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## **Venezuela: New president must review policies affecting key human rights issues**

The winner of Venezuela's presidential elections on April 14 must implement policies that ensure the full protection of human rights in the country, Amnesty International said today.

"Even though there has been some important human rights progress in Venezuela - particularly in terms of economic and social rights for the most vulnerable sectors - there are significant challenges ahead for the new president if the country is to step up to its full responsibilities," said Guadalupe Marengo, Amnesty International's Americas Programme Director.

In a letter sent to all the presidential candidates, Amnesty International highlighted the urgency for Venezuela to rescind its withdrawal from the American Convention on Human Rights and, consequently, the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

"Failure to respect the American Convention on Human Rights is an affront to Venezuela's victims of human rights who are denied the possibility of turning to this important body of international legal protection," said Marengo. "The new Venezuelan President must revert this decision as soon as possible."

Amnesty International also called on the new government to address the continued lack of security that affects citizens in the country's major cities.

The organization said that every security policy must respect human rights.

"The authorities should implement a policy of arms and ammunition control, investigate the numerous allegations of human rights abuses committed by security forces and establish a care programme for the families of victims and survivors of violence," said Marengo.

The organization also stated that the new government must address problems in Venezuela's detention centres.

"Many prisons are overcrowded and conditions are very poor, with frequent clashes between different groups of prisoners", said Marengo. "There is much to be done in this area which includes addressing the speed of the judicial system so that cases can be brought to trial more quickly, helping reduce over-crowding in prisons."

Another issue of great importance to Amnesty International is the respect for freedom of expression and association.

"Threats and intimidation against people who express views against the government can be commonplace in Venezuela and undermine the rights of its citizens. This situation must change."

Women's rights also need to be addressed in Venezuela where there is a lack of regulatory implementation of the law and shelters for women who have been victims of violence even though the National Assembly passed an Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence six years ago.

"It is essential that the successful candidate prioritizes plans for the protection and promotion of human rights, particularly those priorities identified by Amnesty International. Some straightforward policy changes could make a huge difference in peoples' lives and we will be calling on the new government to make this difference possible," said Guadalupe Marengo, Amnesty International's Americas Programme Director.

### **Background Information:**

Presidential elections are due to be held in Venezuela on 14 April in order to elect the successor for President Hugo Chávez, who died on 5 March. Amnesty International sent a letter to all the candidates

running for Venezuela Presidency on March 20. The full letter is available at <http://www.amnesty.org/es/library/info/AMR53/004/2013/es>.