

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Venezuela

CAPITAL: Caracas

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Federal Multiparty Republic

AREA: 912,050 Sq Km (352,143 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION: 24,024,500



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Venezuela is located on the northeast coast of South America. It is bound by the Caribbean Sea to the north, Brazil to the south, Guyana to the east and Colombia to the southwest and west. The country can be divided into four distinct geographical regions. (1.) The Andes and adjacent hill country in the northwest. (2.) The north coastal zone of the mountains bordering the Caribbean Sea and Lake Maracaibo, which is the largest lake in South America. (3.) The plains or Llanos which extend south and east from the mountains to the Orinoco River. (4.) The Guyana Highlands which is a vast area of high plateaux and plains that runs south and east of the Orinoco River. This region also contains the world's highest waterfall, the Angel Falls. Major Cities (pop. est.); Caracas 1,822,000, Maracaibo 1,250,000, Valencia 904,000, Barquisimeto 625,000, Maracay 538,600, Petare 532,000 (1990). Land Use; forested 34%, pastures 20%, agricultural-cultivated 5%, other 41% (1993).

CLIMATE: Venezuela has a tropical climate influenced by altitude. The country has four climatic zones. (1.) The Tierra Caliente comprising the coastal plains, valleys and central prairies with an elevation less than 800 metres (2,625 feet) and temperatures averaging 25 to 35 degrees Celsius (76 to 96 degrees Fahrenheit). (2.) The Tierra Templada which comprises the lower mountain slopes and plateaux between 800 metres and 2,000 metres (2,625 to 6,562 feet) with temperatures averaging 10 degrees Celsius to 25 degrees Celsius (50 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit). (3.) The Tierra Fria a sub-alpine zone of the mountains from 2,000 to 3,000 metres (6,562 to 9,843 feet) with average temperatures below 24 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) (4.) The Paramos above the timberline which has an average temperature seldom above 15 degrees Celsius (59 degrees Fahrenheit). The wet season is from May to November with an average annual precipitation varying from 1,400 mm (55 inches) in the Andes to 280 mm (11 inches) on the coast. Average temperature ranges in Caracas are from 24 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) to 27 degrees Celsius (81 degrees Fahrenheit) all year.

PEOPLE: The principal ethnic majority are the Mestizos who are of mixed AmerIndian and Spanish descent and account for 69% of the population while Whites account for 20%, Black Africans for 9% and AmerIndians for 2%. The AmerIndians are divided into at least 40 groups and are primarily concentrated in the Amazon territory.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 22 persons per sq km (56 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 84.0% urban, 16.0% rural (1990). Sex Distribution; 49.7% male, 50.3% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 67.0 years male, 73.3 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 38% under 15, 28% 15 to 29, 19% 30 to 44, 9% 45 to 59, 5% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 30.4 per 1,000 (1991). Death Rate; 4.5 per 1,000 (1991). Increase Rate; 25.9 per 1,000 (1991). Infant Mortality Rate; 25.9 per 1,000 live births (1990).

RELIGIONS: Mostly Christians with nearly 92% of the population Roman Catholic while 2% are Protestant. The remainder consists of a small number of Jews and AmerIndians who follow local native tribal beliefs.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Spanish which is spoken by virtually the entire population except for some isolated AmerIndian groups.

EDUCATION: Aged 10 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 9.5%, primary 45.7%, secondary 35.9%, higher 8.9% (1990). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 13,371,743 or 92.2% (1990).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: In 1948 Romulo Gallegos of the Democratic Action Party (AD) was elected President, although he was ousted 10 months later. Three military leaders ruled the country for the following two years and in 1950 Marcos Perez Jimenez became dictator of the military government. In Jan. 1958 after a general strike and escalating civil unrest, Perez was deposed and a former President, Romulo Betancourt was returned to office after elections. In 1963 he was succeeded by another AD member, Raul Leoni and in 1968 the Social Christian Party (COPEI) under Rafael Caldera Rodriguez won the presidential elections. In 1973 Carlos Andres Perez of the AD was elected President and in Jan. 1976 his government nationalized the oil industry. In 1978 Luis Herrera Campins of COPEI was elected President and was succeeded by Jaime Lusinchi of the AD in 1983. Lusinchi's government introduced economic austerity policies, wage freezes and abolished fuel subsidies which caused unemployment and inflation to escalate. As a result student and union unrest also escalated. In Dec. 1988 Carlos Andres Perez of the AD was elected President and immediately restructured the economy towards a genuine free market economy. In 1989 serious riots and looting broke out in protest to economic conditions and the introduction of further austerity policies. In Feb. 1990 the Supreme Court revoked arrest orders for 10 former government officials allegedly involved in a large scale exchange rate corruption. In Sept. 1990 Pres. Perez promised to establish a reserve in the Amazon for the threatened Yanomamo Indians. In 1991 the rift between Pres. Perez and the AD widened with a major cabinet reshuffle resulting in July. In the same month Pres. Perez restored the

"economic guarantees" provisions of the constitution and abandoned the president's emergency powers to conduct economic policy which had been used for almost 30 years. Also in 1991 the Venezuelan Investment Fund (FIV) announced that the privatization process of state enterprises would be speed up and announced that it expected to raise USD \$3.6 billion over the next five years. On Feb. 4, 1992 Pres. Perez announced that an attempted coup, led by Lieut. Col. Hugo Chavez Frias, had been foiled. Sporadic fighting continued between the military groups until the government gained control and Frias surrendered the next day. In total 133 officers thought to be members of the Bolivarist Revolutionary Movement (MRB) were arrested for their involvement. Following the uprising and pressure from opposition parties the government announced plans to hold an inquiry into corruption in the military, and promised an increase in the minimum wage and to lower interest rates. On Feb. 25, 1992 a major cabinet reshuffle took place and in June further changes resulted in Gen. Fernando Ochoa Antich, the first military officer to hold a post in the civilian government, being appointed foreign minister. On Nov. 27, 1992 units from the air force along with other leftist groups attempted another coup. Air attacks on the President's office were launched and the rebels captured two air bases. Following 12 hours of fighting the rebels were defeated. In Dec. 1992 some 240 military and civilians were arrested for their involvement in the coup which cost some 170 lives. In 1993 protests against Pres. Perez and his government escalated. In May 1993 Pres. Perez was impeached following allegations of corruption involving the embezzlement of \$17.2 million of secret government funds and the ruling of the Supreme court that there was sufficient evidence for Pres. Perez to be tried. In June 1993 the Congress appointed Ramon Jose Velasquez as interim President. In July 1993 there was a series of bombings in the capital. In Dec. 1993 elections were won by former president Rafael Caldera as head of a coalition called the National Convergence (CN). Pres. Caldera announced plans to modify his predecessor's free market reforms.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Bolivar (B) divided into 100 Centimos.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$58,916,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$26,856,000,000 (1993). Imports; B 997,499,600,000 (1993). Exports; B 1,306,300,000,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; USD \$432,000,000 (1992). Balance of Trade; B 1,159,400,000,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 7,546,200 or 36.3% of total population (1993). Unemployed; 6.3% (1993).

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are the USA, Canada, Italy, Spain and Germany.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Bauxite, Coal, Cocoa, Coffee, Gold, Iron Ore, Livestock, Maize, Manganese, Oil, Rice, Vegetables.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Aluminum, Chemicals, Cement, Food Processing, Petroleum Products,

Ships, Steel, Textiles, Transport Equipment.

MAIN EXPORTS: Aluminium, Crude Oil and Products, Coffee, Cocoa, Iron Ore, Steel.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; route length 363 km (226 mi) (1989), passenger-km 37,626,700 (23,380,140 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 38,627,400 (26,455,906 short ton-mi) (1989). Roads; length 77,500 km (48,156 mi) (1989).