



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States

Fact Sheet

Environmental and Social Justice in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: A Model of Growth that is both Sustainable and Progressive

A Megadiverse Country

Located on the Caribbean, connected to the Andes, the Guayana and the Amazon, **the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is known worldwide for its cultural diversity, beautiful landscapes and for the warmth of its people.** It is home to over 650 vegetation types and 20,000 plant species, as well as to an enormous diversity of fauna, which at last count included 5,711 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish, and more than 110,000 species of insects. **This puts Venezuela among the top ten most biodiverse countries on the planet, which earns it the title of a Megadiverse country according to the United Nations Environment Programme.** 54.2% of the country is covered by forests.



The Constitution as a Framework

The implementation of the 1999 constitution was a landmark for social, political, economic

and environmental progress. **For the first time in the constitutional history of the country, an entire chapter (Chapter IX) was dedicated solely to environmental rights, establishing that sustainable development is the path that the country must adopt in its development plans.** The priority of environmental protection is given once it is established that natural resources are an integral part of the sovereignty of the country because they are a fundamental element of development. The constitution mandates the rational use of

natural resources to guarantee ecological equilibrium.

A Promoter and Supporter of Environmental Agreements

Venezuela has ratified 14 environmental international agreements.¹ These accords have been thoroughly implemented and the government has gone beyond them, by taking steps, for example, and becoming **one of the countries with the most protected areas in the world, with over 67% of the country protected.** Over 34% of the country is designated solely for the purpose conserving biodiversity (including 43 national parks, 36 natural monuments, 7 wildlife refuges, 7 wildlife reserves, 2 biosphere reserves and 79 recreational parks).

Venezuela, which has 43 national parks and 36 natural monuments, is among the top ten most biodiverse countries.

The 1999 constitution

represents a deep focus on social responsibility. In this focus it is recognized that the elimination of poverty and improvements in quality of life are not possible without the guarantee of a clean, healthy and balanced environment. Therefore, **environmental rights are seen as human rights that belong with the right to life, health and education.** This establishes environmental education as required through all levels and types of

¹ Ministry of People's Power for the Environment. http://www.minamb.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=64&Itemid=74



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education. Environmental management is a shared responsibility between the state and the people.

The Plan for Implementation

Venezuela is putting innovative projects into action in the following areas: Shared Environmental Management; Drinking Water and Sewage; Land Use and Zoning; Environmental Conservation; Tree Mission (Misión Arbol); Solid, Toxic and Hazardous Waste Management; Internacional Cooperation; and Energy and Transport Revolution Mission (Misión Revolución Energética y Transporte).

Shared Environmental Management

Under the principle of Participatory Democracy, a basic constitutional principle, **the public's participation is encouraged with regards to environmental problems and the management of natural resources.** This is done via the creation of community structures such as:

- Technical Committees for Water, whose objective is the supply of drinking water and sewage.
- Energy Committees focused on the sustainable and efficient supply of electricity and natural gas.
- Conservation Committees that work towards sustainable management of forests via the application of reforestation projects.
- Volunteer groups, Community Councils, and cooperatives that, among others, develop socio-environmental projects.

Drinking Water and Sewage

In Venezuela water is a human right, a public service, and a common good which cannot be privatized. **The state rationally and responsibly guarantees access and the**

use of water to the population.

Achievements currently include:

- Approval of the Water Law
- 92% of Venezuelans have access to clean drinking water.
- Collecting 80% of waste water.
- Treatment of 27% of waste water.
- Met, in 2003, the millenium development goal for access to clean drinking water set by the U.N. for 2015.

Land Use and Zoning

Since 75% of the population is concentrated in the central north coast of the country, **action is being taken to decentralize the population and to shape new urban centers under the framework of harmonious geographic development.** In selecting the best locations for human activity and settlements, information about ecological footprints, impact evaluations with their respective maps, and fact-finding reports discussing the potentials, limits and restrictions of proposed areas have been made available. Some of the more important accomplishments include:

- Identifying regions for development such as: Orinoco-Apure, Oriental, Occidental, Norte Llanero, Norte Costero, Montano, Orinoco-Río Negro.
- Establishing three large cities, supported by the development of our iron, aluminum and petroleum resources.
- Creating guidelines for the National Plan for the Environment (Plan Nacional de Ambiente) to harmonize social and economic development with environmental protection.
- Promoting state plans for land use and zoning.
- Creating and applying Urban Zoning Plans (Planes de Ordenamiento Urbano).



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- Putting cartographic information in digital form.

Environmental Conservation

To guarantee the protection of biodiversity, **projects are being designed jointly with communities**, including:

- Greater monitoring of flora and fauna facing the threat of extinction.
- Breeding and releasing 250,000 Arrau turtles in 2007.
- Identifying and protecting 1,200 Green turtle nests in 2007.
- Releasing more than 5,000 caimans into the Orinoco River.
- Rescuing 6,000 sea turtles.
- Creation of a National Bio-Security Commission to detect entry of organisms or transgenic derivatives.
- Approval of the Forest Law.
- Evaluation of forestry concessions.
- Increasing environmental monitoring and control.
- Streamlining the environmental permits system.

Tree Mission (Misión Árbol)

This line of work is carried out in conjunction with Conservation Committees, which promote a model of sustainable production that guarantees the protection of watersheds and the sustainable management of the country's forests, through **reforestation with protectoral, agro-forestry, and commercial-industrial ends**. Objectives met include:

- Implementation of 2,230 community and school projects.
- Harvesting nearly 34,000 seeds.
- Growing over 33,000,000 plants.
- Reforestation of over 13,524 hectares between 2006 and 2007.
- Reducing the rate of forest fires by 34% in 2007.

Solid, Toxic and Hazardous Waste

Waste management in Venezuela has achieved the following:

- Creating and implementing state plans for the management of solid waste.
- Converting 50 dumps into controlled, sanitary landfills.
- Cleaning up and closing open air dumps.
- Identifying, transporting and eliminating over 1 million kilos of obsolete pesticides as established by the Stockholm Convention.

International Cooperation

At the international level, **Venezuela has always been a leader in environmental issues** and actively participates in important negotiations relating to water resources, climate change, desertification, biodiversity, and chemical security (seguridad química). In this area we have achieved the following:

- Leadership on recognizing water as a fundamental human right, keeping in mind that this resource is a social good and not an economic one.
- Ratifying the Kyoto Protocol in 2004 and participating in the UN Climate Change Conference in Bali, where Venezuela declared that current models of economic development are threatening the planet.
- Developing initiatives for cooperation on environmental issues with Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua through ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas).
- With respect to desertification, Venezuela reiterated the need to eliminate poverty, to avoid the further degradation of land.



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Energy Revolution Mission (Misión Revolución Energética)

Although 70% of the electricity generated in Venezuela comes from hydroelectric power, the **Venezuelan government is promoting greater energy efficiency**. Achievements to date include:

- Replacing 68 million incandescent light bulbs with energy efficient light bulbs.
- Installing 768 photovoltaic systems which are generating energy in schools, clinics, cafeterias and security stations in isolated, frontier and indigenous areas.
- Opening 123 drinking water facilities powered by solar energy that will benefit over 100,000 Venezuelans.

Transportation

Venezuela is developing important, environmentally friendly, mass transit projects such as: the Cúa Train, Los Teques Metro, Maracaibo Metro, Merida Trolley, and an expansion of the Caracas Metro. We have also spurred the Natural Gas Vehicle Program which will shift the consumption of gasoline and diesel to natural gas, a less expensive and less polluting fuel.

CONCLUSION

The 1999 constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela empowers the public to achieve social justice, environmental protection and to diversify socio-productive activities. Participatory democracy has been a powerful tool used in the many achievements listed above. This is how a paradigm shift is occurring regarding the best use of natural resources, a principal source of life and indispensable foundation for a development which is in tune with nature.

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July, 22 2008

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