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Venezuela's withdrawal from regional human rights instrument is a serious setback

Venezuela must immediately reverse its decision to withdraw from the American Convention on Human Rights and make a commitment to truly protect all individuals, Amnesty International said today.

The Venezuelan government's decision will take effect on 10 September. The withdrawal will leave Venezuelan citizens without the protection of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

"This decision is an insult to the victims of human rights violations and places future generations of Venezuelans at risk. What's more, it goes against Venezuela's constitution, which guarantees access to international bodies to seek protection of their human rights," said Guadalupe Marengo, Deputy Director of the Americas Programme at Amnesty International.

"The Venezuelan government's attitude is highly contradictory. On the one hand it is promoting universal ratification of the American Convention on Human Rights and urging other countries to ratify this instrument while, on the other, it is withdrawing from it and denying its inhabitants access to the protection of one of its bodies."

The regional and international human rights protection systems were set up to provide everyone with an external body that they could turn to if they were unable to obtain justice and reparation for human rights violations within their own countries.

Venezuela recently supported a resolution urging members of the Organization of American States to ratify all regional human rights instruments, in particular the American Convention. Venezuela has also supported similar initiatives at the level of UNASUR and MERCOSUR.

"Over the years, through the Inter-American Commission and Court, the inter-American human rights system has represented the only possible way of obtaining justice and reparation for thousands of victims and their families across the continent. To deprive Venezuelans of the option of turning to the Court is scandalous," said Guadalupe Marengo.

"Human rights are the cornerstone of the rule of law and form an essential instrument with which states can ensure that all people are able to live in dignity, regardless of their gender, race, ethnic origin or any other such criteria. We urge the Venezuelan authorities to do everything in their power to guarantee these rights."

Further information

On 10 September 2012, Venezuela presented a note to the Secretary General of the Organization of American States informing him of its decision to withdraw from the American Convention on Human Rights.

Venezuela's withdrawal does not mean that the country no longer forms part of the Inter-American System, because the Inter-American Commission, as a principal organ of the organization, will still be able to monitor Venezuela's compliance with its human rights obligations. Venezuelan citizens will therefore be able to continue to send petitions to this body when their rights are not being recognized or protected inside the country.

This decision will, however, limit access to the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court for cases that arise after 10 September 2013.