

Release frozen Venezuelan funds for Covid-19 response

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Venezuelan government and opposition leaders, and their respective backers, should agree to use frozen state assets located in banks around the world to protect the Venezuelan people against the spread of coronavirus.

"We are in a race against time to prepare for the coronavirus hurricane, but have no resources at hand to help us," warned Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). "The pandemic could completely collapse Venezuela's already fragile health system unless we act now. The long-term impact would be felt not only by Venezuelans, but by the entire hemisphere."

NRC called on the relevant parties to agree to release USD \$750 million from Venezuelan state assets frozen in banks in the United States, United Kingdom, Portugal and Belgium, and allocate them to the United Nations and relief agencies to step up lifesaving work before the coronavirus sweeps through the country.

The amount is equal to the UN's humanitarian aid appeal estimated for Venezuela for 2020 – before the outbreak of the coronavirus.

As of today, 143 confirmed cases of Covid-19 have been confirmed in Venezuela, but as in many other countries with weak health systems, the real number could be far higher because of limited testing.

Hospitals and health infrastructure are ill-equipped to respond to a global health disaster. A survey carried out by [Doctors for Health](#) last year found that one in five hospitals did not have running water, and that over 60 per cent of hospitals had experienced electrical service failures.

Humanitarian organisations on the ground including the Norwegian Refugee Council are ready to support public health efforts to fight the pandemic affecting the country's most vulnerable communities. But our hands are tied until this money is released.

Unfreezing the assets will require the government and the opposition to agree that the funds should now be used to protect and assist the Venezuelan people before it is too late.

"This would require a major diplomatic effort by the Russians and the Chinese on one hand, and the United States and European governments on the other," said Egeland. "Now is the time to put people ahead of politics."

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