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—Contributor.....Beatriz C. Fantini  
—Contributor email.....Beatriz.Fantini@worldlearning.org  
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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Thanks, Bea — an important perspective that's getting drowned out.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

'This is a victory for us'

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

Venezuelans in southern Vermont say they are grateful  
for the U.S. intervention in their homeland — no matter how it  
was done

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

A TELEPHONE CALL from Caracas at 2:30 a.m. woke one of  
them up. They then started calling one another to share their joy.

For these Venezuelans who live in Brattleboro, the  
stunning news about the American mission to capture Nicolás  
Maduro was the best way to start the new year.

11            “This is a gift from the Three Kings,” one of them said,  
12 referring to the Catholic tradition of the Feast of Epiphany on Jan.  
13 6, which marks the arrival of the Magi or Kings in Bethlehem to  
14 pay their respect to the Christ Child.

15            In the last several days, I have spent many hours talking  
16 with a group of Venezuelan refugees in Brattleboro. Given the  
17 shocking news of the Trump administration’s decision to seize  
18 President Maduro and having heard some North American  
19 friends express anger at the action, I wanted to hear the reactions  
20 of actual Venezuelans themselves.

21            I spent three hours with a group of them this past  
22 weekend, watching the televised arrival of Maduro in New York.

23            Given all the suffering they endured under the Maduro  
24 regime, they all felt they had to see Maduro’s arrest with their  
25 own eyes.

26            And when they saw him coming out of the plane, with  
27 handcuffs on his hands and feet, they all shouted “Bravo!”

28            “This is a victory for us,” said one of them, who  
29 requested anonymity. “And we have to thank President Trump for  
30 having the courage to do it. Nobody did anything in the 26 years  
31 since Chávez took over the country.”

32            “We are very happy but are even happier for people who  
33 remain in Venezuela,” said another. “We were able to leave when  
34 we experienced some of the earliest atrocities — when we did  
35 not have anything to feed our children, when we saw our  
36 neighbors dying of malnutrition.”

37            \* \* \*

38            THEIR STORIES FROM life under the Maduro regime — and  
39 their reasons for coming here, to southern Vermont — are quite  
40 similar. Some of them fled first to Colombia and then Ecuador.  
41 They spent for four to eight years in other places. Then, when  
42 things turned out to be not as good as they hoped or expected,  
43 they decided to apply for asylum in the United States.

44            “It has been challenging [here in the U.S.] in many  
45 respects,” said another. “We did not speak the language. We

46 were not familiar with the culture or the food. But we simply had  
47 to find a way to adjust. Our children had to go to school — and,  
48 fortunately, this community is very welcoming. But we always  
49 hoped that somehow the Chavist-Maduro regime would come to  
50 an end.”

51 Many of them admit that, in spite of all challenges, being  
52 here in Vermont provides a better life for them. “In terms of the  
53 economy, jobs, the quality of life, education for our children, we  
54 are fortunate to be here,” said one mother. “A lot of people in  
55 Venezuela dream of having their kids study in the U.S. We are  
56 fortunately here already — and it has made a big difference.”

57 In terms of finding jobs that do not require proficiency in  
58 English, they all said they have had to learn to do things they  
59 never imagined.

60 “I was a truck driver in Venezuela, and here I got a job at  
61 a farm and ended up killing chickens — something completely  
62 new to me!” one of them said.

63 Another admitted that he has a degree in economics —  
64 “yet I am working in a pizza factory.” He quickly adds, “But I am  
65 very grateful to simply have a job!”

66 When asked how they see the future of Venezuela, they  
67 all agreed that it will take some time to straighten things out.

68 “First, they will have to change the entire infrastructure of  
69 the country,” one said. “And they also have to make sure that all  
70 of Maduro’s people are removed from government offices.

71 “But this is something that only Venezuela can do. The  
72 United States started the process by removing Maduro — but the  
73 rest is up to the Venezuelan people.”

74 \* \* \*

75 I ASKED THEM ALL if they consider the actions of the U.S.  
76 an “invasion” as some have said in the media. They responded  
77 with a resounding no, explaining that the surprising U.S. action  
78 may have been necessary.

79 In fact, one of them observes that the action was done  
80 astutely: “The Administration did not involve international

81 organizations like the U.N. because, if it had, the whole  
82 operation may not have gone as smoothly as it did.”  
83 “Of course, now we are seeing ‘Chavistas’ [that is,  
84 Maduro’s die-hard loyalists] are fighting with the opposition —  
85 but that is to be expected.”

86 While none of them described themselves as  
87 sympathetic to Trump’s MAGA movement, they noted that  
88 sometimes the least likable people do amazing things for the  
89 good of others.

90 “People who don’t agree with Trump’s intervention don’t  
91 really know how the vast majority of Venezuelans feel right now,”  
92 one of them observed.

93 It is something they had hoped and prayed for, for so  
94 long, that the U.S. action has brought relief to thousands of long-  
95 suffering Venezuelans — no matter how it was done.

96 “Maduro is out—and that is what is important.”

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

97 **BEATRIZ FANTINI** lived in Venezuela for 10 years. She  
98 attended college there and worked as a journalist in Caracas and  
99 Maracaibo. She has been working with a group of Venezuelans  
100 since they arrived in Brattleboro last year.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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