

# *Pope Francis Offers Help With Venezuelan Dialogue*

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Vatican City, December 27 (RHC)-- Pope Francis has addressed the importance of an ongoing dialogue between the Venezuelan government and the opposition, saying that negotiations are vital to heal political rifts and shore up social welfare in order to achieve lasting peace.

Talks between the government and opposition are scheduled to resume January 11th and 12th in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic, in order to create mechanisms to solve the country's political, social and economic challenges.

Six points will be taken into account during the agenda: the installation of a truth commission; economic guarantees; political and electoral guarantees; recognition of the National Constituent Assembly; ways to achieve institutional harmony, and economic and social needs.

The Pope expressed his willingness to assist in advancing the dialogue in his message to members of the diplomatic corps in the Holy See.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has reached out on more than 300 separate occasions requesting talk with the right-wing opposition.

Rapprochement began in 2013, when the head of state called the elected mayors of the coalition of

opposition parties – known as the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) – to Miraflores Palace in Caracas following municipal elections.

But violence broke out last April, when the opposition incited riots leaving over 100 people dead. Some, like 21-year-old Orlando Jose Figuera, were burned alive for simply "being Chavista" in protests that caused millions of dollars of damage to public and private properties.

September 2017 marked the latest round of peace talks. An exploratory meeting with the opposition was held in the Dominican Republic.

The discussions, overseen by Dominican President Danilo Medina and former president of Spain Jose Luis Zapatero, resulted in an agreement to proceed with a second round of talks, this time accompanied by delegates from Mexico, Chile, Bolivia and Nicaragua.

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