



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

## *Fact Sheet:* **Floods in Venezuela**

### **Background**

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Extreme weather patterns have caused devastating floods across the region of Latin America, particularly in Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela.

The heaviest rains in 40 years hit Venezuela in early November killing 35 people, leaving 130,000 people homeless, infrastructure badly damaged and agricultural production severely impacted.

Over 40% of Venezuelan territory has been affected and a number of states including Vargas, Miranda, Falcon and the Capital District of Caracas have declared a state of emergency. Education had to be suspended in 11 out of Venezuela's 23 states to ensure the safety of children.

### **Response of the Venezuelan government**

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#### Immediate aftermath

In the immediate aftermath of the floods, the National Bolivarian Armed Forces and other state entities were deployed to evacuate affected communities and set up over 900 temporary refuges providing food, shelter and medical assistance for those left homeless.

Almost 3,000 doctors have been sent to the affected areas to ensure that water-borne diseases and epidemics are prevented. In addition, 140 psychologists have also been

deployed across the country to support families. Over one thousand pregnant women in temporary refuges across the country are being closely monitored with those most at risk being sent to medical centres.

President Chavez took the unprecedented step of opening up Miraflores Palace to 26 families that had been left homeless and called on all Venezuelans, including ministers, governors and mayors, to open their homes to those affected by the floods.

The government has also been collaborating with the National Federation of Hotels to ensure that the many empty hotel rooms help to temporarily house those made homeless.

Venezuela's Ministry of Science and Technology informed residents of Falcon state, one of the worst hit areas, that all users of Movilnet cell phone services received a one-off phone credit of 25 bolivars and 50 free text messages to communicate with their families.

#### Long-term strategy

To deal with the long term consequences of the floods, the Venezuelan government has set up a \$2.3 billion (10 billion bolivars) special fund for those affected.<sup>1</sup> The funds, drawn from the National Reserve Fund, will be used to aid "an integral reconstruction plan" for every community impacted by the rains.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5842>



## Enabling Law

In late December 2010, Venezuela's National Assembly approved an Enabling Law that will allow President Chávez to enact decrees to bring rapid relief to the tens of thousands of Venezuelans that have been left without homes, jobs and access to basic services.

The measure will allow the government to enact laws in specific response to the devastation caused by the floods in key areas such as infrastructure, transportation, housing and public services.

The Enabling Law is a measure permitted under the Venezuelan Constitution and concedes powers to the Executive Branch for a determined period of time to implement critical policies which would otherwise take too long to enact due to bureaucratic obstacles. However, all laws enacted by the president are open to a public referendum if at least five percent of voters request one. Additionally, the National Assembly can change or rescind decree laws at any point by majority vote.

The need to act quickly and decisively in response to natural disasters was tragically illustrated in the 1999 floods in the state of Vargas in which tens of thousands of people died (roughly 10% of the state's population). Following the 1999 tragedy, the Venezuelan government has strengthened its disaster relief and emergency response strategies which has dramatically boosted the capacity to save lives.

## Measures to be taken under Enabling Law:

### Housing:

Venezuela's housing programme is to be accelerated under the Enabling Law to deal with the chronic shortage of suitable housing. The government has earmarked \$1 billion USD for investment in new housing this year with the aim of creating "at least 25 thousand homes."<sup>2</sup> In addition to this, President Chavez announced 9<sup>th</sup> of January that a further \$500 million recovered from frozen U.S accounts will be also be used to construct housing.<sup>3</sup>

### Agriculture:

It is estimated that 35% to 40% of the country's plantain crop, one of Venezuela's most important staple foods, has been damaged as a result of rains and some 10% of milk and meat production in the area south of Lake Maracaibo has also been lost.

After the rains that affected large areas of Venezuela's farmlands, the government is set to implement a plan to boost agricultural output.

More than 1,500 small farmers from the area south of Lake Maracaibo in the states of Merida and Zulia will be the beneficiaries of a new government plan to recover underutilized farm and rebuild the agricultural productivity of the zone. Venezuela's Minister of

<sup>2</sup> <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5685>

<sup>3</sup> <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5928>



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Agriculture and Land, Juan Carlos Loyo, announced on Monday that the government will redistribute over 20,000 hectares (49,420 acres) of land formerly belonging to 43 massive estates.<sup>4</sup>

As well as improving agricultural output, the initiative will also provide job opportunities and address the stark inequality of land ownership in the region where 40% of the land is owned by 4% of the population.

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[www.embavenez-uk.org](http://www.embavenez-uk.org)

### Facts and figures

- 130,000 people left homeless as a result of floods
- 40% Venezuelan territory affected
- 900 temporary refuges set up to house displaced families.
- Over 2,700 doctors and 140 psychologists deployed to affected areas
- \$2.3 billion fund for reconstruction

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<sup>4</sup> <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5869>