

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 16, 2023

The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Janet L. Yellen
Secretary of Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Yellen,

We write to express our support for the Biden administration's ongoing diplomatic efforts to forge a negotiated solution to resolve Venezuela's political and humanitarian crisis, including your decision to provide limited sanctions relief in response to the electoral agreement reached between the democratic opposition's Unitary Platform and the Maduro regime in Barbados on October 17. The decision to provide such sanctions relief is consistent with our long-standing belief that U.S. sanctions are most effective when we use them as a tool to prompt changes that advance U.S. national interests. Our message is clear: free and fair elections in which all candidates are able to participate provide the best pathway for Venezuelans to determine their future.

At the same time, though, we are aware of the Maduro regime's failure to honor past commitments and the credible accusations of its involvement in crimes against humanity. To that end, we urge you to reimpose sanctions absent concrete steps by the regime to implement the Barbados agreement. Consistent with the agreement, the Maduro regime must also make additional progress on human rights issues, including taking steps to release, by the end of November, opposition figures and the three wrongfully detained Americans held in the country: Eyvin Hernandez, Jerrel Kenemore, and Joseph Ryan Cristella.

If fully implemented, the agreement between the Unitary Platform and the Maduro regime will help lay the groundwork for more competitive elections in Venezuela next year. Under the agreement, the Maduro regime has committed to hold presidential elections in the second half of 2024, respect the opposition's ability to choose its own candidates, invite independent international election observers, update the electoral registry, and ensure equal access to the media by all candidates. Given the breakdown of past negotiations with the Maduro regime, the

agreement reached in Barbados represents a diplomatic breakthrough, one that was only made possible through the Biden administration's strategic use of U.S. sanctions relief as leverage in the negotiations. Additionally, we welcome Secretary Blinken's October 18 public statement setting forth additional expectations that the Maduro regime must meet by the end of November, namely establishing a process for reinstating opposition candidates and releasing wrongfully detained opposition figures and U.S. citizens.

However, while we strongly believe that a negotiated solution to Venezuela's political and humanitarian crisis is the only path forward to end the misery and suffering of the Venezuelan people, we are under no illusions that commitments made by the Maduro regime can be taken at face value. Already, less than two weeks since it signed the agreement, the regime is pursuing a criminal investigation against the organizers of the recent opposition-organized presidential primaries and the regime-allied Supreme Court has moved to annul the primaries' results. Such actions are unacceptable and belie the sincerity of Maduro's commitments to allow credible, competitive elections next year.

Going forward, it is imperative that the United States and international community closely monitor implementation of the Barbados agreement. We urge you to make it unequivocally clear to Maduro and his allies that continued efforts to breach the letter and spirit of this agreement—including not allowing the winner of the opposition's primary, Maria Corina Machado, to be eligible for next year's election—will result in the swift roll back of sanctions relief. We also urge you to make it similarly clear that any current or future sanctions relief is conditioned on the regime fulfilling both what was agreed to with the Unitary Platform and the additional expectations explicitly articulated in Secretary Blinken's October 18 public statement.

Venezuelans should determine their future at the ballot box. We sincerely hope that history will remember the October 17, 2023, electoral agreement between the Unitary Platform and the Maduro regime as the first tangible step towards restoring Venezuelan democracy and ending the political and humanitarian crisis that has forced almost 8 million Venezuelans to flee their homeland. However, without sustained pressure from the international community to hold Maduro accountable in the coming months, including a credible commitment by the Biden administration to reimpose sanctions, as necessary, the agreement may be remembered as nothing more than another entry on Maduro's record of broken promises to the Venezuelan people. You have our full support in your efforts to ensure that is not the case.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



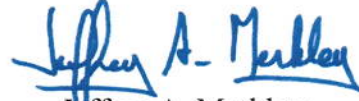
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



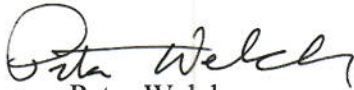
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United States Senator



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