

Venezuelan cardinal warns President Maduro over deaths of protestors

Vatican / Documents

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Cardinal Jorge Urosa of Caracas has warned President Nicolás Maduro and the high command of the armed forces that they will be accountable to God for the deaths of Venezuelans killed by military personnel and Chavista groups during demonstrations against the country's contentious Constituent Assembly.

"In the name of God, stop the repression!" exclaimed the cardinal, adding that "there are citizens who were murdered and wounded by Venezuelan military personnel and, presumably, by armed forces that act illegally and criminally. This is totally intolerable and cries out to heaven."

In statements made to the local press, the cardinal referred to the violent repression of protests against the country's July 30 election for a 545-member Constituent Assembly. The newly appointed assembly will be responsible for reforming the country's 1999 constitution. Its first sitting is scheduled for Thursday.

According to the government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, more than 8 million voters – or 41 percent of the eligible population – participated in the election. However, the Democratic Election Bureau, which opposes the Maduro government, reported that only 2.4 million votes, or 12 percent of the voters, were cast in the ballot box, and a quarter of those votes were void.

The country's opposition-controlled legislature, the National Assembly, has stated that it will oppose "all measures and actions to depose the Constituent Assembly," and states that the country owes "no obedience" to any constitutional changes.

The governments of the United States, Peru, Colombia, Panama, Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Canada, Brazil, as well as the European Union, announced that they will not recognize the Constituent Assembly promoted by Maduro.

Following the election, at least 10 people have died in protests against the regime, though other sources report higher numbers of dead. Over 100 people have been confirmed to have been killed in protests against the Maduro government since April, according to Venezuela's Attorney General, Luisa Ortega Díaz.

The Venezuelan bishops have repeatedly spoken out against the ballot measure, and called to a peaceful resolution to the country's economic and political problems.

Cardinal Urosa spoke out against the killings, saying that those in charge of the Venezuelan government who are responsible for soldiers attacking Venezuelan citizens "must give an account before God, our Lord, and before the laws."

He also criticized the electoral process promoted by the regime despite strong opposition from the population.

"With these results, the Constituent Assembly can not be erected with the superpower to repeal the State and the Constitution of 1999. It is an illegitimate process with a comically absurd foundation that detracts from the electoral power of citizens. You can not impose a fraudulent and illegitimate and totally invalid instrument when the people did not vote," the cardinal said.

On Wednesday Smartmatic, the company in charge of the electronic voting system used in Venezuela's Sunday elections, stated that "in the past elections of the National Constituent Assembly there was manipulation of participation data."

"The difference between the number announced (by the Government) and the one that the system gives is at least one million voters," the organization said.

At a press conference from London, Smartmatic Executive Director Antonio Mugica said that for the time being they could not specify the

exact amount of the voter discrepancy, but that "an audit would allow them to know the exact amount of participation."

Smartmatic is a multinational firm that has provided the technological platform of voting and services for the elections in the South American country since 2004.

Venezuela's electoral commission has dismissed Smartmatic's claim as "irresponsible" and "unfounded."

The Venezuelan bishops' conference has tweeted asking that the "Blessed Virgin, Mother of Coromoto, heavenly Patron of Venezuela, may liberate our country from the clutches of communism and socialism."

Previously, the Venezuelan bishops have repeatedly spoken out against the ballot measure, and called to a peaceful resolution to the country's economic and political problems. Venezuela faces high inflation and shortages of necessities like food, housing, and medical supplies, following dropping oil prices in recent years.

The bishops have also asked the laity to "pray for Venezuela." In another prayer posted to Twitter, the bishops ask that the people of Venezuela be "identified with the respect for the human person, liberty, justice and a commitment to the common good."

They also restated the importance of love for all, solidarity of the poor, and the necessity of "working for reconciliation and peace."