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The Earthquake's Other Ruins

Now comes mourning. Now comes anger. Now comes the helplessness over the lives that were lost, over the improvisation and abuse of power. Now, too, will come hope, even as it makes its way through uncertainty, fear, and the vast authoritarian swamp in which Venezuela is submerged.

The earthquakes of June 24, 2026, did not merely shake Venezuelan soil with terrifying force. Once again, they exposed the fractures of a country subjected for years to the destruction of its institutions. Nature struck hard and found a weakened state with feet of clay. As if everything had been a fiction that the earth ultimately swallowed whole. The collapse and destruction at the Misión Vivienda housing complex in Playa Grande are a painful metaphor for an era in which the fundamental task of prevention and protection was subordinated to the interests of a group unwilling to relinquish its privileges.

When an emergency shows that ordinary people, with their own hands, can do more than the military and bureaucratic institutions that did not know how, could not, or would not respond, tragedy becomes abandonment. It is no longer only a natural disaster; it is also anger at a government more concerned

with control than with service. Yet even amid that failure, another truth stands out. The catastrophe speaks to our collective consciousness and reminds us of what we are capable of when we act as a community.

Perhaps that is why one of the most powerful images was that of Tsunami the dog, as a symbol of shared redemption. Amid the disaster, ministers, generals, and officials mattered little. The heroes were neighbors, volunteers, rescue dogs, and international first responders who did what they could with what they had. It was the quiet, everyday heroism of a society that has endured multiple, prolonged crises. In the absence of official answers, a phrase once again spread by word of mouth and across social media, encapsulating the painful lesson we have learned: “Only the people can save the people.”

Politics should be built on profound empathy, especially in times of tragedy. Yet while, in the first hours, spontaneous solidarity was the only thing offering relief amid the collective bewilderment, the authorities arrived late. Rather than sharing in the mourning, they sought to justify themselves and contest the narrative of the tragedy. This gap between the urgency of the emergency and the pace of politics says much about the country we are today and the institutions that urgently need to be rebuilt.

The earthquakes revealed the limits placed on our sovereignty. Venezuela was once again seen as a territory available to be ordered by others, while the image of a happy country, euphorically dancing in the streets, was repeated almost mechanically. But we are not happy, much less dancing over our dead. The current U.S. administration sees us as an estate that could be managed from abroad: a protectorate for major decisions and a domestic tyranny for everything else. Colonial domination does not consist

only of occupation; it also involves replacing a people's own will with decisions made abroad and carried out by local overseers. These are other ruins: those of a sovereignty that had already been battered despite the patriotic rhetoric. But the Venezuelan people have different concerns. They are not concerned with the division of power, but with the homes that collapsed, the family member who was lost, the hospital that does not work, the lack of electricity and water, shrinking wages, and the phrase that says so much —one I saw posted a few days ago by illustrator Cristina Estanislao: "Like little ants, each of us, with whatever we can contribute, near and far, will build a country."

That is why, after so many crises unfolding simultaneously and for so long, democracy ceases to be an abstract word. Democracy means well-being, timely action, institutions that anticipate, public officials who respond, a justice system that investigates, and cities created by and for life —not for demagoguery or opportunism in times of emergency.

Perhaps there are still new periods of controlled authoritarianism, opaque negotiations, and changes managed from above to come. But the path we deserve is a different one: rebuilding democracy. Perhaps that process of reconstruction began before the aftershocks had even ended. It began when strangers dug together through the rubble, when spontaneous networks of solidarity emerged. That was citizenship in action. The task now is to accelerate that process. Mourning is memory, and anger is a demand for democratic rebirth. Venezuela does not merely need to clear away the rubble. It needs to rebuild trust, its institutions, and its independence in freedom. We need to build a republic again.