



February 13, 2024.

**President Joseph R. Biden**  
**The White House**  
**1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW**  
**Washington, DC 20500**

Dear President Biden:

How do democracies perish? Political scientists write books and analyze how that happens. Nicolás Maduro has shown the world how to murder one in slow motion since 2013, and he now intends to bury the last remnants of democracy in Venezuela by disbarring María Corina Machado from the electoral ballot in 2024.

We write to you because your Administration, along with the UK, the EU and Canada, backed the Venezuelan Barbados agreement of October 17, 2023, that recognizes and respects “*the right of each political actor to choose their candidate for the presidential elections freely and in accordance with their internal mechanisms*”. Furthermore, your government engaged in good faith bilateral discussions with the Maduro regime, in Qatar, that led to the release of its indicted treasurer Alex Saab from a US jail, the deportation of Venezuelans that had fled the dictatorship and were returned to the regime, as well as the relaxation of oil sanctions. These steps were supposed to lead to a democratic election, where the regime would face off against the chosen opposition candidate.

On October 22, 2023, millions of Venezuelans defied the tyranny and elected Machado as their presidential candidate with over 92% of the votes. After that, your government publically demanded the “*expedited reinstatement*” of opposition candidates and announced that there would be a “*snapback*” of sanctions if this did not occur. The opposition candidacy today is one, and only one, the brilliant, unbreakable, steadfast Machado.

In a surreal inversion of democratic values Maduro’s judicial guillotine now wants to take Machado off the ballot, for failing to declare unused congressional lunch vouchers (cesta-tickets) ten years ago, plus other trumped up charges that were never adjudicated through the judicial route, violated due process and never allowed her to exercise her basic rights to defense. It is unfathomable that this pseudo-judicial lynching can be ordered by a man who himself should be disbarred, as he is under investigation for crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court (ICC), is responsible for gross human rights violations documented by UN investigative organizations, and has a \$US 15-million-dollar bounty on his head issued by your country’s security organizations.

Mr. President, what Venezuelans -and democrats everywhere- reject is a Maduro coronation by excluding the only candidate that leads him in the polls by at least a 5:1 margin. As the European Parliament just declared last week the only acceptable, internationally recognized, election is one with Machado on the ballot. Nothing less will suffice. Anything else will eviscerate freedom and vanquish democracy forever in that country.

Mr. President, we ask your government to consider four critical elements, in the next few weeks, that will determine the future of Venezuela.



GRUPO  
LIBERTAD Y  
DEMOCRACIA

- 1) The US election will take place later this year, around the same time as the one in Venezuela. It is clear your name will be on the ballot as the Democratic nominee, as you are handily prevailing in your party primaries. Machado, under a dictatorship, without access to TV or free media, barred from boarding domestic flights, with her team subject to withering persecution and physical intimidation, was elected in opposition primaries with unprecedented support. You will be on the ballot in your country. Machado has to be on the ballot in Venezuela.
- 2) The world needs Venezuela as a reliable energy supplier for global markets again; for it to cease to expel millions of its citizens, many ending up in the USA; and for this great nation to terminate its role as a regional Cuban/Russian/Iranian enclave, as a Hamas and Hezbollah haven, and as a sanctuary for the remnants of the FARC and ELN guerrillas. The only way for Venezuela to increase its oil production, to reduce the flow of outbound migration while generating conditions for its people to return home, and to free itself from nefarious foreign influences, is to change course in the 2024 presidential elections. The only and last hope for that change is Machado on the ballot.
- 3) The future of our Inter-American Democratic Charter, signed on that tragic 9/11 of 2001 which will live in infamy forever, depends squarely on the denouement of the situation in Venezuela. The EU and our region are the only ones that require democracy to qualify for regional membership, with Cuba being the sole exception at the turn of the century in the Americas. Unfortunately, Nicaragua became the second full-blown regional dictatorship in 2021, when Ortega jailed all viable opposition leaders, ruthlessly hounded the Catholic Church and established a nepotistic tyranny. Maduro intends to set up a third Cuba. So, the only way to prevent this tragedy, free Venezuela in 2024, liberate Nicaragua and Cuba later and fully live up to our hemispheric democratic commitment, is to guarantee that Machado is on the ballot.
- 4) Some critics say that sanctions and pressure did not work in Venezuela. We beg to differ. The Maduro regime desperately needs economic sanctions lifted to steal even more money; the personal sanctions removed to enjoy the proceeds from their plundering with impunity; their multi-million dollar bounties eliminated to pretend they are “government officials”, and not members of a narco-linked criminal conglomerate; the ICC investigation stopped to avoid ending up in a cold cell in The Hague, or a warm hammock in Cuba; and to steal the upcoming election, with a patsy opponent, to obtain international recognition for Maduro as the democrat he is not, nor will ever be. That is the regime’s motivation, that is the leverage that your government has, that is why Maduro agreed in Barbados to hold elections with the candidate freely chosen by the opposition. Now his regime broke its international pledge, is openly mocking your government and is stalling for time to later proceed to obliterate democracy. Sir, we respectfully note that April is way too late to act, the time to save Venezuela is now, so we ask you to fully engage the international democratic community, and the silently complicit Latin American governments, to get Machado on the ballot.

Mr. President, we fully realize you are dealing with extremely perilous worldwide circumstances, including the Middle East powder keg and Russia’s blatant violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. These complex problems



do not have short-term solutions. In Venezuela, there is a cut and-dried issue that will be defined over the next few weeks: without Machado on the ballot it will become the third full regional dictatorship, years will be spent debating how we lost it and how we let it devolve into a permanent tyrannical disgrace; or, with Machado on the ballot, her nation will finally live up to its historical moniker as the “land of grace”.

How can we be certain of this? Because many of us closely follow events in this brotherly nation, have visited several times and have witnessed how Venezuelans keep fighting for freedom against killings, torture, incarceration, blackmail and unimaginable brutality. They have proven time and again they are willing to withstand exile, jail and even die on their feet, rather than subserviently kneel to the autocracy.

On October 2023, days after the Barbados commitment became public, completely aware of its significance and justifiably full of hope, they came out in droves, defying the regime once more and overpoweringly elected Machado as the opposition’s presidential candidate. Venezuelans showed the world why in their anthem they proudly sing: “*Glory to the brave people, who shook off the yoke*”. We ask you to do everything in your power to honor these brave people and work to assure Machado is on the ballot, so that with her resolute nation by her side, she can finally shake off the dictatorial yoke once and for all.

We close this letter with a painfully deep regret. Sebastián Piñera, two times President of Chile, founded and led our group “Libertad y Democracia” of former government leaders. On February 5<sup>th</sup> he convened a long Zoom call with many of us, and María Corina Machado, to listen to her and then discuss internally how we could reach and mobilize members of the international community to best help address the consequential challenges that Venezuela is facing. On February 6<sup>th</sup> Sebastián made phone calls and exchanged messages with some of us around noon time; later, at 12:46 pm (Chile time), he suggested we prepare a draft of this letter to you, Mr. President, so we could share it and review it “ASAP”. Tragically, he passed away in a helicopter crash two hours after what will be his last international initiative and final message to us.

Chile lost a great historical leader, his beloved family its irreplaceable linchpin, regional democracy one of its fiercest defenders, our group lost its leader and, regretfully, this letter lacks his signature. We have done our best to capture what President Piñera would have written about an issue he was passionate about, we have certainly fallen short, but in his name and on behalf of the people of Venezuela yearning to be free, we ask for your help at this fateful hour for Latin America democracy.

Sincerely,



Former Presidents and members of the group “Libertad y Democracia”:

Mario Abdo Benítez, Former President of Paraguay

Jeanine Áñez Chávez, Former Constitutional President of Bolivia

José María Aznar, Former President of Spain

Felipe Calderón, Former President of Mexico

Rafael Calderón, Former President of Costa Rica

Iván Duque, Former President of Colombia

Luis Fortuño, Former Governor of Puerto Rico

Juan Guaidó, Former Interim President of Venezuela

Oswaldo Hurtado, Former President of Ecuador

Guillermo Lasso, Former President of Ecuador

Mauricio Macri, Former President of Argentina

Jamil Mahuad, Former President of Ecuador

Mireya Moscoso, Former President of the Republic of Panama

Jorge Tuto Quiroga, Former President of Bolivia

Mariano Rajoy, Former President of Spain

Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, Former President of Costa Rica