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Rule of law 'virtually absent' in Venezuela, UN report says

Government forces carry out killings with impunity
'Credible, shocking' reports of unlawful killings of young men



'The impunity must end,' said Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN high commissioner for human rights. Photograph: Cristian Hernandez/EPA

Reuters in Geneva

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Government security forces in Venezuela carry out unjustified killings without any apparent consequences, as the rule of law is “virtually absent” in the country, according to a new report by the United Nations.

The UN human rights office called on the government to bring perpetrators to justice and said it was sending its report to the international criminal court (ICC), whose prosecutor opened a preliminary investigation in February.

The report published on Friday cited “credible, shocking” accounts of extrajudicial killings of

young men during crime-fighting operations in poor neighbourhoods conducted without arrest warrants. Security forces would tamper with the scene so that there appeared to have been an exchange of fire, it said.

“The failure to hold security forces accountable for such serious human rights violations suggests that the rule of law is virtually absent in Venezuela,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN high commissioner for human rights. “The impunity must end.”

There was no immediate response from the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

Critics say Maduro has used increasingly authoritarian tactics as Venezuela’s economy has spiralled deeper into recession and hyperinflation, fuelling discontent and prompting hundreds of thousands to emigrate in the past year.

About 125 people died in anti-government protests last year.

Security forces were allegedly responsible for killing at least 46 of them, said the UN rights spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani.

Maduro says the opposition protests were aimed at overthrowing him and accuses the United States of directing an “economic war” against Venezuela.

Zeid called on the UN human rights council on Monday to set up an international commission of inquiry into alleged violations in Venezuela - one of its 47 member states.

“The time has come for the Council to use its voice to speak out before this tragic downward spiral becomes irreversible,” Leila Swan of Human Rights Watch said in a statement on Friday.

Venezuela is suffering from an economic collapse that includes chronic shortages of food and medicine and annualised inflation around 25,000%. Maduro blames an “economic war” directed by the opposition and the US - which has imposed new sanctions on Venezuela’s oil industry.

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