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# US actions in Venezuela ‘constitute a dangerous precedent’: Guterres



© Wikimedia/Olga Berrios | Caracas, Venezuela's capital city.

3 January 2026 | **Peace and Security**



The **UN Secretary-General** António Guterres has **said he is “deeply alarmed”** over the standoff between the United States and Venezuela in recent months, which culminated on Saturday morning in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro by US special forces.

US President Donald Trump made the announcement on social media, and the US Attorney General said Mr. Maduro and his wife would face “the full wrath of American justice on American soil, in American courts,” based on a 2020 narcoterrorism indictment during the first Trump administration, in New York.

The US operation began with overnight strikes in and around the capital, Caracas. Venezuela has declared a state of national emergency, with casualty figures and the extent of the damage yet to be confirmed.

The Venezuelan Government denounced the act of “extremely serious military aggression” by the US, which followed months of increasing tension including a major military build up off the Venezuela coast and a series of deadly strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats.

The US ordered the seizure of sanctioned oil tankers in recent weeks amid threats that it would launch land operations to force Mr. Maduro from office.



UN Photo/Cia Pak | The Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro addresses the United Nations General Assembly in 2018.

## Rule of law

“The Secretary-General is deeply alarmed by the recent escalation in Venezuela, culminating with today’s United States military action in the country, **which has potential worrying implications for the region,**” said a statement issued by UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric.



**“Independently of the situation in Venezuela, these developments constitute a dangerous precedent.** The Secretary-General continues to emphasize the importance of full respect - by all - of international law, including the [UN Charter](#),” the statement continued.

**“He’s deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected.”**

Mr. Guterres called on all parties involved to engage in “inclusive dialogue” in accordance with human rights and international law.

## Protection of Venezuelans

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The [UN human rights chief](#)  Volker Türk also [called for restraint](#)  and full respect for international law. **“The protection of the people of Venezuela is paramount and must guide any further action,”** he added.


Venezuela has formally asked the [Security Council](#) to meet in emergency session in New York and **a meeting has been scheduled for 10am on Monday morning.**

During a press conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida late Saturday morning, President Trump said that the US intended to “run Venezuela” until there is a “safe, proper and judicious transition” of power.

As the country with the world's largest oil reserves, he added that US oil companies would modernise and renovate infrastructure “to make money for the country.”

## Might does not make right

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Responding to the crisis, President of the UN General Assembly, [Annalena Baerbock](#) , said the “guiding framework” in the days ahead must be the UN Charter, which is not an “optional document”.

The UN Charter is not optional—it is our guiding framework, in moments of calm and in times of crisis, like in Venezuela today, culminating with the United States military action.

Article 2 of the UN Charter clearly stipulates that all Members of the United Nations shall...

— Annalena Baerbock  
(@UN\_PGA) [January 3, 2026](#)

She said Article 2 clearly stipulates that all Member States, including the US, need to refrain from the “threat or use of force” against the territory or political independence of any other nation.

**“A peaceful, safe and just world for everyone is only possible if the rule of law prevails instead of might makes right,”** she warned.

## Rights scrutiny intensifies amid turmoil

The UN [Independent International Fact-Finding Mission](#) on Venezuela has voiced grave concern over the country’s human rights situation following the US attack and capture of President Maduro, urging that accountability for long-documented abuses must not be eclipsed by the unfolding crisis.

Chair of the independent investigative team appointed by the [Human Rights Council](#), Marta Valiñas, said the focus should remain on “grave human rights violations and crimes against humanity” committed against Venezuelans, regardless of the charges cited by the US to justify its actions.

The Mission has previously documented a pattern of abuses including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances – often short-term – torture and other ill-treatment, as well as sexual and gender-based violence.

Expert member Alex Neve stressed that alleged violations do not justify a military intervention that breaches international law, while the illegality of such an intervention does not diminish the responsibility of Venezuelan officials for years of repression, amounting to crimes against humanity.

## Concern over US intention to ‘run’ Venezuela

Another of the independent investigators, Maria Eloisa Quintero, underlined that responsibility is not limited to Mr. Maduro, but extends to others who exercised command over security forces or otherwise contributed to the crimes.

Warning of heightened volatility, investigators cited risks of further violations amid a declared state of emergency and assertions by Washington that it intends to “run” the country.

It said it is closely monitoring developments and called on Venezuelan and US authorities, as well as the international community, to uphold international law and place human rights first.

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