

# Foreword

Preventing violence is more important than ending it; it is unusual for international organizations to become deeply involved in a serious political dispute early enough to prevent widespread violence. In Venezuela in 2002, the Carter Center, the Organization of American States, and the United Nations Development Program had the opportunity to do so when President Hugo Chávez and the opposition grouping under the Coordinadora Democrática invited our three organizations to facilitate a dialogue between them. After a short-lived coup and massive protests that turned deadly, we believed that the conditions were ripe for the continuing street demonstrations and for deep divides to erupt into civil war and that we had an obligation to try to protect human life.

We thought the dialogue might last two months and the Carter Center hired an Argentine mediator, Francisco Diez, to be on the ground to help set up that dialogue. In the end, the Carter Center was officially involved as facilitator or election observer for two years instead of two months, and I personally visited Venezuela six times. The director of the Carter Center's Americas Program, Jennifer McCoy, led our efforts from Atlanta and traveled to Caracas regularly. César Gaviria, the OAS secretary general, made an unprecedented personal contribution, spending seven months almost full-time in Venezuela facilitating negotiations between the two sides.

All of these efforts, I am convinced, helped to prevent widespread deadly conflict in Venezuela. Yet sacrifices were made by Venezuelans who lost their lives or were injured in protests, who lost their jobs after the petroleum strike, and whose families became trapped in the ideological divides. I was particularly touched by the young Venezuelans working with Diez in Caracas who

responded to conflict expert William Ury's calls to form a "third side" to ameliorate the political conflict. These young people formed networks to offer dispute resolution classes to communities, training to journalists willing to correct their contribution to polarization, and cultural events to unite Venezuelans. They are the hope for the future of Venezuela.

This book is a candid account of the international community's role, and especially the Carter Center's role, in alleviating the Venezuelan crisis. The authors document our analysis as we saw it at each moment of the intervention, and acknowledge our failures as well as successes. Their goal is to contribute to the historical record so that others may assess our work and draw lessons that may be useful for future conflict prevention efforts.

Since our intervention in Venezuela, President Chávez has continued to win elections and remain in office, with the option to run for continuous reelection. At the same time, we have seen opposition parties winning important positions in regional and legislative elections. Since the beginning of our participation in Venezuela, we have encouraged the government and the opposition to find ways to coexist because both represent large segments of the Venezuelan people. The key will be to maintain the social gains of recent years while strengthening independent democratic institutions and protecting the rights enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. The Venezuelan people deserve nothing less.

—JIMMY CARTER  
FEBRUARY 2011