

## INTERIM REPORT

### UN Panel of Experts – Venezuelan Presidential Elections 28 July 2024

1. At the invitation of the National Electoral Council (CNE) of Venezuela, and within the framework of the Barbados Agreement of October 2023, the UN Panel of Experts – consisting of four electoral experts – deployed to Venezuela, from late June through 2 August 2024, to follow the Presidential election held on 28 July 2024. Its objective was to follow and report internally to the UN Secretary-General on the election process, and make recommendations for future improvements. The Panel was not an observation mission, and – in contrast to electoral observation missions – was not established to make a public judgement on the outcome of the election.
2. The Panel hereby presents some of its **preliminary conclusions**, focusing on election day and the management and announcement of results. The Panel continues to follow and analyze remotely the process, specifically the handling of electoral complaints and appeals. The Panel’s full report will also address the legal framework for elections, voter registration, candidate registration, the campaign environment, the electoral administration, and women’s political participation.
3. The election was dominated by the contest between the incumbent candidate, President Nicolás Maduro, and the opposition Democratic Unitary Platform’s candidate, Edmundo González Urrutia. There were no female candidates on the ballot.
4. The **pre-electoral period** was marked by continuous restrictions on civic and political space. The government campaign dominated state-owned media outlets, with very limited access for opposition candidates. A number of restrictions to the right to stand for office remained in place for several prominent political figures. Despite the absence of a level playing field, the pre-electoral period unfolded peacefully overall, amongst renewed enthusiasm.
5. The Panel also noted other features which shaped **the context of the election** and how its contenders perceived its stakes. For example, the incumbent candidate and the ruling party’s campaign emphasized the economic and financial sanctions imposed on Venezuela, and described the election as an unfair race in which the President was at a disadvantage.
6. Election day on Sunday, 28 July 2024, took place in a **largely peaceful environment** and was **logistically well organized**. The CNE was able to detect and swiftly resolve a large majority of small technical glitches that were reported during the day. Voters in general appeared to be patient and enthusiastic about participating, despite long waiting times and reports of last-minute changes as to the polling station to which they were allocated.

7. The CNE reported a **turnout** of 59.97% of registered voters. Opposition parties reported similar turnout figures. This is a marked increase from the 2018 presidential elections (45.74%). If only registered voters present in-country are taken into account, the level of participation would be even higher.

8. As acknowledged by all contenders, the **electronic voting system** was well designed and trusted, and was scheduled to function in combination with significant audit procedures and the dissemination of results protocols at the polling station. The CNE had also put in place a robust mechanism for the results transmission process – the digital transmission of results from each voting machine to the CNE’s main tabulation centre – with several layers of protection against unauthorized connections and cyberattacks.

9. The actual **electronic results transmission** reportedly worked well initially, but was abruptly stopped in the hours after the closing of polling stations, without any information or explanation provided to candidates at the time, or to the Panel. At the moment of announcing the results, the President of the CNE declared that a terrorist cyber-attack had affected the transmission and caused a delay in the tabulation process. The CNE, however, postponed and subsequently cancelled three key post-electoral audits, including one on the communication system that could have shed light on the occurrence of external attacks on the transmission infrastructure.

10. In the early hours of 29 July 2024, the President of the CNE orally **announced** that President Nicolás Maduro had won the election with 5,150,092 votes (51.2%), followed by Edmundo González with 4,445,978 votes (44.2%), stating that 80% of polling station results had been received. On 2 August, the CNE confirmed President Maduro as the winner with 6,408,844 votes (51.95%), followed by González with 5,326,104 votes (43.18%), based on what it said were 96.97% of polling results. The results announcements consisted of oral communications with no infographic support. **The CNE did not publish, and still has not published, any results** (or results broken down by polling station), to support their oral announcements as envisaged in the legal framework for elections.

11. The CNE had put in place arrangements for the production of **printed results protocols**, at the polling station level. This was a key transparency safeguard (i.e., a paper trail), with several security features such as QR and hash codes with unique signatures, as well as physical signatures of officials and agents. These security features, as a whole, appear to be very difficult to be fabricated. The legal framework stipulated that each original printed protocol was to be sealed and safeguarded by military personnel. Copies were to be distributed to polling officials, party agents, and accredited observers. However, the Panel received several reports that agents of opposition parties had been prevented from obtaining such a copy. Moreover, despite assurances that it would do so, the **CNE has not published these results protocols**.

12. The Panel reviewed a small sample of the documents that are currently in the public domain (including those posted online by the opposition) and that are reported to be results

protocols from various polling stations. **All of those reviewed exhibit all the security features of the original result protocols.** This suggests that a key transparency safeguard may be available, as intended, with respect to any officially released results. (The Panel did not set out to ascertain or review the vote totals).

13. In sum, the results management process of the CNE fell short of the basic transparency and integrity measures that are essential to holding credible elections. It did not follow national legal and regulatory provisions, and all stipulated deadlines were missed. In the experience of the Panel, the announcement of an election outcome without the publication of its details or the release of tabulated results to candidates has no precedent in contemporary democratic elections. This had a **negative impact on confidence in the outcome announced by the CNE among a large part of the Venezuelan electorate.**

14. On 31 July 2024, President Maduro submitted a **complaint** to the Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice, reportedly seeking a review of the process and a verification of the results. On 6 August 2024, the Electoral Chamber confirmed that it had received from the CNE the results protocols and other requested documentation. It announced that it would proceed to an expert verification process of the documentation submitted by the CNE. There is no detailed information available to date on how this appraisal is to be conducted.

15. While the numbers from domestic sources vary and the Panel did not try to ascertain their accuracy, it noted reports stating that over 20 people – including one soldier – were killed and more than 1,000 people were detained between 29 July and 2 August 2024 as a result of **protests** following the announcement of results. These reported numbers have continued to rise. The Panel also heard reports of threats and intimidation against party agents and polling officials.

16. Venezuelan authorities cooperated and supported the Panel's deployment. The Panel was able to interact with a wide range of interlocutors and follow the main stages of the electoral process. It also had a constructive dialogue and positive exchanges with the CNE until the closing of polls on 28 July. After that moment, the Panel was regrettably – and despite a request sent by Note Verbale – **not able to meet the CNE Board** before the Panel's departure.

9 August 2024

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