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One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

April 30, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We believe it is dangerous and shortsighted of the Trump Administration to pause U.S. funding for the life-saving work of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in Venezuela and throughout the Americas in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. President Trump's decision to halt funding for the World Health Organization (WHO) has impacted U.S. support for PAHO and could further harm the Venezuelan people who already have suffered greatly under Nicolás Maduro's rule. PAHO's work in Venezuela is more important now than ever, and we urge you to resume this funding immediately.

PAHO is a unique organization in that it is both the specialized health agency of the Inter-American System and the Regional Office for the Americas of the WHO. PAHO's U.S.-supported efforts in Venezuela have saved lives and prevented the spread of disease. As just one example, when measles returned to Venezuela, USAID provided \$3.4 million to PAHO that enabled it to vaccinate nine million Venezuelan children. As a result, measles cases in Venezuela declined by more than 90 percent from 5,800 in 2018 to less than 600 in 2019.

We were dismayed to learn that \$12 million in U.S. funding for PAHO to conduct diagnostics and contact tracing for COVID-19 in Venezuela and among Venezuelan migrants in Colombia is currently on hold. This is on top of \$43 million in 2019 U.S.-assessed contributions and \$65 million in 2020 contributions for PAHO's work throughout the region that have not yet been provided to the organization.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela created by Nicolás Maduro and his predecessor worsens by the day. Household surveys carried out by the Universidad Católica

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Andrés Bello show that the percentage of Venezuelans living in poverty increased from 48.4 percent in 2014 to 94 percent in 2018. In an April 2019 briefing to the U.N. Security Council, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock estimated that 7 million Venezuelans were in need of humanitarian assistance, with particular needs for pregnant and nursing women, those with chronic illnesses, indigenous people, migrants, children under five and individuals with disabilities. At the same time, Human Rights Watch and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health have documented how the country's health system is collapsing. Infant and maternal mortality rates have soared. Lacking even soap and running water, many hospitals were already unable to provide basic care before the pandemic. Due in large part to these dire conditions, as of February 2020, over 4.8 million Venezuelans had left the country, with the vast majority migrating to neighboring countries like Colombia.

PAHO has a long history in Venezuela and in supporting Venezuelan migrants throughout the region. It is uniquely suited to do the work it does in an extremely challenging environment and cannot easily be replaced by other organizations.

We urge you to stand with the Venezuelan people by immediately resuming U.S. funding for PAHO in Venezuela and throughout the Americas. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman



ALBIO SIRES
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Western
Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade