

their goals. The second delegation of Brazilian senators, however, did manage to meet with several national-level stakeholders in Venezuelan society.

I. POLITICAL CONTEXT

On May 23, 2015, [redacted] party leader Leopoldo López began a hunger strike with four specific demands: a halt to repression of the Venezuelan people, the immediate release of all political prisoners, the immediate setting of the date for parliamentary elections, and comprehensive, transparent international observation of parliamentary elections. The announcement of this initiative was made by Leopoldo López himself in a video recorded on his cell at Ramo Verde prison and broadcast over the Internet and over the state-run [redacted] TV channel ([see note](#)). López's decision and production of the video prompted additional punishment for the political leader, i.e., solitary confinement in [redacted]


The chapter on hunger strikes was finally brought to a close on June 23, the day after the CNE announcement setting the date for parliamentary elections, and after the release, early that morning, of two students held by the SEBIN, thanks to the Ombudsman's efforts concerning the case of students held in prison because of

government expressed its regrets over the incidents that occurred during the visit to Venezuela by senators from that country, describing them as “unacceptable hostile acts against Brazilian parliamentarians,” but cautioned in the same communiqué that these senators’ plans could be construed as an attempt to “meddle”

II. ELECTORAL CONTEXT

At a special press conference on June 22, Tibisay Lucena, principal rector and president of the CNE, the country's highest electoral authority, announced that parliamentary elections will be held on Sunday December 6, 2015. Together with all the other CNE rectors, Lucena stated that the CNE had agreed on the preliminary steps required for holding these elections, and she announced some important dates in that regard.⁶ Among key aspects of the electoral process highlighted by Lucena was the candidate nomination period, set for August 3-7; the electoral campaign scheduled for November 13 – December 3; and conclusion of voter registration on July 8. Concerning this last point, Lucena said that 504,661 new voters had been added from last February, when the CNE special operation began promoting voter registration and updating the electoral roll, until the end of May, underscoring this as a positive accomplishment ([see note](#)). The official electoral timetable was posted on the CNE's official website the following day ([see timetable](#)), and the accompanying press release highlights two important dates in the electoral process: the first, July 16, for approval of electoral districts and the second, October 18, for an election drill to acquaint voters with the voting process ([see note](#)).

The CNE's call to elections ends a long period of uncertainty and complaints from the opposition over the election date and even the prospect of not even holding elections in 2015. Although guarantees had been made by State institutions that elections

baseball team calendar was issued, setting December 13 as the election date. In response to this, MUD Executive Secretary Jesús "Chúo" 

The “perfect agreement” on the selection of candidates announced by the MUD suffered a major setback a few hours after it was made public, following disclosure of a resolution handed down by the CNE guaranteeing the right of both genders to equal political participation in the electoral race for the National Assembly.¹¹ CNE President Tibusay Lucena explained at a meeting with women political activists¹² that the aim of this resolution was to “do justice with regard to the political participation of women” and that it followed the same path as previous resolutions, such as the one handed down in 2008¹³ in that, according to figures presented by the CNE itself, the standard was met in terms of both proportion and alternation of candidates. ~~Specifically, the~~ new resolution stipulates that nominations for elections must be gender balanced (50 percent of each gender), and where this is not possible, nominations must be composed of individuals of at least 40 percent and at most 60 percent for either gender. The resolution approved applies to both principal candidates and alternates, regardless of whether they are party-list proportional or nominal candidates ([see note](#)).

While the issue of gender equality had been debated recently ([see previous bulletin](#)), this resolution’s adoption and enforcement in the parliamentary primaries without it being introduced for broad discussion, sparked rejection and annoyance among opposing forces since most of their candidates for parliamentary elections had already been announced.

In the list of candidates submitted by the MUD (including those selected in the primaries and by consensus) there were only 13 female principal candidates, and according to the resolution adopted, the opposition coalition would need at least 67 female candidates (to meet the 40 percent quota for all 167 positions), or at most 100 candidates (to comply with the maximum of 60 percent of all positions up for election).

Therefore, the resolution forces the opposition parties to swiftly revise their agreements so that they adhere to required parameters by the date set on the timetable for the nomination of candidates, with the deadline being August 7.¹⁵

MUD Executive Secretary Jesús Torrealba characterized the resolution as “illegal, unconstitutional,” and as an “unlawful change in the rules of the game” following on the heels of the MUD primary elections, right after most of the coalition’s candidates had been announced ([see note](#)). In the same vein, Henrique Capriles asserted that the CNE was aiming to “make the game more complicated” and that Venezuelan women were not looking to “

together an electoral mission to lend support to the process over the remaining months leading up to elections, and on election day, of course" ([see video](#)).

UNASUR, meanwhile, in a statement issued on the same day that Lucena announced the election date, applauded the announcement, underscoring that with these elections the Venezuelan people had an "open path for resolving their differences by democratic means in a framework of understanding and national coexistence." Lastly, UNASUR expressed that it would get the electoral support mission underway "immediately," as requested of the foreign ministers of Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador by Lucena during their recent visits to the country¹⁶ ([see statement](#)). Concerning participation of this mission in the upcoming elections, opposition spokespersons expressed their agreement with it, but added that it would be important for that mission to abide by qualified international observation guidelines and for missions from the OAS and the European Union to be allowed to come also, at least two or three months in advance. Similarly, MUD spokespersons requested that these missions be capable of publishing reports and be guaranteed immunity and freedom of movement ([see note](#)).

Meanwhile, the OAS, in a message posted on the official Twitter account of its newly-elected Secretary General, Luis Almagro, let the country know that the regional body "offered its election observation services" to Venezuela ([see note](#)). The European Union also indicated that it was ready to "explore, together with the National Electoral Council, UNASUR, and OAS, the best way to contribute to inclusive, credible, and transparent elections" ([see note](#)).

Regarding international observation and its importance, CNE Principal Rector Luis Emilio Rondón contended that the international observation provided for by the electoral branch should include additional international organizations other than UNASUR, adding that these organizations should be able to observe the electoral process before, during, and after election day. According to Rondón, long-term observation of the Venezuelan electoral process and publishing of election reports by these organizations could "enhance the credibility of and confidence in the referee and in the process as such." He likewise expressed that the work of national observers is just as important as the work done by

the electoral campaign, the CNE only activated 26% (3,987) of the polling centers and operated a total of 5,613 polling stations on election day for the PSUV primary elections; consequently, some voters were redirected to nearby polling centersy d

Units (UBCH); in the third week, sectoral meetings would be held, posters would be published and a media presence would be permitted. Finally, the finale would take place during the fourth week ([see note](#)).

According to plans, the PSUV electoral campaign began on May 27 with 87 motorized caravans reaching out to the country's various states and spreading propaganda on behalf of the ruling party candidates ([see note](#)). To ensure a level playing field among candidates, during the campaign, the PSUV used its own funds to print and publish posters for all the candidates using the same style and format. Similarly, the party reported that each candidate would be provided television and radio spots with the same format for all ([see note](#)).²⁰ Party leaders insisted that the aim of their self-funded campaign was for primary candidates "not to have to depend on any contractors who might demand a certain type of conduct contrary to our people's interest" ([see note](#)). Thus, the entire campaign process was centralized and managed by national PSUV leadership.

At a national leadership meeting, PSUV vice-president and current National Assembly president Diosdado Cabello made a proposal for primary winning candidates to sign a letter of resignation in advance for use by the party in the event that any candidate elected as deputy were to "betray the revolution and the people" by attempting to switch party allegiance ([see video](#)).

Despite the PSUV's centralized strategy to ensure fairness in the electoral race, during the primaries, Carter Center consultants managed to observe cases of openly expressed preferences for some candidates on the part of PSUV national leaders. Sources closely associated with the Carter Center indicated that individual instances of support were part of a political strategy whereby candidate profiles were assessed for the purpose of pitting them against a potential opposition candidate, or even due to the position that a candidate held within the party itself. However, in some instances, candidates formed alliances among themselves, and in others, some candidates conceded their candidacy to other candidates ([see note](#)).

PSUV primary day

campaign activities included text messages relentlessly sent to PSUJ

While the PSUV held its primaries in all 87 districts of Venezuela, the primary process only selected 98 of the 113 all candidates up for election by nominal vote. Moreover, also not voted on during the primaries were party-list proportional deputies. During the primary process, the equivalent of 59 percent of all candidates for deputy were selected.²⁸ In the case of districts where two NA deputies are elected, Article 10 of the PSUV primary bylaws stipulates that the candidate getting the highest number of valid votes will be the candidate selected, and the second candidate will be appointed by the party's national leadership²⁹ ([see regulations](#)). In the case of districts where three deputies are up for election, the PSUV primaries put two of the three positions up for vote and the party kept the nomination of one candidate to itself, applying the same criteria outlined above.

The remaining 69 PSUV candidates are to be decided by political party cadres through negotiation or by consensus with member parties of the "Simón Bolívar" Great Patriotic Pole (GPPSB). As for minority coalition parties, these have their own internal mechanisms for deciding on the candidates that they will support in these negotiations.³⁰ The Communist Party of Venezuela, for example, reported that it would select 23 potential candidates and negotiate the remaining candidates among all of the parties and the PSUV in order to achieve "perfect unity" ([see note](#)).³¹

Because the GPPSB consists of eleven parties, the PSUV faces the challenge of meeting each group's expectations, given that the ruling party chose over half of the candidates without taking a number of national or regional leaders of the coalition into account. Concerning the PSUV's so-called internal electoral pact, Diosdado Cabello made it clear to the allied parties that there would be no quota-based distribution of candidates, but that the advantages of each particular case would be reviewed individually. He ruled out the possibility of excluding any candidates selected in the primaries in order to

include any others from the coalition. Nevertheless, Cabello himself left open the possibility of offering just alternate positions to some of the allied parties.³²

As its first vice-president, Diosdado Cabello announced that the PSUV had “delivered to the people,” characterizing participation as “historic.” In reference to the election results, Cabello stated that if the votes obtained by the PSUV were to be compared with those obtained by the MUD in the 33 districts where the opposition coalition held their primaries, the ruling party would have gotten 40 percent more of the votes. Referring to specific cases, Cabello said “If we were to hold elections now, with these results we would elect eight deputies in Carabobo compared to two for the right-wing opposition. Of the eight deputy seats up for grabs in Anzoátegui, PSUV would get seven, and the MUD, one”. ([see note](#)). Following the same line of analysis, the chief of command for the PSUV campaign, Jorge Rodríguez, asserted that “in the 33 districts where they (the opposition parties) garnered 543,723 votes, we won 1,287,743... ..this amounts to 70.3 percent versus 29.7 percent, i.e., a difference of 744,000 votes” ([see note](#)).

PSUV primary elections to select candidates for deputy to the National Assembly were accompanied by 21 international political stakeholders from various countries in the Americas and Europe ([see note](#)). At the conclusion of the primary election process, these international political figures held a press conference in which they said that the electoral process had they c

