

Statement on Venezuela by the Conference of Bishops, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) stands with the people of Venezuela during the current multifaceted crisis within their nation and holds them up in prayer. We also express our concern about the consequences of this crisis as already felt in neighboring countries as well as its impact more widely on international peace and security.

We fervently support our companion church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela (IELV) and the call from the Vice-President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for Latin America and the Caribbean Region “for a negotiated, peacefully constructed resolution” of the crisis. (Letter from the Rev. Dr. Nestor Paulo Friedrich to IELV Pastor President the Rev. Gerardo Hands, January 31, 2019). In that regard, and in light of a history of U.S military interventions in Latin America, we are concerned about the U.S. Administration’s statements which do not rule out possible military options. The hazards of “external interference, including threat of intervention and military action” and benefits of utilizing “the existing multilateral UN and Organization of the American States mechanisms to peacefully address the current crisis in the country” and “provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela” were also raised in an LWF statement issued on January 29, 2019 which we support.

In view of the crisis, the ELCA Conference of Bishops joins the LWF in calling on all parties to respect internationally-recognized human rights, in calling for a halt to the deportation of Venezuelans currently in the U.S and in calling for presidential elections in Venezuela as quickly as possible, under international supervision, with new electoral authorities, and overseen by a neutral government.

We affirm the ways that our church has already been assisting Venezuelans within and outside their country through our ELCA International Disaster Fund, including the following support offered:

- to the Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en Venezuela (IELV) to provide food at the children’s home, pre-school and food pantries at IELV congregations;
- to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) in Argentina and Uruguay to assist migrant families arriving in Posadas, Misiones, Argentina from Venezuela;
- to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia (IELCO) to create a Humanitarian Assistance Center for Venezuelan migrants in Colombia;
- to Educación Popular en Salud – EPES (Popular Education in Health) to provide humanitarian assistance in Health to Venezuelan immigrants in Chile;
- to the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) to respond to the Venezuelan Migration Crisis in Colombia;
- to the LWF-World Service office in Colombia to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to Venezuelan migrants in Saravena-Arauca settlements; and
- to Lutheran World Relief (LWR) in Peru to assist in providing humanitarian assistance to and advocating for migrant rights for Venezuelans in Peru in partnership with Iglesia Luterana del Peru (ILP).

We also affirm with gratitude the other significant work being done by our companion churches and their partners in Colombia, Peru, Chile and Argentina as they receive and support refugees from Venezuela.

Cognizant of Venezuela’s location in the Caribbean Basin, we remember our **Churchwide Blueprint for Action in Central America and the Caribbean** (*Adopted by the ELCA Church Council in 1990*) which calls us

to: "... Work for justice and peace, including supporting a negotiated solution to the conflicts, ending all U.S. war-related aid to the region, and advocating for unrestricted humanitarian assistance..."

ELCA Conference of Bishops, March 2019