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Venezuela Doesn't Deserve a Seat on the U.N. Security Council

By Editorial Board

The odds that Venezuela, once Latin America's richest country, will suffer a catastrophic economic collapse shortened significantly this month. Nicolás Maduro, the economically illiterate former bus driver who succeeded Hugo Chávez as president last year, rejected the advice of pragmatists proposing common-sense measures to rein in soaring inflation of more than 60 percent and crippling shortages of basic goods such as milk and toilet paper. Instead he gave a speech claiming that "our problems are the result of economic war waged by the opposition and private business."

Now Mr. Maduro's government is attempting to prove his point. It is pressing forward with the prosecution of several top opposition leaders, including Leopoldo López, the former mayor of a Caracas district who heads the more militant wing of anti-government forces. "Militant" is a relative term here: Earlier this year Mr. López and several allies called for peaceful street demonstrations under the slogan "the way out." The hope was they would create irresistible pressure for change, similar to the "people power" revolutions of Asia and Eastern Europe.

As [Human Rights Watch documented](#), the regime responded violently. More than 40 people were killed, and 1,700 were criminally charged. Some 70, including Mr. López, remain incarcerated. [Since voluntarily surrendering on Feb. 18](#), Mr. López has been held in isolation on a military base. Now he is undergoing a trial that can only be described as

farcical. The government claims that Mr. López is somehow responsible for violent clashes in Caracas, even though he was not present when they took place and had publicly called on his followers to remain peaceful. A judge has disallowed all but one of the more than 60 witnesses he called, while scheduling more than 100 for the prosecution. As The Post's [Nick Miroff recently reported](#), Mr. Maduro has already declared the trial's outcome: "He has to pay, and he will pay."

Average Venezuelans are already paying heavily for Mr. Maduro's practice of substituting political persecution for economic remedies. Now the question is whether he and his cronies will be held responsible for their behavior by outside powers with leverage, including the United States. The Obama administration has been resisting legislation that would provide for sanctions against leading members of the regime. In July, it offered the weaker measure of canceling the U.S. visas of some two dozen officials, without naming them.

It's time for more visible action. One opportunity is at the United Nations: Next month Venezuela will stand for a seat on the U.N. Security Council, where it would be able to advocate for allies such as Syria, Iran and Cuba. Though unopposed, the Maduro government must win the votes of two-thirds of the General Assembly in a secret ballot. The Obama administration could help itself and send a message to Mr. Maduro by rounding up the 65 votes needed to keep Venezuela off the Security Council.