MCM: "The primary election is the conclusion of a political and social cycle, although some still resist understanding and accepting it"

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To the Chavistas who ask her if there is life for them after a potential transition, she responds: "Of course there is! That said, in a country with clear and democratic rules of the game." The Venezuelan opposition's presidential candidate clarifies that she will not marginalize the parties "because I'm not a fool," and points out the need to politically and spiritually defeat the regime to achieve change.

–How do you assess the impact of the primary election on October 22nd on Venezuelan politics?

I believe it is the most powerful event that has occurred in Venezuela in a long time, and it still has ripple effects that we have not finished evaluating. For me, the most important aspect is what it generated emotionally among Venezuelans: the awareness of our strength. It signifies aspirations, desires, and hopes transformed into organization and action.

A silent majority that sensed and spoke out despite everything, despite the lack of money and information, despite last-minute changes to polling stations, despite transportation challenges, and despite the scarcity of gasoline. It was an event for the citizen, for the individual. I believe it had a tremendously powerful impact on morale and awareness of our strength.

It had a decisive impact on the international community because it shattered all the narratives that had been built around a fractured opposition, incapable of coordinating, and a country that was sad and defeated. When they had made the international community believe that not even half a million people would turn out, it was almost 3 million. Above all, there was an awareness before the world that the regime had completely lost its social base. After they had made them believe that we would have to wait until perhaps 2030 for a political change, the world said it is now, it is possible, it is a country willing to fight for it. The international reaction is a consequence of internal forces, and we must be very aware of that.

There is the internal impact within the regime. It exposed its vulnerabilities to all sectors and the pillars that sustain the regime: the judicial system, which has been the great cover-up for all the abuses and violations of the Constitution, the Armed Forces, and the police. They were there, and they saw it. They forced us to set up polling stations in the streets because they did not lend us the schools, and that backfired on them because it made us visible to everyone. The PSUV itself realized that they do not have that mobilization capacity, and they know it. It created an internal turmoil that has resulted in them continuing to make mistakes in the face of the consciousness and public exposure of their weaknesses. It's another country after the primary election.

It's the closing of a political and social cycle, although some still resist understanding and accepting it.

–Aside from the sectors that opposed the primaries in favor of the consensus formula, during the campaign, it seemed that the attacks intensified not so much because of the primary itself but because of who would win them. Did you have that perception?

Absolutely. Because, in some way, for those sectors, we represent the end of impunity and privileges. There are sectors that thrive on cronyism, and since they know that I don't owe favors to anyone and they can't control or subdue me, that exacerbates them, worries them. Those are the ones who call me radical and extremist.

What do they want? Someone dominated and subjected to their personal projects, not someone who answers to the people of Venezuela. I am at the service of the Venezuelan people, not of those dark interests.

I make something clear: I am in favor of economic and financial sectors that can prosper and make a lot of money and generate wealth and employment in Venezuela, of course, but with clear and equal rules of the game for everyone. And to those entrepreneurs, media owners, journalists, traders, producers, to those Venezuelans, I say: they will never be better off than with a government like the one we are going to install, with the Rule of Law, openness, clear rules of the game, and respect for private property. They are monitoring how they can divide up a tiny pie, when I say to them: let's think about a country that starts to value itself, that starts to soar.

–At the time, how did you interpret Henrique Capriles' decision to withdraw from the race and Manuel Rosales' decision not to participate in the election? Did you fear that this would affect the legitimacy of the process?

I saw it as a highly personal decision, which probably frustrated their followers. But in any case, the result of the primary election speaks for itself about the determination of the people to make themselves heard. We must listen to the people. They were determined to assert their voice, their decision, and not have it imposed by elite groups meeting in secret conclaves. They wouldn't accept it.

–At one point, it was said: if the primary is about political machinery, María Corina Machado will lose them, as it was believed that her vote was mainly spontaneous due to the absence of a strong party. How much did organization weigh in your victory?

I believe that organization weighed a lot, and not only that of Vente, but also the parties that allied with our movement and the Venezuelans who genuinely, independently offered to support the Primary Commission in all operational and logistical aspects. Undoubtedly, there was a monumental spontaneous vote. Now, in all the centers, tables, and corners, our teams responded.

However, I want to tell those teams: the primaries were 5 thousand tables, now we are heading to a presidential election with 50 thousand. Ten times more. That's why since the day after, since October 23, I've been dedicated body and soul to organization. It seems important to me to convey a message outward, make contacts, I have to appear in the media so that people know what we are doing, and I have to travel the country, but my absolute

priority is organization. Setting up *Red 600K* –a network of 600 thousand citizens trained to ensure electoral transparency–, *Gran Alianza Nacional* (GANA), and getting the command posts to start showing up all over Venezuela.

> –The opposition delegation has pointed out that the primary took place thanks to the Barbados Agreement. Now, what's the point of allowing the primary if they don't respect the result, which involves accepting her candidacy?

Undoubtedly, the Barbados Agreement was one of the most important factors for the primary to exist. Not the only one. Everyone was making scenarios, evaluations of contributions, thinking about all imaginable actors inside and outside, and there's always one missing factor: the people. It's like the people don't matter. The pressure that existed since the primary was proposed and how this grew made opposition and international political actors understand that the people would not accept any other mechanism than the primary.

Now, the first point of the Barbados Agreement establishes that the parties can choose their candidates however they want, and Venezuelans have already done so. The democratic forces have already done so through the primaries; the candidate of the people is chosen by the people. I have received the support of all the candidates and parties that participated in the primary, and those that did not.

For there to be a clean and free election, as stated by the European Parliament, the winner of the primaries must participate. Period. Because it's in the Constitution, because it's the international electoral integrity standards, and because it's explicitly stated and signed in the Barbados Agreement.

–As a result of the primaries, you are the opposition's presidential candidate. But you are also considered the leader of the opposition. How do you exercise that leadership, particularly in relation to the parties and their leaders?

We all know that we are in a very complex process, that this is not a conventional election. The regime tells you, in the words of Nicolás Maduro: "This is by fair means or foul". Please, let's not be naive, we are talking about a process that has neither a date nor conditions. It has absolutely nothing.

I want to say precisely what needs to be achieved: for there to be an electoral defeat, first there must be a political and spiritual defeat. That is much more than a candidacy, and that is already happening. That's why the regime acts like this, because it knows that we are delivering an irreversible political defeat, and the spiritual defeat at the level of each Venezuelan and their relationship with the country and the system.

This obviously makes them see it as impossible to avoid a defeat if there is a competitive election. And today, they do not accept the possibility of leaving power. They haven't accepted it; they don't assume the possibility of a transition. That's why they say "by foul means." And by foul means, it's not about removing María Corina; it means they will not accept losing.

The political defeat is realized on the day they accept that a transition is coming. And from there, everything else is secondary. I value all the points, but I want to say that they are easy to execute if the political defeat is consolidated. All the discussion about the rest, enabling, electoral card, and conditions, is administrative and subsequent to achieving the regime's acknowledgement that a transition is coming. When they accept that a transition is coming,

it will be the result, among other things, of them recognizing that there are guarantees for that transition to be reasonable for them and favorable for Venezuelans.

This is how I am engaging with all the parties that want to contribute and understand the complexity of this moment. This is not a campaign with bells and whistles, because there's no money for that anyway. This is something else, this is a movement of depth, not surface. What we are reaching is people's consciousness and homes.

–What do you respond to those who fear that due to having obtained such an overwhelming victory in the primary, you might believe that you can "go it alone" and leave the parties aside?

I'm not a fool. That would be foolishness. Besides, we're not thinking about the present moment; we're thinking about what comes next, how we give governability to Venezuela. We are building governability starting now. To some of them, I say: you can be sure that I won't do to you what you did to me, because I'm not a fool.

This is not about quotas. It's about finding the best people to do what they do best. And I do know how to do that, to build high-performance teams, and we have done it. In all the command centers, there are technicians and leaders from all parties. This is happening at the national, state, municipal, and parish levels. And if anyone feels like I haven't called them, call me because we need everyone here. That is, those who are rowing in the same direction. I don't want those who disguise themselves and come to row in the opposite direction, I don't want those. Just as I don't

want the corrupt, nor their money, nor their support, nor their media, nor their votes.

–How can we make the Chavismo accept that the favored candidate competes in the presidential election?

That's the crux of the matter. Why don't they want me? Because they know I will defeat them. What does Maduro want? Someone he can defeat. Period. The problem isn't me; the problem is that they still haven't accepted they're going to lose.

That's what we're building. That's why we need more strength every time. I want to reach the heart of every Venezuelan who may have doubts about me today. Justified and legitimate doubts, because they've said horrible things about me, that I'm some sort of local Savonarola coming to chop heads and settle scores. I want to reach the heart of every Venezuelan, even those in the PSUV who have approached me, by the way, and ask me, "Is there life for me after the transition?" Of course, there is! That is, in a country with clear and democratic rules of the game.

That's already happening, PSUV members are saying: "I want to choose my candidate, our leaders, not have one imposed on me by a party leader based on their internal feuds and loyalties." They know that will only happen with us. So, what's happening? Pieces of this system are starting to break apart because, in the end, all of them, PSUV members, military personnel, police officers, judges, prosecutors, go home and talk to their husbands, wives, and see their children leaving, just like us, and ultimately, they want the same thing: for their kids to come back, for us to live well.

A country where there is order, where the territory is under the control of the Venezuelan state, a country where children go

to school every day and not just two days a week. The regime knows that the spiritual defeat has already occurred, and we will complete the political defeat when they understand that their best option is a transition. Why is it their best option? Because the alternative is to end up like Nicaragua, and this country cannot withstand it institutionally or emotionally; the people will not tolerate them seizing power by force.

If this is to be done peacefully, then, who do we negotiate the transition with and on what terms? Because, in the end, the terms of a negotiation must be presented to the country and accepted by the country. And the country will only accept the terms of a negotiation if it trusts the leadership representing them, not just anyone. That's why Maduro will ultimately understand that his best option is negotiating with us.

–Although the candidate was chosen through primaries, the discussion about consensus reappears with the new disqualification...

A few days ago someone answered that by saying: but the primaries were by consensus. They don't understand anything; they don't understand what happened. Whoever does that, does the same thing as the Supreme Court of Justice, which said that the primary did not exist. What do people do about that? They don't even laugh anymore; they don't even listen to them; what they do is expose themselves in terms of who they serve.