



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale

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To all National Councils of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS)

Dear brothers and sisters,

On behalf of the Presence in the World Commission of the CIOFS Presidency, we wish to call your attention to the situation that Venezuela is currently experiencing. We are referring specifically to the peaceful protests that have been organized since last February 12th, and to the grave incidents that have unfolded since, with the sad result of people being arrested, wounded, and killed, mostly among very young people.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Venezuela has issued a document, which states that, “*Facing the grave challenges of our country in the struggle against personal insecurity and social violence and also the serious economic problems that affect us all, the protest against the government is both legitimate and constitutional, but it has to be peaceful*”. As a matter of fact, citizens have come out to protest for a number of reasons, such as: violence in the country, which has resulted in 24,763 killings during 2013 – a homicide rate of 79 per 100,000 inhabitants; inflation, which has become the highest in the world; food shortage, including even toilet paper, which has resulted in long lines of consumers in front of supermarkets and other stores. National health is also under threat due to poorly equipped and even abandoned hospitals, and doctors that cannot properly treat patients because of the lack of basic medicines. Due to this unacceptable situation, people have taken their protest to the streets in a peaceful manner, and the government, in turn, has responded by utilizing war weapons and paramilitary groups, shooting at close range at protesters. An intense atmosphere of rebellion has the country on the verge of total collapse since the situation could get out of control at any moment. The mass media has been distorting the facts since, for example, the majority of the independent television and radio stations have been either suspended or expropriated by the Government.

1. <http://www.cev.org.ve/index.php/noticias-3/56-comunicado-cev-construir-la-paz-y-evitar-la-violencia>

In order to save lives and avoid a human catastrophe, we are making an urgent call to our brothers and sisters of the OFS to act on their commitment “*to create worthy conditions of life for all and to work for the freedom of all people.*” (GGCC 18.3) We are calling for worldwide support of the Venezuelan people, which is calling for justice and peace while seeking full respect of their human rights. Let us support the exhortation that the Commission of Justice and Peace of the Bishops Conference of Venezuela has issued in their communiqué: “*We have to be witness to the truth*” rejecting government politics that, instead of guaranteeing social peace, are using violence indiscriminately, thus violating human dignity.

In view of all of these facts, we also formally propose that you ask the National Catholic Conference of Bishops of your own country, as well as to the Peace and Justice Commissions of the Franciscan Family, to come forth and speak out with regards to the situation in Venezuela.

We commend ourselves to our Lord and to the most blessed Virgin of Coromoto, patroness of Venezuela, and ask them to heed our prayers for the reestablishment of justice and governance in Venezuela, with full respect for human rights. We invite you to collaborate efficiently in this endeavor. “*They should take up the challenges and accept the responsibilities that this reflection will lead them to discover*” (Const. 14.1)

Peace and all good,

Attilio and Rosa Galimberti.
Coordinators
Presence in the World Commission of the
CIOFS Presidency