND TO THE PEOPLE OF VENEZUELA !!!**

### **THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT OF THE CONSOLATA MISSIONARIES**

***“Console, console my people!” Isaiah 40, 1***

“A country brought to a situation of hunger and on the brink of civil war” is the one told by our missionaries from Venezuela, listening to the stories of young people, professionals, elderly people, students and poor families: “The card for food rationing, lack of medicines, hyperinflation, empty supermarkets, the climate of insecurity, anger for violated civil liberties”. And again “With the streets turned into a land of endless pitched battle, the Maduro’s regime seizes power in a coup to change the Constitution. While political opposition cries to the coup”.

These are some considerations made to Father Stefano, Superior General, who is in constant telephone contact with them, to show the closeness of the whole Institute, the concern for the worsening of the clashes and through our confreres convey our solidarity to the Venezuelan people in the face of the serious problems that afflict them.

The missionaries are serene and are doing well, they thank for remembering them in the prayers; their only concern is the uncertain future of a country on its last legs, and ask to pray constantly.

These days Venezuela has returned under the spotlight of the major international news agencies. It is appearing in the news headlines and on the front pages of the national newspapers and respective websites due to the escalation of violence, with numerous deaths, wounded and imprisoned, yet another tragic epilogue of a situation that has been dragging for five years now and where there seems to be no way out.

While people suffer and live in terror, the protagonists of the Venezuelan conflict, government and opposition, find themselves at the farthest point between them, just intent to launch one to the other threats and accusations.

### **THE MISSIONARIES ON THE SIDE OF THE PEOPLE**

In Caracas, the Consolata Missionaries together with other male and female Missionaries from other Congregations, have opened a reception house for homeless people, street people who can find there shelter and support, and medical care, and if they want, to give a new



start to their life. Also in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, we have a Parish located on the outskirts of at least 150 / 200,000 people living on fortune houses on the hills around the capital. It is an agglomeration of problems, violence, drugs and gangs, but also of good people who earn their lives with a hard day's work and then, in the evening, they are still queuing to get to their lodge and live a moment of serenity with their family. In this situation and context, our missionaries try to build hope and be a sign of consolation for a group of Christians who, of course, are not the majority, but are presence and brotherhood, and this is enough to be able to at least dream a little.

Also in Caracas, in addition to the Parish of Carapita, we have the Regional House with a center for Vocational Missionary Animation connected also to the City Centre of Barquisimeto. The regional house is somewhat original because it does not represent the usual style of our regional houses, office and organization, but it is the home of everyone and where everyone can find a bed to sleep, a meal to share and someone who would listen to your problems. And when I say everyone, I mean everyone, not just the missionaries.

The AMV is in the hands of a team that also works with the Consolata Laity and with our Consolata Friends, an important and shared experience that is worth studying and deepening.

Among all these presences, a special mention should be made of those with indigenous people. We have a team of five missionaries from different nationalities working in two distinct communities: one in the town of Tucupita where indigenous people moves in in difficult times or looking for labour expedients and the other on the Amucuro Delta where the Warau Indians live according to their lifestyle on huts suspended on water poles. Our Missionaries, unpretentious, but with the only force of their presence, share the life of these people, sharing their fates with the only claim of love.

Along with many other priests, religious consecrated people and faithful lay people, our missionaries have chosen to stay in the country, to be alongside the people, to share their situation, attentive to their concrete needs, on the painful journey of an ecclesial community crushed between two blocks that have broken each bridge and contact.

Their testimony of humble presence among the poor and helpless of the outskirts of Caracas accomplishes very well the exhortation addressed to us by Pope Francesco:

***“Do not be tired of bringing comfort to populations that are often marked by great poverty and acute suffering, as in so many parts of Africa and Latin America. Let yourself continually be provoked by the concrete realities with which you come into contact and try to offer in a proper way the testimony of the charity that the Spirit infuses in your hearts (see Rm 5, 5)... While I gladly thank the Lord for the good that you are doing in the world, I would urge you to carry out a careful discernment of the situation of the peoples among whom you carry out your evangelizing action...”*** (Pope Francesco, to the participants in the General Chapters of the IMC and MC Consolata Missionaries, Sala Clementina, June 5, 2017)



## A COMPLEX SITUATION

We would need a systematic and in-depth analysis to decipher the complexity of the national and international causes, which have helped to plunge Venezuela into this chaos.

Here we limit ourselves to some considerations that, though not exhaustive, give the idea of the gravity of this moment.

*“... Following the fall of black gold prices, the country has collapsed in an economic chaos. Only in 2016 revenues for oil-derived products had fallen by 5,000% annually. Consequently, the strategic need to seek resources from sources that are alternative to the oil industry.”*

*«... In the Amazon area, concessions were made to Russian, Canadian, British, South African, Chinese, Iranian and Australian companies for the exploitation of territories that are rich in gold, silver, oil, iron, diamonds, coltan, uranium and all types of strategic resources ... There is the displacement of the original inhabitants ,who for centuries have populated these areas; and all this is only because of the greed that leads to the deliberate exploitation of subsoil resources» (in Dossier Caritas Italiana, “Unheeded. A people at the end of the rope ask for their fundamental rights”, [www.caritas.it](http://www.caritas.it) )*

*The Bolivarian revolution, launched by Hugo Chávez almost twenty years ago, is ending into a bloody chaos. Even the State Attorney General, Luisa Ortega Díaz, a high official appointed by the Chavian power, condemned the violence of the repression of the Bolivarian National Guard against the protests, causing dozens of casualties.*

*The proposal made by President Maduro for the election of a new Constituent Assembly was rejected by the opposition, which considers it merely as a “new coup attempt.” The enveloping of the political crisis, famine, and hyperinflation (which could reach 1600% according to the IMF in 2017) also caused the failure of the whole project of the Bolivarian socialism supported, at least until the last presidential elections, April 2013, by a majority, albeit limited, of the population.*

*Today, the social block, which followed the revolutionary leader who died 2013 and his social redemption promises, is in the minority. That is why Maduro - who, according to the polls, has now the 70% of the country against - has postponed the administrative and regional elections. And for this, along with the increasingly dramatic misery in the country, the opposition started the street manifestations.*

## THE NIGHT OF VENEZUELA IS NOT YET ENDED!

In fact, the current situation is qualitatively different from the recent past, because social freedoms are increasingly under siege, unusual repression, growing personal insecurity and lack of confidence in the judiciary: lack of protection of personal rights leaves the citizens



defenceless in front of a violence never seen before. The Venezuelan people, though unheeded, continue to protest!

The humanitarian crisis wraps Venezuela in a dramatic spiral. 82% of the population is in poverty, 52% of whom are in extreme poverty. The very lives of people are threatened by the lack of food necessary for the survival and of the availability of medicines for essential care.

This favours the rise of premature deaths, in particular those of the weaker population groups, especially children, the elderly and the sick. The mortality due to these causes is not reflected in the official figures available to the media because the interest is focused only on the number of deaths and injuries of the events occurring every day since April of this year. Actually, real figures are other. There are over 11,000 children who have died in 2016 for lack of medicines and maternal mortality has risen by almost 70%. (These are some data from the Caritas Venezuela Observatory, which emerge from a research on the nutritional status of children reported in the Caritas Dossier [www.caritas.it](http://www.caritas.it)).

## THE APPEALS OF THE CHURCH

*Although the Vatican, which in recent months led negotiations for a compromise between the government and the opposition, had to throw in the towel, judging “almost impossible” a new mediation.*

Even though outside and inside Venezuela, in front of the parties' stance and closure, Maduro's government and opposition parties, all seem to be resigned to the worst, the Church continues to call for dialogue, for violence end and for resumption of negotiations.

The **Bishops' Conference of Venezuela**, in a letter recently sent to President Maduro on July 8, 2017, called on the Government “to withdraw the proposal of a Constituent Assembly, to make possible the elections established by the Constitution”. Furthermore, to “recognize the autonomy of public powers, abandoning the inhumane repression of those who manifest in disagreement, dismantling armed groups,” and liberating “the people who have been deprived of their liberty for political reasons.”

Besides, the Bishops are calling “to address the very serious problems of the people and to allow the opening of a humanitarian channel so that medicines and food can reach the neediest.” They ask the National Armed Forces “to fulfil their duty of service to the people in respect and guarantee of the constitutional order”. From the political leadership, the Bishops demand commitment to the exclusive wellbeing of the people and never to their own interests, respecting the “democratic will of the Venezuelan people”. Educational and cultural institutions are asked to cooperate to the “collapse of the walls dividing the country,” encouraging “every effort in favour of peace and coexistence, founded on the law of fraternal love”. (The letter is found in: [www.caritasitaliana.it/caritasitaliana/allegati/7182/2Carta\\_de\\_la\\_CEV\\_a\\_Maduro.pdf](http://www.caritasitaliana.it/caritasitaliana/allegati/7182/2Carta_de_la_CEV_a_Maduro.pdf))



**Pope Francesco** himself on more than one occasion has launched appeals to the Government and to all the members of Venezuelan society:

*“In order to avoid any further form of violence, human rights are to be respected and solutions to the serious humanitarian, social, political and economic crisis that is exhausting the population are to be sought.” (Regina Coeli, 30 aprile 2017)*

And in view of Venezuela's Independence Day of July 5, he assured:

*“My prayers for this beloved nation and my closeness to the families who have lost their children in the streets. I call for the end to violence and for a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis. May Our Lady of Coromoto intercede for Venezuela!” (Angelus, 2 July 2017)*

And in a letter addressed to the Venezuelan episcopate on Friday, May 5, the Pontiff expressed his solidarity with the Bishops of Venezuela and his clear conviction:

*“That the serious problems of Venezuela can be solved if there is a will to build bridges and to seriously talk and respect the agreements reached ... I would like to encourage you not to let Venezuela's beloved children be overcome by mistrust and despair because these are evils that penetrate people's hearts when no future prospects are seen”.*

Our missionaries in Venezuela, in the telephone conversations we had and in the e-mail exchange, agreed to support the path of dialogue and negotiation as the only viable one because:

*“In the people, the will of a strong change is increasingly widespread, but we must follow the path of peace and democracy. Most people ask for a peaceful solution. But the human costs of this process are too high. The government must listen to people's cry. They must find an agreement. We do not know how much time we shall need in Venezuela to reconcile the population and to heal the wounds we have been inflicting on ourselves”.*

We, as Consolata missionaries, make it our own and present again the appeal of Pope Francesco, convinced that when all hope is silent, the only way out lies precisely in the search for consensual solutions.

## **SOLIDARITY WITH THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE**

Dear missionaries, friends, men and women of goodwill, by this message we want to express our solidarity with all the Venezuelan people and our closeness and affection to our missionaries through our remembering and prayer.

The situation of insecurity and uncertainty of Venezuela on its last rope, recalls that lived by the prophet Isaiah in one of the most difficult times of the history of the people of Israel. The holy city reduced to a cumulus of rubble, the more able and prepared people deported,



destruction and despair all around, silence and death reign: not a song, not a cry of joy, only sadness and tears.

The prophet is invited to contemplate the sprout of hope that emerges between the ruins and above all to trust the Lord for “*knowing how to strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees and say to those whose hearts are frightened: courage, fear not! Here is your God coming*” (Isaiah 35, 3-4)

Dear Venezuelan people, this prophecy of the prophet Isaiah, in the situation in which you find yourselves, would seem to be “an impossible dream”, yet whoever believes does not give up in the face of evil, he does not consider it inevitable because he knows that God is faithful and is personally involved in the history of his people.

And to you missionaries, we wish that the testimony of brotherly life, your commitment to the poor, can bring about the specificity of our missionary style:

“*Console, console my people, shout to Jerusalem that its slavery is over ...*” (Isaiah 40, 1-2).

Through you, the consolation of God may become a tender caress that will comfort and wipe the tears; rescuing those who are in despair, a ransom for the poor by raising them from the dust (1Sam 2: 8), changing the lament of many into dancing and their crying in a song of joy (Psalm 30, 12).

In this way, in you, people will be able to touch a God who really comforts because he frees them from all bondage.

By renewing our commitment to sustain you and to remember you in our prayer along with all the Venezuelan people, we greet you with the exhortation of our Blessed Founder:

«*Courage, therefore, supported by our prayers; courage in Domino, day by day, hour by hour. At the feet of our Most Holy Consolata I bless you with all my heart* » (see Lett., IX/1,

### **The General Government of the Consolata Missionaries**

Fr. Stefano Camerlengo  
Fr. Bholá James Lengarin  
Fr. Godfrey Portphal Alois Msumange  
Fr. Jaime Carlos Patias  
Fr. Antonio Rovelli



Rome, August 15, 2017

*Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary!*