

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PASSES BIPARTISAN RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN VENEZUELA***Calls for the Release of Venezuelan Political Prisoners*

Washington - Yesterday, the United States House of Representatives passed a bipartisan resolution H.Res.851, which expressed profound concern about the ongoing political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, and called for respect of constitutional and democratic processes in the country. The resolution also called for the release of the more than 85 political prisoners in the country, including opposition leaders Leopoldo López, Daniel Ceballos, and Antonio Ledezma.

Upon announcing the passage of the resolution, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27) said, “I am honored to stand alongside my South Florida colleague Debbie Wasserman Schultz . . . to condemn the misguided policies of Maduro’s corrupt regime while advocating for the release of all political prisoners, including U.S. citizens, and for the respect of democratic principles.”

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-23) added, “This resolution states in no uncertain terms that President Maduro’s shameful and rampant corruption in Venezuela must end. He has jailed political opponents, mismanaged the economy, and continued to refuse millions of Venezuelans’ calls for a referendum.”

Venezuela today is experiencing a profound crisis. Under President Nicolas Maduro, massive inflation and growing food scarcity have caused the government to resort to a food rationing system that has left even the middle class vulnerable to hunger. The deterioration of the country’s economy has led to a shortage of medicine and a rise in violent crimes. Given the increasingly difficult situation, the Venezuelan opposition has launched a campaign for a constitutional recall referendum on the Venezuelan presidency. A recent poll showed that 88% of Venezuelans want Nicolas Maduro’s presidency to be recalled.

The recall referendum includes three phases of signature collections and voting to recall the presidency. Should this recall referendum be completed before January 10, 2017, a new election for president will be held. Should the referendum be completed after January 10, 2017, President Maduro’s Vice-President will assume power and finish his term. The Government of Venezuela has been delaying the referendum as much as possible. The government-controlled National Electoral Council has been slow to implement the necessary steps for the recall referendum and recently put forward a timeline that extends past the January 10th deadline. This obvious delay runs contrary to the demands and constitutional rights of the Venezuelan people and so on September 1 this year, almost 1,000,000 Venezuelans took to the streets to protest. With the Government’s continued deferral of the process, the Venezuelan opposition announced yesterday that they will move ahead with the second phase of the recall referendum, without the support of the Government, on October 26, 27, and 28.

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