



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

July 7, 2016

His Excellency Ban Ki-moon
United Nations Secretary General
United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary General:

I respectfully write to ask that you issue a public statement urging Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to adhere to constitutional mechanisms in his country by not blocking efforts to hold a recall referendum this year. I applaud the statements you have made in favor of dialogue between the Venezuelan government and the opposition. With Venezuela in both economic and political turmoil, dialogue is essential. At the same time, I believe that it is critical to ensure that the rule of law is respected in Venezuela. A strong message from the United Nations on the referendum would send an important signal and would complement the recent statements by Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro.

Unfortunately, President Maduro and government agencies over which he exerts control – including the National Electoral Council (CNE) – have consistently put in place obstacles to stall the referendum from moving forward and to invalidate the will of the Venezuelan people. If President Maduro manages to delay the referendum until after January 10, 2017, a vote in favor of his removal would allow his Vice President to take office for the remainder of his term. It is imperative that both the letter and the spirit of Venezuela's constitution be respected so that a referendum can take place without politically-motivated delay and in the next few months.

In accordance with the country's constitution, one percent of the electorate in each Venezuelan state – or approximately 198,000 individuals – must sign the initial petition for the referendum to move forward. Some 1.95 million signatures were collected by the opposition, with 605,727 of these disqualified by the CNE. Venezuela's CNE now plans to begin a process to validate the remaining signatures before the next step of the process in which signatures from 20 percent of registered voters need to be collected for an actual referendum to take place. A referendum would then need to be approved by more than the number of votes President Maduro

received when he was elected. I believe that these next steps must take place expeditiously, fairly and in accordance with the country's constitution.

Your voice will be crucial in urging the Venezuelan government to respect the letter and spirit of their constitution by allowing a recall referendum to take place in an expeditious manner.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs