



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

Fact Sheet: **Dramatic Improvement in Women's Rights in Venezuela**

Background

Venezuela has a long history of women's struggles, and since 1999, efforts to elevate the status of women and provide guarantees for women's rights have become an integral part of the country's Bolivarian Revolution.

As a result, women have assumed unprecedented leadership roles in politics at national and local levels, and are benefitting from new laws and policies aimed at providing important protections and tools for empowerment.

Women's participation in the workforce has increased by 20 % over the past ten years. Venezuela has South America's smallest wage gap based on gender and the third smallest gap in the Western Hemisphere. Evidence of this progress is the fact that Venezuela has already achieved the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women.¹

Progress on women's rights under previous governments was often stunted. For example, a Ministry for Women's Development was founded in 1979 and later done away with, and an equal opportunity law was passed in 1993 but never enacted.

After President Hugo Chávez was elected with a mandate to create a new national

constitution, women's organizations jumped at the chance to become involved in drafting that document. Their input had a significant impact on the 1999 constitution, which uses gender-neutral language and contains several articles that deal with issues related to women. For example, it bans discrimination on the basis of sex, guarantees family planning services and assistance for mothers, protects equality between spouses, and extends social security benefits to housewives.² In fact, Venezuela's 1999 constitution is the first constitution in

Latin America that recognises housework as an economically productive activity, entitling houseworkers to social security and other benefits. (Article 88).

Over time, more laws have been enacted to benefit women, such as the 2007 Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence. It defines 19 forms of violence against women, including psychological violence and media violence.³

The law has been praised by women's rights activists in Venezuela, who continue to work to ensure its full implementation. Also important in this regard is the new National Office for the Defense of Women, established under the Attorney General's Office in 2011.

***“ without the
Venezuelan women
there would be no
authentic revolution.”
President Chavez***

²www.venezuelaemb.or.kr/english/ConstitutionoftheBolivarianingles.pdf

³www.minmujer.gob.ve/images/pdf/ley%20organica.pdf

¹ <http://www.avn.info.ve/node/47151>



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This office employs 43 public prosecutors in 15 offices nationwide.⁴

Several other pieces of federal legislation include provisions that help protect women, such as the 2001 Law on Land and Agricultural Development, which allows women to qualify as heads of household, to lead agricultural projects, and hold preferential property rights. President Chávez has also opened all branches of the armed forces to women.

Political participation

Women's political participation has grown enormously under the Bolivarian Revolution. As recently as the 1960s, there were no female ministers in Venezuela, and in subsequent decades they remained scarce. Now, women head more than one third of the government ministries. They have also headed four out of five of the branches of government – all but the executive. Five out of six of the directors of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice are women, as are 14 of the 32 elected magistrates. Meanwhile, the number of female lawmakers in Venezuela has roughly tripled in roughly a decade. In 1997, under the previous administration, less than six percent of lawmakers were women, while in recent years, women have occupied 16 to 19 percent of seats in the National Assembly.⁵

Women's involvement in local politics has also been very impressive. Many women serve as state governors, comptrollers, legislators, and mayors. In local communal councils, they often comprise 70 percent of members. This

⁴ . <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/6496>

⁵ http://www.idea.int/publications/30_years_of_democracy/index.cf

structural transformation is complemented by changes to other institutions in Venezuela.

Institutional progress

Venezuela's Ministry for Women was founded in 2008 under the National Institute of Women (INAMUJER). Then, on March 8 – International Women's Day – in 2009, it was given budgetary autonomy and its name was changed to the Ministry for Women and Gender Equality. Its mandate is to promote policies favorable to women, and projects have included promoting the development of women's committees in local community councils, and facilitating the reporting of domestic abuse.

The economic rights of women are also being defended in new ways under the Chávez government. Since 2001, the Women's Development Bank (BanMujer) has provided free financial services, microcredits and training to women particularly in low-income sectors, contributing to a massive reduction in poverty. Nora Castaneda, the President of Banmujer made clear that the objective of the institution would be to “create a caring economy at the service of human beings”. In a decade, BanMujer has conducted over 16,000 training sessions in which over 178,000 Venezuelan citizens have participated.⁶

BanMujer has helped create 20,000 jobs since its founding and funded more than 1,200 projects related to agricultural production, food sovereignty, and nutrition.⁷ For further

⁶http://www.minmujer.gob.ve/banmujer/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49:bntalleres&catid=3:noticias&Itemid=5

⁷ <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/6531>



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information on Banmujer see the Venezuelan Embassy Factsheet: http://www.embavenez-uk.org/pdf/fs_Banmujer.pdf

Social safety nets

Because women are particularly vulnerable to poverty, several of the state-funded social programs developed by the Chávez government are designed specifically to respond to their needs and provide appropriate safety nets. Those safety nets include not just financial assistance, but also training, medical care, and other essential services. “Sons of Venezuela” offers funds to mothers of young children living in extreme poverty and family planning services to women of all ages. Families in which parents are unemployed or earning less than minimum wage receive about \$100 per month per child for up to three children. These benefits are also given to teenage mothers and disabled dependents of any age.⁸ As of March 2012, some 20,000 families had already registered with the program.⁹

“Mission Jesus Child” assists mothers in all stages of pregnancy and during childbirth at maternal and children’s care facilities in communities that lack hospitals. As of January 2012, it has opened 7 maternity centers and 17

⁸ 1. <http://venezuela-us.org/2011/11/28/venezuelan-government-sets-aside-2-3-million-for-children-in-poverty/>

⁹ . <http://venezuela-us.org/2012/03/05/20000-venezuelan-families-receiving-aid-through-the-program-%E2%80%9Csons-of-venezuela%E2%80%9D/>

children’s care centers, some of them equipped with breast milk banks and other innovative services.¹⁰

“Mothers of the Neighborhood” has provided over 90,000 Venezuelan women living in extreme poverty with economic aid since 2006. As of late 2011, it had a total investment of \$348.8 million.¹¹

Women in Venezuela are also benefitting from other social missions that provide adequate housing, affordable basic foods, free health care, education, and job training. By universalizing access to these services, the government is helping repay a social debt to sectors that were marginalized for centuries – not only women, but also indigenous peoples, Afro-Venezuelans, small farmers, migrants, and others. This policy of putting human beings first has been achieved through sovereignty over the oil industry. By reinvesting oil profits in human development, Venezuela has achieved dramatic reductions in poverty and inequality.¹²

In conclusion, Venezuela has a lot to celebrate on International Women’s Day. From increased rates of political participation among women, to new laws in defense of women and institutions designed to enforce those laws, to social missions helping to end poverty and inequality, the Bolivarian Revolution has already brought numerous

¹⁰ . <http://venezuela-us.org/2012/02/16/venezuelan-social-program-for-children-opens-17-shelters/>

¹¹ <http://venezuela-us.org/2011/11/17/over-800000-venezuelans-have-benefitted-from-social-missions-%E2%80%9Ccribas%E2%80%9D-and-%E2%80%9Cmadres-del-barrio%E2%80%9D/>

¹² . http://venezuela-us.org/live/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Presentaci%C3%B3n-Dr-Eljuri_ingles.pdf



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achievements in the struggle for women's rights.

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