



Open Letter to Members of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association regarding USA military action in Venezuela

Dear Friends,

I write to you in my capacity as Vice President of the Americas Hub of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association (“CLA”), a Council Member of the CLA representing the Turks and Caicos Islands, and a Caribbean lawyer from a region that, through lived experience, understands the consequences of power exercised without regard for sovereignty and democratic self-determination.

Abhorrent to the Rule of Law

The recent military actions taken by the United States of America (“USA”) in relation to Venezuela are abhorrent to the rule of law and must be condemned. The basic principles of sovereignty of nations are enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Specifically, Article 2(4) of the Charter prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The Inter-American Democratic Charter also underscores the importance of respecting sovereignty and adhering to democratic principles.

These universal principles are designed to restrain the unilateral exercise of power by even the most powerful and/or influential nations. These principles lose their force if they are treated as optional and do not bind all nations.

Beyond accepted international norms

It is therefore essential to recall the narrow basis on which this action was initially presented. The operation was described as a limited interdiction intended to assist the United States Department of Justice in enforcing extra-jurisdictional criminal warrants issued by courts in New York against President Maduro and his wife. Even taken at face value, that legal footing was tenuous. This operation can be characterised as an unlawful rendition carried out beyond accepted international legal norms.

What has followed is even more troubling. Public statements indicating that the USA is now, in effect, “running the country” point to a clear expansion of the original mandate. This apparent mission creep—from a narrowly framed law-enforcement rationale into a far broader exercise of control—fundamentally alters the legal character of the intervention and further undermines any claim to legitimacy grounded in law.

When legal principles give way to raw power, the delicate balance of democracy and the trust in its norms are eroded. A selective or inconsistent application of international law not only calls into question its legitimacy but also threatens the very democratic ideals it is meant to safeguard. Democracy cannot be upheld by diluting the legal order on which it stands; nor can it flourish through methods that bypass multilateral institutions and undermine international accountability.

Endangering principles of Sovereignty

It has been suggested that the actions by the USA are justified because they are said to support democracy in Venezuela, on the basis that the recent election was illegitimate. However, allegations of electoral irregularity do not grant the USA the legal authority to act unilaterally and illegally. Such unbridled interventions are a licence for powerful nations to act whenever it suits their interests, endangering the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention.

When powerful states bypass established legal frameworks or selectively apply international law, it is ordinary people—families, workers, small businesses, and vulnerable communities—who bear the heaviest burden. Measures justified in the language of democracy and accountability cannot be divorced from their real impacts.

Nor can these measures be separated from the broader strategic context in which they occur. Venezuela is a country of significant economic and energy importance, and any serious evaluation of recent USA actions must acknowledge the long-standing reality that interventions framed as support for a people's welfare or democratic aspirations have often coincided with strategic and resource-driven interests. For Caribbean societies, shaped by that history, scepticism in such circumstances is not ideological; it is informed.

Legal profession cannot be silent

In times like these, the legal profession cannot afford to remain silent. The CLA has strongly advocated for the rule of law and for the legal profession and Judiciary to be supported to act independently to uphold the rule of law. In practical terms, this requires lawyers and bar associations to do what our profession exists to do: to scrutinise the legal basis of state action, to support lawful multilateral processes, to stand in solidarity with legal professionals working under pressure, and to resist the idea that legality may be set aside whenever it proves inconvenient. Lawyers may not decide geopolitical outcomes, but we play an essential role in guaranteeing they are not shaped solely by power.

The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers emphasise the duty to support colleagues facing threats in their fight for justice. Supporting Venezuelan attorneys aligns with the commitment of the CLA to uphold these principles. Their future should be backed through lawful, multilateral, and humane engagement, not determined by unilateral external force.

Dangerous and alarming precedent

The CLA, through the Americas Hub, expresses unequivocal solidarity with the lawful democratic rights of the people of Venezuela. We stand with those striving to live with dignity amid hardship, and with civil society actors seeking lawful space for democratic expression.

The military action by the USA has set a dangerous and alarming precedent. Power exercised without law is not leadership; it is precisely what the rule of law exists to prevent.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Stanbrook

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The **Commonwealth Lawyers Association** is an international non-profit organisation which exists to promote and maintain the rule of law throughout the Commonwealth by ensuring that an independent and efficient legal profession, with the highest standards of ethics and integrity, serves the people of the Commonwealth.
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