Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 14, 2026

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The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Scott Bessent
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20220

Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20528

President Trump, Secretary Bessent, and Secretary Rubio:

In light of the catastrophic earthquakes that struck Venezuela on June 24, we write to urge you to immediately lift the United States' broad economic sanctions on the country and do everything in your power to facilitate Venezuela's access to its frozen assets abroad. These economic restrictions are severely hampering urgent relief efforts, and will continue to threaten Venezuela's recovery and long-term reconstruction if allowed to remain in place.[1]

The June 24 earthquakes were the most powerful to strike Venezuela in over a century. Over 4,500 people are confirmed to have been killed, nearly 17,000 have been injured, and at least 50,000 are still unaccounted for – and these numbers are expected to dramatically increase in the coming days.[2] At least three U.S. citizens have been killed, a dozen are missing, and hundreds have reached out to the State Department for assistance.[3] Some 1,400 buildings collapsed or were damaged, including many schools and hospitals.[4] The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction estimates the cost of the direct physical damage alone to be $37 billion, or roughly 33 percent of the country's GDP.[5] According to the U.S. Geological Survey, total economic losses

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[1] Federica Marsi, *Venezuela earthquakes: How will sanctions impact aid operations?*, Al Jazeera (last updated June 26, 2026), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/6/25/venezuela-quakes-how-will-sanctions-impact-aid-operations

[2] *The death toll from the earthquakes in Venezuela rises to 4,561*, Reuters (July 14, 2026), https://www.reutersconnect.com/item/the-death-toll-from-the-earthquakes-in-venezuela-rises-to-4561/; Daniel Johnson, *Venezuela quake: Search goes on for survivors amid 'impossible odds'*, UN News (June 29, 2026), https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/06/1167829

[3] Elmira Aliieva and Abigail Williams, *Time is running out to rescue those trapped in Venezuela, officials say*, NBC News (June 29, 2026), https://www.nbcnews.com/world/venezuela/venezuela-earthquake-latest-death-toll-missing-rescues-la-guaira-rcna352179

[4] Simon Romero and Emma Bubola, *Venezuela Was on the Cusp of Rebirth. Then Disaster Struck, Again.*, N.Y. Times (June 27, 2026), https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/27/world/americas/venezuelas-economy-earthquake.html

[5] *Venezuela quake: UN continues to scale up as damage estimate reaches $37 billion,* UN News (July 6, 2026), https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/07/1167879

could reach $100 billion.[6] UNICEF warns that 1.8 million people, including 680,000 children, need humanitarian assistance.[7]

While we all want democracy and true self-determination for the Venezuelan people, broad-based sanctions imposed by the U.S. since 2017 have done nothing to advance this goal. In this moment of crisis, a robust state-coordinated response, unhampered by sanctions, is essential for preventing a humanitarian collapse and addressing the vast civilian and infrastructure needs that exceed the capacity of non-governmental approaches alone. The removal of sanctions will also allow state institutions to more effectively coordinate and deliver emergency healthcare, shelter, and food, clear debris, and rebuild roads, schools, and homes.

The existing sanctions regime on Venezuela has far-reaching indiscriminate effects. Restrictions on the central bank, financial system, oil industry, mining industries, and debt transactions impact all of Venezuela's economy and society. They discourage foreign suppliers, increase import costs, disrupt international payment mechanisms, weaken state capacity, and generate and exacerbate shortages.[8] Economists estimate that sanctions and related restrictions have been the primary cause of the immense, unprecedented depression that Venezuela experienced during the past decade, in which it lost 74 percent of its GDP, according to IMF data.[9] This was three times as severe as the Great Depression in the United States and it has greatly undermined the country's ability to adequately respond to natural disasters such as these.[10]

This year, the Administration has released a series of General Licenses easing sanctions on Venezuela, including one exclusively for humanitarian purposes issued in response to the earthquake.[11] However, these are entirely insufficient to meet the urgency and scale of Venezuela's need. Not only are these licenses and exemptions limited in scope and in some cases time-bound, but they imply burdensome paperwork and largely fail to shift the incentives of businesses and financial institutions that overcomply for fear of punishment.[12] As over 100 economists and related experts from around the world recently noted, for recovery and

[6] *Supra*, note 4.
[7] UNICEF, *Devastating earthquakes hit Venezuela* (last accessed July 2, 2026), https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/venezuela-earthquakes
[8] Alena Douhan, *Visit to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: report of the Special Rapporteur on the Negative Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on the Enjoyment of Human Rights*, UN Human Rights Council (October 4, 2021), https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3946822?ln=en&v=pdf#files
[9] Francisco Rodriguez, *Sanctions and Venezuelan Migration*, SSRN (Dec. 26, 2024), https://ssrn.com/abstract=5072710; IMF, Real GDP growth (last accessed July 2, 2026), https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/WEOWORLD/VEN
[10] *Id*.
[11] U.S. Department of State, *Responding to Venezuela Earthquakes* (last accessed July 2, 2026), https://www.state.gov/responding-to-venezuela-earthquakes
[12] *See* Holland & Knight, *Venezuela Sanctions in Practice: What Financial Institutions Need to Know* (May 26, 2026), https://www.hklaw.com/en/insights/media-entities/2026/05/podcast-venezuela-sanctions-in-practice; Francisco Rodriguez, *Sanctions and Human Development*, SSRN (June 21, 2024), https://ssrn.com/abstract=4865508

reconstruction to succeed, sanctions must be removed entirely, not merely temporarily waived.[13]

In addition to the general lifting of sanctions, we urge you to facilitate the restoration of Venezuelan institutions' ability to access, safeguard and deploy their assets in response to the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe. This includes the immediate issuance of the Federal Reserve Act's Section 25B certification to the current authorities of Venezuela's central bank, the restoration of complete access to over $11 billion in frozen foreign-based assets (including roughly $5 billion worth of Special Drawing Rights which Venezuela has been largely unable to access at the International Monetary Fund), the immediate release of billions of dollars of Venezuelan oil income currently held in Treasury-controlled accounts, and the termination of U.S. custodial control over the proceeds from the sale of Venezuelan oil.[14] These steps are essential for the state to urgently fund relief efforts and stabilize the country's economy.

The June 24 earthquakes were unpreventable natural disasters. But the U.S. government's far-reaching economic sanctions and asset freezes that have severely undermined the country's response and reconstruction efforts are man-made and avoidable. And given the President's decision to launch military strikes, forcibly detain Nicolas Maduro, and proclaim that his Administration "runs" the country, you bear additional responsibility for the humanitarian response.[15] The U.S. government must not allow additional Venezuelan lives to be lost or cripple the rebuilding of Venezuela. In light of the dire humanitarian consequences that will result from leaving them in place, we urge you to act to lift these unjustified and counterproductive restrictions today.

Sincerely,

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Greg Casar
Member of Congress

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[13] Jesus Servulo Gonzalez, *Un centenar de economistas pide a Estados Unidos que levante las sanciones a Venezuela para aliviar el golpe del terremoto*, El Pais, (July 7, 2026), https://elpais.com/us/2026-07-07/un-centenar-de-economistas-pide-a-estados-unidos-que-levante-las-sanciones-a-venezuela-para-aliviar-el-golpe-del-terremoto.html%E2%80%8B

[14] *See Casten, Van Hollen Push for Answers on Venezuelan Oil Proceeds in U.S. Treasury-Run Accounts* (Mar. 11, 2026), https://casten.house.gov/imo/media/doc/casten-van_hollen_letter_on_venezuelan_oil_account.pdf; Andrés Arauz & Michael Galant, *Producing Scarcity*, Phenomenal World (April 3, 2026), https://phenomenalworld.org/analysis/producing-scarcity/; Alexander Main, *Lift the Siege*, Phenomenal World (Jan. 22, 2026), https://phenomenalworld.org/analysis/lift-the-siege/

[15] *See* Katrin Bennhold, *What the U.S. Owes Venezuela*, N.Y. Times (June 29, 2026), https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/29/world/venezuela-earthquake-trump-aid.html; *Trump says U.S. will 'run' Venezuela and sell seized oil in remarks on the strikes*, NPR (Jan. 3, 2026), https://www.npr.org/2026/01/03/g-s1-104346/trump-venezuela-maduro-press-conference

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