

Venezuela: Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), including structure, leadership, and membership process; MAS membership cards, including description; treatment of members by authorities and society (2008-January 2015)

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1. Background

The statutes of the Movement Towards Socialism or Movement to Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) define the party as [translation]

a democratic organization composed of men and women struggling to be interpreters of the aspirations and needs of the workers and peasants, employees, professionals and technicians, students and the youth, medium and small producers, city and countryside entrepreneurs, the marginalized, and in general of all those who want a more just and democratic society. (MAS n.d.a, Art. 1)

The website of MAS indicates that the party was created in 1971, when it splintered from the Communist Party of Venezuela (Partido Comunista de Venezuela) due to internal conflicts regarding the position of the party towards the Soviet Union and the emergence of Eurocommunism [a "trend among European communist parties toward independence from Soviet Communist Party doctrine during the 1970s and '80s" (Encyclopædia Britannica 15 Aug. 2013)] (MAS n.d.b). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of sociology at the Universidad Central de Venezuela who specializes in Venezuelan politics indicated that at the time of its foundation, MAS defended the idea of a [translation] "modern left" that was critical of the Soviet system (Associate Professor 19 Jan. 2015). MAS indicates on its website that the party supported Hugo Chávez for the 1998 presidential elections, and until 2001, when it decided that the government's actions did not reflect the programs that had been presented to the country (MAS n.d.a). The Political Handbook of the World 2014 (PHW) indicates that MAS "began distancing itself from the government coalition in May 2001 in the wake of reports that the president [Hugo Chávez] was considering a declaration of emergency that would permit him to rule by decree"

(2014, 1595). Five months later, according to the same source, Chávez asked MAS to leave the ruling coalition (ibid.).

Sources indicate that MAS joined the opposition movement (Associate Professor 19 Jan. 2015; PHW 2014, 1595), also known as the Democratic Unity Table (Mesa de la Unidad Democrática, MUD), before the 2010 National Assembly elections (ibid.). MUD is a coalition of 50 parties that challenged the ruling party in the 2010 and 2012 elections (ibid., 1594).

According to the Associate Professor, after MAS withdrew its support from the ruling coalition, President Chávez criticized MAS [translation] "several times" for their "'disloyalty'" (Associate Professor 19 Jan. 2015). The Associate Professor also indicated that the party has experienced [translation] "many" internal divisions between those who supported Chávez and those who did not (ibid.). In his opinion, MAS is a [translation] "tiny" party whose influence in Venezuelan politics is "very small" (ibid.). Corroborating information on the above statements by the Associate Professor could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information on the geographical presence and activities of MAS could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Structure

MAS's website identifies Felipe Mujica as their [translation] "Secretary General" (MAS 27 Oct. 2014) and Jesús Tapia as the Secretary of the national youth wing of MAS (ibid. 9 June 2014). Sources also identify the following individuals as officials of MAS:

María Verdeal as national Vice-president of MAS (El Universal 15 Dec. 2014; Analítica 13 Jan. 2015);

Macario González as national Sub-secretary (La Patilla 16 Jan. 2015);

José Miguel Rodríguez as [translation] "Secretary Under-general" (El Universal 1 Dec. 2014);

Gustavo Mujica as Secretary General for Caracas (La Patilla 16 Jan. 2015); and

Máximo Blanco, Lisbeth Cordero and Humberto Prado as members of the National Directorate (Dirección Nacional) (ibid.).

2.1 National Convention (Convención Nacional)

According to the MAS statutes, the National Convention is [translation] "the highest authority of MAS at the national level and its decisions have the weight of statutory regulations and are binding for all agencies of MAS and its militants and leaders" (MAS n.d.a, Art. 17). It is composed of the following elected members: the national Secretary General and the national President of the party, the secretaries general and presidents elected in each municipality, the secretaries general and presidents of regional bodies, members of the National Directorate and the National Executive Committee (Comité Ejecutivo Nacional), the secretaries general and presidents of the [translation] "popular fronts" (Frentes de Masas), the Secretary General and the President of MAS's youth wing

(Juventud del MAS), 25 nationally-elected delegates, 10 delegates elected nationally by MAS's youth wing, and 10 nationally-elected delegates from each of MAS's "fronts" (ibid., Art. 18). The main and alternate members of the National Electoral Committee (Comisión Electoral Nacional) are also part of the National Convention as well as delegates from national and international political organizations related to MAS, trade unions, and civil organizations with which MAS has signed cooperation or electoral agreements (ibid., Arts. 19-20). The National Convention takes place every three years, though it can also hold special meetings (ibid., Art. 17).

2.2 National Directorate

The National Directorate of MAS is [translation] "the highest political authority of the party between conventions" and consists of the following: the Secretary General and the President of the party, the Secretary General and the President of MAS's youth wing, the regional secretaries and the regional presidents, the secretaries general of the popular fronts, those responsible for functional and technical Directorate agencies, the presidents of the National Electoral Committee and the Committee of Ethics and Discipline (Comisión de Ética y Disciplina), and one hundred nationally-elected party members (ibid., Arts. 22-23). The National Directorate is also composed of delegates from national and international political organizations related to MAS, trade unions, and civil organizations with which MAS has signed cooperation or electoral agreements (ibid., Art. 22). The National Directorate can be convened by the National Executive Committee, by half of its members plus one, or by half of the regional or municipal bodies plus one (ibid., Art. 23).

2.3 National Executive Committee

The National Executive Committee is [translation] "the highest level of executive leadership of the party" and is composed of the following: the national Secretary General, the national President of the party, the national Youth Secretary, and 49 [translation] "political secretaries" that are elected nationally (ibid., Art. 24). The National Executive Committee meets once a week (ibid.).

2.4 Regional Convention

The Regional Convention (Convención Regional) is [translation] "the highest authority of the party at the regional level and its decisions have the weight of regional statutory regulations and are binding for all agencies of MAS and its militants and leaders in the region" (ibid., Art. 30). It is composed of the following: the President and the Secretary General of the party at the regional level, the secretaries general and presidents elected in each municipality, the secretaries general and presidents of popular fronts, elected members of the Regional Committee (Comité Regional), the Secretary General and the President of the regional youth wing, [translation] "a number" of regionally-elected delegates determined by the Regional Electoral Committee (Comité Electoral Regional), and the main and alternate members of the Regional Electoral Committee (ibid., Arts. 31-32). The Regional Convention is also composed of delegates from regional political organizations related to MAS, trade unions, and civil organizations with which MAS has signed cooperation or electoral agreements (ibid., Art. 33). The Regional Convention takes place every three years, though it can hold special meetings (ibid., Art. 30).

2.5 Regional Directorate (Dirección Regional)

The Regional Directorate of MAS is [translation] "the highest political authority of the party between conventions" and consists of the following: the Secretary General and the President of the party at the regional level, the Secretary General and the President of the regional youth wing, the municipal secretaries and the municipal presidents, the secretaries general of the regional popular fronts, those responsible for functional and technical Directorate agencies, the presidents of the Regional Electoral Committee and the Regional Committee of Ethics and Discipline (Comisión de Ética y Disciplina Regional), and [translation] "a number" of regionally-elected members determined by the Regional Electoral Committee (ibid., Arts. 36-37). The Regional Directorate is also composed of delegates from regional and national political organizations related to MAS, trade unions, and civil organizations with which MAS has signed cooperation or electoral agreements (ibid., Art. 36). The Regional Directorate can be convened by the Regional Executive Committee (Comité Ejecutivo Regional), by half of its members plus one, or by half of the municipal bodies plus one (ibid., Art. 37).

2.6 Regional Executive Committee

The Regional Executive Committee is [translation] "the highest level of executive leadership at the regional level" and is composed of the President, the Secretary General, and regionally-elected members (ibid., Art. 35). The Regional Executive Committee meets [translation] "on a regular basis" (ibid.).

2.7 Municipal Convention (Convención Municipal)

The Municipal Convention is [translation] "the highest authority of the party at the municipal level and its decisions have the weight of municipal statutory regulations and are binding for all agencies of MAS and its militants and leaders in the town" (ibid., Art. 38). The Municipal Convention is composed of the President and the Secretary General of the party at the city level, the secretaries general and presidents elected in every local parish, the secretaries general and presidents of popular fronts, elected members of the Municipal Committee (Comité Municipal), the municipal Secretary General and the municipal President of MAS's youth wing, [translation] "a number" of city-elected members determined by the Municipal Electoral Committee (Comisión Electoral Municipal), and the main and alternate members of the Municipal Electoral Committee (ibid., Arts. 39-40). The Municipal Convention is also composed of delegates from municipal political organizations related to MAS, trade unions, and civil organizations with which MAS has signed cooperation or electoral agreements (ibid., Art. 41). The Municipal Convention takes place every three years, though it can also hold special meetings (ibid., Art. 38).

2.8 Municipal Directorate (Dirección Municipal)

The Municipal Directorate of MAS is [translation] "the highest political authority of the party between conventions" and consists of the Secretary General and the President of the party at the municipal level, the Secretary General and the President of the municipal youth wing, the secretaries and presidents at the local parish level, the secretaries general of the municipal popular fronts, those responsible for the functional and technical Directorate agencies at the municipal level, the presidents of the Municipal Electoral Committee and the Municipal Committee of Ethics and Discipline (Comisión de Ética y Disciplina Municipal), and [translation] "a number" of city-elected members determined by the Municipal Electoral Committee (ibid., Arts. 43-44). The Municipal Directorate is also composed of delegates from local, regional, and national political organizations

related to MAS as well as trade unions and civil organizations with which MAS has signed cooperation or electoral agreements (ibid., Art. 43). The Municipal Directorate can be convened by the Municipal Committee, by half of its members plus one, or by half of the bodies at the local parish level plus one (ibid., Art. 44).

2.9 Other Bodies of MAS

The statutes also indicate the following bodies that are part of MAS:

local board at the parish level (Pleno Parroquial): considered the base of the party and is composed of all militants within the radius of the local parish;

MAS youth wing: composed of youth who are part of MAS;

popular fronts: sectorial organizations structured at the national, regional or municipal levels;

functional committees (Comisiones Funcionales): dedicated to ensure the functioning of the party;

technical departments (Departamentos Técnicos): responsible for providing advice to directorates at all levels on public policy;

interinstitutional bodies (Organismos Interinstitucionales): composed of members of the party who won a seat in the National Assembly or at the regional or municipal level;

committees of ethics and discipline (Comités de Ética y Disciplina); and

electoral committees (Comisiones Electorales) (ibid., Arts. 45-56).

3. Membership

The statutes of MAS indicate that, in order to become a member of the party, a person must be 18 years of age or older (ibid., Art. 6). It also indicates that the party accepts members regardless of their religious, ethnic, or social backgrounds, who express their [translation] "willingness to cooperate and participate in party activities, and share the aims and purposes ruled in the statutes" (ibid.). Additional information, including information on membership cards, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information on MAS membership numbers could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Treatment by Authorities

Information on the treatment by authorities could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be,

conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact individuals and representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: professor of law, Faculty of Law, Florida International University; Movimiento al Socialismo; professor of social movements in Latin America, Gallatin School of Individualized Study, New York University.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Diario La Voz; ecoi.net; El Diario; El Tiempo; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; IRIN; Noticierodigital.com; United Nations - ReliefWeb; United States - Department of State; Venezuela - Correo del Orinoco, Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Interiores, Justicia y Paz, Tribunal Supremo de Justicia; Venezuela al Día.

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