

# national lawyers guild

*"An organization of lawyers, law students, legal workers, and jailhouse lawyers... in the service of the people, to the end that human rights shall be regarded as more sacred than property interests." Preamble to the NLG Constitution*

May 12, 2019

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cc: All members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate

The undersigned write to condemn the violations of law which are occurring at the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington D.C. and to demand immediate action be taken. Prior to April 25, 2019, a group of peace activists were invited to the Embassy by the government of Venezuela – recognized as such by the United Nations - and continue to be lawfully on the premises. Nonetheless, the United States government, through various law enforcement agencies, have condoned and protected violent opponents in support of an attempted siege of the Embassy. In so doing, the U.S. government is creating a dangerous precedent for diplomatic relations with all nations. These actions are not only illegal, but they put embassies around the world at risk.

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It has been no secret that the United States government has been interfering in the internal affairs of Venezuela, openly supporting "regime change" and the promotion of a coup d'état. Regardless of differing opinions of the Maduro government, the U.S. government's failed attempt at an orchestrated coup in Caracas is now being directed at the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in Washington D.C. Secret Service agents, tasked to protect the inviolability of foreign embassies under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, are currently permitting violent opposition demonstrators to physically attack the Embassy, assault the peaceful invitees and prevent them from entering the Embassy with supplies of food and water. Video footage discloses multiple and on-going episodes of mob violence, including physical assaults, theft of food supplies, and the hurling of racist, sexist and homophobic slurs at those expressing to support the peace activists inside the Embassy. The president of Veterans for Peace was tackled, bloodied and arrested by Secret Service agents to prevent him from delivering food to the invitees. This week, apparently at the behest of the U.S. State Department and with no notice or due process as required by law, the utility company Pepco cut off electricity to the Embassy.

U.S. law enforcement authorities, including the Secret Service, have allowed the mob outside the Embassy to encircle the building with tents and canopies and place sentinels 24 hours a day at the doors to physically block food from entering the building. They have attempted to break the Embassy doors down or drill through them and have allowed the mob to paper over the outside windows so that those inside cannot see out and protect themselves from attack. Repeatedly, members of the violent opposition have been allowed to break into the building and cause destruction and damage to Embassy property, windows and doorways, as well as threatening the persons inside with death and rape. The Secret Service has refused to arrest these persons even though they have been directly apprehended undertaking these unlawful acts. The refusal to arrest, and the immediate release of these violent persons back into the surrounding mob, is emboldening violent actions. On May 12, 2019, at 3:15 a.m. and again at 12:45 p.m. there were two more attempted break-ins. Despite these actions occurring in front of law enforcement, police refuse to act to protect the diplomatic compound, arrest, or even move the violent offenders away from direct proximity.

The United States' failure to provide guarantees of security and protection to diplomatic personnel, the Embassy and its guests is in clear violation of the most basic tenets of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, in particular Articles 22 and 45, which was ratified by the United States in 1972. It is well-established law that the people inside the premises of an Embassy, the Embassy's property and its archives are covered by the Vienna Convention.

The United States, by its actions towards regime change and threats of violence against Venezuela, also violates Article 2.4 of the United Nations Charter which was ratified in 1945 and which is binding upon all members states.

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The contempt shown by the Trump Administration for these principles and for international law puts at risk the entire system of diplomatic relations which could have a reverberating effect in nations throughout the world.

The undersigned demand that the United States immediately cease its on-going state-sponsored assault and illegal intervention in Venezuela and against its government, which continues to be recognized by the United Nations and the majority of the world. We demand that local and federal law enforcement immediately refrain from exposing the peaceful invitees and their supporters inside and outside the Embassy to harm in violation of their fundamental human rights.

Signed,

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Elena Cohen, President, National Lawyers Guild

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