

A Roadmap for Venezuela's Future

An Interview with Isadora Zubillaga, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela and Special Envoy of President Juan Guaidó to France

EDITORS' NOTE *Isadora Zubillaga has served as Director of Speak Truth to Power, a Human Rights program of the Robert F. Kennedy Foundation, and as International Coordinator of NYC2010, under the leadership of Michael Bloomberg. She was a member of the Board of Directors of the Alliance Francaise of Caracas and International Director of the Municipality of Chacao, under the term of Mayor Leopoldo López. She also worked in venture capital as Vice President of eQuest Partners and was the CEO of LA Almazara. Zubillaga was designated by Venezuelan President Juan Guaidó and the National Assembly of Venezuela as Ambassador of the Republic of Venezuela to France and also as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela in 2019. Zubillaga earned a degree in economics and political science from Boston University and a master's degree in international relations from Sorbonne University in Paris.*



Isadora Zubillaga

You have been a leader in the fight for change in Venezuela for many years. Will you discuss this commitment and how this passion and purpose developed?

My family comes from the south of Venezuela, home to the majestic Angel Falls, powerful rivers and endless plains. I was privileged to grow up in a family of women with great character. As the youngest of four competitive sisters, we were raised by a resilient mother who taught us to love and embrace our Venezuelan traditions, to never forget where we came from, and to respect and defend the values of freedom and humanity – values that later served as the foundation for both my passion and commitment to social justice.

Every cause that I have defended, whether it be political or human rights, or simply helping to build bridges between both countries and people, I have always done so with one objective in mind – to assure that human rights are never violated in Venezuela or in any other place on earth.

In 2014, I was forced to leave Venezuela due to political persecution. Ever since, I have been working with both the Venezuelan diaspora and young and dynamic leaders to represent the democratic forces in our country. For the last two years, as the top diplomatic

representative of the interim government of Venezuela in Europe, I have had the honor and privilege to meet with political and opinion leaders of every ideological stripe in every corner of Europe to explain the complex situation in Venezuela and the ramifications it has had on the Venezuelan people, to denounce the cruelty of the Maduro dictatorship, and to seek proper democratic accompaniment in our cause. One of the most rewarding moments of this decade-long fight came during a December 2017

European Parliament plenary in Strasbourg when the Venezuelan opposition was awarded the Sakharov Prize for our continued fight for freedom and human rights.

You are creating a roadmap for Venezuela for 2021. Will you provide an overview of this roadmap and what you see as the keys to making this vision become a reality?

In February 2019, interim President Juan Guaidó designated me as his Ambassador to France and seven months later, in September, I was named Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. In these positions, I have contributed to the enlargement of the interim government's coalition and have helped provide a voice to the Venezuelan people at the highest level. But as time goes by, the men and women of my country are suffering unimaginable and inexplicable

living conditions. Hunger is a reality for a third of Venezuela's population. I always ask myself, and I ask your readers to do the same: how would you feel as a mother or a father if you were unable to feed your children?

Our roadmap should not lose sight of the real reason behind our fight which is the recovery of human dignity for Venezuelans. Our first commitment is to build a road towards a democratic solution where Venezuelans participate in a general election that is both free and fair. We will choose between dark and light, between death and life, between a dictator that kills innocents and the rebirth of democracy led by a generation of committed, brave and talented leaders abundant both within Venezuela and within the Venezuelan diaspora.

The second milestone for our coalition is to establish a National Emergency Government, conformed by all political sectors of the country except those responsible for crimes against humanity. The objective of an Emergency Government is to urgently and efficiently address the ongoing humanitarian crisis and to stabilize the country.

Third, our coalition seeks to build a unified platform that will rebuild Venezuela and invest in the necessary infrastructure that will better provide basic services such as health, food, electricity, education and transport. Let's think of Venezuela today as a post-war country that needs the assistance of the international

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community, but with a great opportunity to stand up again. The country can show the solidarity and the generosity that has always been a trademark, work hand in hand with the Venezuelan diaspora and with our neighboring countries that were there when we needed them the most. We will work with the great democracies and economies of the free world to design and materialize a rebuilding plan that will change the direction and the future of millions in Venezuela and enhance the security and peace of the region as well.

How critical is it to build international support to bring about a democratic solution to the multidimensional crisis in Venezuela through transitional mechanisms?

International support is not only critical, it is a sine qua non condition for finding a peaceful, democratic and political solution to the multidimensional crisis in Venezuela. Since January 2019, the interim government of Venezuela has built a coalition of support consisting of over 50 countries which is unprecedented in the recent history of international relations. These 50+ countries have voiced their support for the restoration of democracy and human rights in Venezuela and are working tirelessly by our side to achieve a solution to our crisis. Through their support, we have achieved the implementation of individual, targeted sanctions in Europe, the freezing and recovery of assets, and worked to facilitate access to desperately needed humanitarian aid.

However, our work is far from done and so we must continue to exert pressure on a regime that continues to commit human rights violations and crimes against humanity on a daily basis. Additionally, our people are suffering more than ever due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and due to an inept regime that has allowed our hospitals to fall into a dilapidated state and where food remains scarce and electricity and access to sanitary water is unreliable. As such, pressure through targeted, individual sanctions and judicial actions, among others, must increase in order to pressure the regime to first, permit a full-fledged humanitarian response, and second, to organize free and fair elections as soon as possible.

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What message would you want to provide to the global community about Venezuela today and its possibilities for the future?

My main message would be that we cannot allow a criminal regime that commits crimes against humanity including torture, degrading and inhumane treatment, rape, forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and other systematic and widespread human rights violations to continue to exist as a government.

Even though most of the free world doesn't recognize the dictatorship, the regime still has many potent allies. Every one of us can take a stand on the right side of history. It is our duty, as defenders of freedom, democracy and the rule of law, to speak out against these violations and to take action to protect the millions of citizens who are living under this oppressive and undemocratic regime.

You are a mentor and role model to many young girls in Venezuela through your actions and efforts. What do you tell these young girls about public service and the importance of following a passion and purpose in their lives?

I tell them to always support causes that are important to them, to stay true to their values, and to work hard for what they want. It is never easy, but with the necessary passion and dedication, they can achieve their goals. Resilience is a word that characterizes me the most and I continue to be inspired by this beautiful country that we all love. One must always follow their heart. We are part of a generation that is fighting to recover democracy and freedom today and the younger generation will have the responsibility to rebuild Venezuela in an honest, efficient and respectful way. That is a once in a lifetime opportunity – seize it.

You have said that this is the time that the fight for freedom in Venezuela needs to happen. Are you optimistic that real, lasting change is possible?

Yes, I am convinced that real, lasting change is possible and, in fact, inevitable. We are facing a very powerful adversary, and therefore, the fight has been a long and uphill struggle. However, the interim government, members of Parliament, civil society, the Venezuelan diaspora, the church, the unions, and many, many Venezuelans, both within the country and outside its borders, are ready to do everything they can in order to achieve a peaceful transition in our country. No one ever knows when the wall will fall, but we need to be ready to push because the wall has many fractures. Every one of the 5 million people that have fled the country, every case of torture and assassination, every one of the thousands of political prisoners, every beautiful river contaminated, every innocent child that suffers, every patient without medicine, those are the cracks in the wall and the wall of tyranny will fall. ●

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