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Almagro Doubles Down on Venezuela, Invokes Democratic Charter

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The Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, this Tuesday invoked the so-called "Democratic Charter" on Venezuela, a measure that initiates a process that could end in the suspension of the South American country from the OAS.

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In a 132-page report released Tuesday, Almagro said this unprecedented move was based on "the alteration of the constitutional order and how it gravely affects the democratic order" in Venezuela.

Almagro has become the first head of the OAS to activate the charter against a member state against the will of its government, a step he takes based on Article 20, which authorizes the secretary-general or any member state to call on an immediate Permanent Council meeting. Almagro also summoned "a Permanent Council of the state members of the OAS between June 10 and 20 of 2016."

The move comes as Venezuelan government and opposition leaders continue talks facilitated by former presidents Leonel Fernandez of the Dominican Republic and Martin Torrijos of Panama, along with former Prime Minister of Spain, Jose Luis Zapatero.

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The former Uruguayan foreign minister has been brazen in his attacks on the government of Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, including penning a tirade against Maduro published on the OAS website on May 19. The letter prompted OAS member state Ecuador to issue a swift rebuke, saying Almagro's statement "uses improper terms and a tone removed of equanimity and restraint required by the representative of an organization that brings together thirty-four states in the hemisphere."

Almagro's claim of an "alteration of constitutional order in Venezuela" comes months after parliamentary elections in the Latin American country which handed a major victory to the right-wing MUD opposition. The MUD have attempted to pass a number of measures that have been deemed unconstitutional, including a retroactive change to presidential term limits, with the intention of removing Maduro from office.

In recent months, Almagro has met with leaders and prominent figures of the MUD, prompting some in the Venezuelan government, including Maduro, to accuse Almagro of working with the opposition to topple his government.

In his report, Almagro bases his assertions on allegations made by the right-wing opposition, who have been publicly calling on Almagro to apply the clause against Venezuela. "(The) Secretariat-General of the OAS considers that the institutional crisis in Venezuela calls (for) immediate actions by the Executive Power or (the country) risks immediately falling into a situation of illegitimacy," the document states.

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The next step now is for the OAS's permanent council to convene to debate the situation in Venezuela and vote on resolutions or diplomatic efforts, and ultimately vote on the suspension of Venezuela from the organization. The latter would require the approval of two thirds of the OAS' ministers.

The last suspension of a member state occurred in Honduras in 2009, after a coup removed Venezuela's ally Manuel Zelaya from power.

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