

For Six Month Period Ending Feb. 29, 2008
(insert date)

I - REGISTRANT

1. (a) Name of Registrant Venezuela Information Office, LLC (b) Registration No. 5609

(c) Business Address(es) of Registrant
2000 P Street, NW Suite 240
Washington DC 20036

2. Has there been a change in the information previously furnished in connection with the following:

- (a) If an individual:
- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) Residence address | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (2) Citizenship | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (3) Occupation | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
- (b) If an organization:
- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| (1) Name | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| (2) Ownership or control | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| (3) Branch offices | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
- (c) Explain fully all changes, if any, indicated in items (a) and (b) above.

2008 MAR 27 PM 1:57
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

IF THE REGISTRANT IS AN INDIVIDUAL, OMIT RESPONSE TO ITEMS 3, 4 AND 5(a).

3. If you have previously filed Exhibit C¹, state whether any changes therein have occurred during this 6 month reporting period.

- Yes No
- If yes, have you filed an amendment to the Exhibit C? Yes No

If no, please attach the required amendment.

¹ The Exhibit C, for which no printed form is provided, consists of a true copy of the charter, articles of incorporation, association, and by laws of a registrant that is an organization. (A waiver of the requirement to file an Exhibit C may be obtained for good cause upon written application to the Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC 20530.)

4. (a) Have any persons ceased acting as partners, officers, directors or similar officials of the registrant during this 6 month reporting period? Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name Position Date connection ended

(b) Have any persons become partners, officers, directors or similar officials during this 6 month reporting period? Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name Residence address Citizenship Position Date assumed

5. (a) Has any person named in item 4(b) rendered services directly in furtherance of the interests of any foreign principal? Yes No

If yes, identify each such person and describe his service.

(b) Have any employees or individuals, who have filed a short form registration statement, terminated their employment or connection with the registrant during this 6 month reporting period? Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name Position or connection Date terminated
Alexander Main Researcher/policy analyst 9/30/07

(c) During this 6 month reporting period, has the registrant hired as employees or in any other capacity, any persons who rendered or will render services to the registrant directly in furtherance of the interests of any foreign principal(s) in other than a clerical or secretarial, or in a related or similar capacity? Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name Residence address Citizenship Position Date assumed

6. Have short form registration statements been filed by all of the persons named in Items 5(a) and 5(c) of the supplemental statement? Yes No

If no, list names of persons who have not filed the required statement.

II - FOREIGN PRINCIPAL

7. Has your connection with any foreign principal ended during this 6 month reporting period?
Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name of foreign principal _____ Date of termination _____

8. Have you acquired any new foreign principal² during this 6 month reporting period?
Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name and address of foreign principal _____ Date acquired _____

9. In addition to those named in Items 7 and 8, if any, list foreign principals² whom you continued to represent during the 6 month reporting period.

Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

10. EXHIBITS A AND B

(a) Have you filed for each of the newly acquired foreign principals in Item 8 the following:

Exhibit A³ Yes No
Exhibit B⁴ Yes No

N/A

If no, please attach the required exhibit.

(b) Have there been any changes in the Exhibits A and B previously filed for any foreign principal whom you represented during the 6 month period? Yes No

If yes, have you filed an amendment to these exhibits? Yes No

If no, please attach the required amendment.

2 The term "foreign principal" includes, in addition to those defined in Section 1(b) of the Act, an individual organization any of whose activities are directly or indirectly supervised, directed, controlled, financed, or subsidized in whole or in major part by a foreign government, foreign political party, foreign organization or foreign individual. (See Rule 100(a)(9).) A registrant who represents more than one foreign principal is required to list in the statements he files under the Act only those principals for whom he is not entitled to claim exemption under Section 3 of the Act. (See Rule 208.)

3 The Exhibit A, which is filed on Form CRM-157 (Formerly OBD-67), sets forth the information required to be disclosed concerning each foreign principal.

4 The Exhibit B, which is filed on Form CRM-155 (Formerly OBD-65), sets forth the information concerning the agreement or understanding between the registrant and the foreign principal.

III - ACTIVITIES

11. During this 6 month reporting period, have you engaged in any activities for or rendered any services to any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, and 9 of this statement? Yes No

If yes, identify each such foreign principal and describe in full detail your activities and services:

Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
All activities were of a political nature and are described in response to item 12 of Section III.
(see attachment)

12. During this 6 month reporting period, have you on behalf of any foreign principal engaged in political activity⁵ as defined below? Yes No

If yes, identify each such foreign principal and describe in full detail all such political activity, indicating, among other things, the relations, interests and policies sought to be influenced and the means employed to achieve this purpose. If the registrant arranged, sponsored or delivered speeches, lectures or radio and TV broadcasts, give details as to dates and places of delivery, names of speakers and subject matter.

(see log attached)

13. In addition to the above described activities, if any, have you engaged in activity on your own behalf which benefits any or all of your foreign principals? Yes No

If yes, describe fully.

⁵ The term "political activities" means any activity that the person engaging in believes will, or that the person intends to, in any way influence any agency or official of the Government of the United States or any section of the public within the United States with reference to formulating, adopting or changing the domestic or foreign policies of the United States or with reference to the political or public interests, policies, or relations of a government of a foreign country or a foreign political party.

IV - FINANCIAL INFORMATION

14. (a) RECEIPTS-MONIES

During this 6 month reporting period, have you received from any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, and 9 of this statement, or from any other source, for or in the interests of any such foreign principal, any contributions, income or money either as compensation or otherwise? Yes [X] No []

If no, explain why.

If yes, set forth below in the required detail and separately for each foreign principal an account of such monies⁶

| Date | From whom | Purpose | Amount |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1/22/2008 | Venezuelan Embassy | operating expenses | \$ 180,000 |
| | | | \$ 180,000 Total |

(b) RECEIPTS - FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN

During this 6 month reporting period, have you received, as part of a fund raising campaign⁷, any money on behalf of any foreign principal named in items 7, 8, and 9 of this statement? Yes [] No [X]

If yes, have you filed an Exhibit D⁸ to your registration? Yes [] No []

If yes, indicate the date the Exhibit D was filed. Date _____

(c) RECEIPTS - THINGS OF VALUE

During this 6 month reporting period, have you received any thing of value⁹ other than money from any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, and 9 of this statement, or from any other source, for or in the interests of any such foreign principal? Yes [] No [X]

If yes, furnish the following information:

| Name of foreign principal | Date received | Description of thing of value | Purpose |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------|
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------|

6, 7 A registrant is required to file an Exhibit D if he collects or receives contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for a foreign principal, as part of a fund raising campaign. (See Rule 201(e).)

8 An Exhibit D, for which no printed form is provided, sets forth an account of money collected or received as a result of a fund raising campaign and transmitted for a foreign principal.

9 Things of value include but are not limited to gifts, interest free loans, expense free travel, favored stock purchases, exclusive rights, favored treatment over competitors, "kickbacks," and the like.

15. (a) **DISBURSEMENTS - MONIES**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you

(1) disbursed or expended monies in connection with activity on behalf of any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, and 9 of this statement? Yes No

(2) transmitted monies to any such foreign principal? Yes No

If no, explain in full detail why there were no disbursements made on behalf of any foreign principal.

If yes, set forth below in the required detail and separately for each foreign principal an account of such monies, including monies transmitted, if any, to each foreign principal.

| Date | To whom | Purpose | Amount |
|------|---------|---------|--------|
|------|---------|---------|--------|

(See attachment 15a)

Total

(b) **DISBURSEMENTS - THINGS OF VALUE**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you disposed of anything of value¹⁰ other than money in furtherance of or in connection with activities on behalf of any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, and 9 of this statement?

Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

| Date disposed | Name of person to whom given | On behalf of what foreign principal | Description of thing of value | Purpose |
|---------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
|---------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|

(c) **DISBURSEMENTS - POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you from your own funds and on your own behalf either directly or through any other person, made any contributions of money or other things of value¹¹ in connection with an election to any political office, or in connection with any primary election, convention, or caucus held to select candidates for political office?

Yes No

If yes, furnish the following information:

| Date | Amount or thing of value | Name of political organization | Name of candidate |
|------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
|------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|

^{10, 11} Things of value include but are not limited to gifts, interest free loans, expense free travel, favored stock purchases, exclusive rights, favored treatment over competitors, "kickbacks" and the like.

V - INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

16. During this 6 month reporting period, did you prepare, disseminate or cause to be disseminated any informational materials ¹²?
Yes No

IF YES, RESPOND TO THE REMAINING ITEMS IN SECTION V.

17. Identify each such foreign principal.

Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

18. During this 6 month reporting period, has any foreign principal established a budget or allocated a specified sum of money to finance your activities in preparing or disseminating informational materials? Yes No

If yes, identify each such foreign principal, specify amount, and indicate for what period of time.

Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
Amount \$ 180,000
Period Jan 2008 - March 2008

19. During this 6 month reporting period, did your activities in preparing, disseminating or causing the dissemination of informational materials include the use of any of the following:

- Radio or TV broadcasts
- Magazine or newspaper articles
- Motion picture films
- Letters or telegrams
- Advertising campaigns
- Press releases
- Pamphlets or other publications
- Lectures or speeches
- Internet
- Other (specify) _____

20. During this 6 month reporting period, did you disseminate or cause to be disseminated informational materials among any of the following groups:

- Public Officials
- Newspapers
- Libraries
- Legislators
- Editors
- Educational institutions
- Government agencies
- Civic groups or associations
- Nationality groups
- Other (specify) _____

21. What language was used in the informational materials:

- English
- Other (specify) spanish

22. Did you file with the Registration Unit, U.S. Department of Justice a copy of each item of such informational materials disseminated or caused to be disseminated during this 6 month reporting period? Yes No

23. Did you label each item of such informational materials with the statement required by Section 4(b) of the Act? Yes No

¹² The term informational materials includes any oral, visual, graphic, written, or pictorial information or matter of any kind, including that published by means of advertising, books, periodicals, newspapers, lectures, broadcasts, motion pictures, or any means or instrumentality of interstate or foreign commerce or otherwise. Informational materials disseminated by an agent of a foreign principal as part of an activity in itself exempt from registration, or an activity which by itself would not require registration, need not be filed pursuant to Section 4(b) of the Act.

VI – EXECUTION

In accordance with 28 U.S.C. §1746, the undersigned swear(s) or affirm(s) under penalty of perjury that he/she has (they have) read the information set forth in this registration statement and the attached exhibits and that he/she is (they are) familiar with the contents thereof and that such contents are in their entirety true and accurate to the best of his/her (their) knowledge and belief, except that the undersigned make(s) no representation as to the truth or accuracy of the information contained in the attached Short Form Registration Statement(s), if any, insofar as such information is not within his/her (their) personal knowledge.

(Date of signature)

(Type or print name under each signature¹³)

3/25/08

Olivia B. Goumbri

Olivia B. Goumbri

2008 MAR 27 PM 1:57
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

¹³ This statement shall be signed by the individual agent, if the registrant is an individual or by a majority of those partners, officers, directors or persons performing similar functions, if the registrant is an organization, except that the organization can, by power of attorney, authorize one or more individuals to execute this statement on its behalf

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
FARA REGISTRATION UNIT
NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20530

NOTICE

Please answer the following questions and return this sheet in triplicate with your Supplemental Statement:

1. Is your answer to Item 16 of Section V (Informational Materials – page 8 of Form CRM-154, formerly Form OBD-64-Supplemental Statement):

YES ✓ or NO _____

(If your answer to question 1 is “yes” do not answer question 2 of this form.)

2. Do you disseminate any material in connection with your registration:

YES _____ or NO _____

(If your answer to question 2 is “yes” please forward for our review copies of all material including: films, film catalogs, posters, brochures, press releases, etc. which you have disseminated during the past six months.)

Olivia B. Goumbri
Signature

3/25/08
Date

Olivia B. Goumbri
Please type or print name of
Signatory on the line above

Executive Director
Title

CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT
2008 MAR 27 PM 1:58



U.S. Department of Justice

National Security Division

Washington, DC 20530

THIS FORM IS TO BE AN OFFICIAL ATTACHMENT TO YOUR CURRENT SUPPLEMENTAL STATEMENT - PLEASE EXECUTE IN TRIPLICATE

SHORT-FORM REGISTRATION INFORMATION SHEET

SECTION A

The Department records list active short-form registration statements for the following persons of your organization filed on the date indicated by each name. If a person is not still functioning in the same capacity directly on behalf of the foreign principal, please show the date of termination.

Short Form List for Registrant: Venezuela Information Office, LLC

| Last Name | First Name and Other Names | Registration Date | Termination Date | Role |
|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Gilmond | Isaura | 03/18/2004 | | |
| Goumbri | Olivia B. | 11/22/2005 | | |
| Fani | Natali d. | 01/10/2007 | | |
| Morrissey | Megan D. | 03/21/2007 | | |
| Main | Alexander John | 04/24/2007 | 9/30/07 | Researcher / Analyst |

2008 MAR 27 PM 1:58
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT



U.S. Department of Justice

National Security Division

Washington, DC 20530

SECTION B

In addition to those persons listed in Section A, list below all current employees rendering services directly on behalf of the foreign principals(s) who have not filed short-form registration statements. (Do not list clerks, secretaries, typists or employees in a similar or related capacity). If there is some question as to whether an employee has an obligation to file a short-form, please address a letter to the Registration Unit describing the activities and connection with the foreign principal.

| Name | Function | Date Hired |
|------|----------|------------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Signature: Quia B. Gammie Date: 3/25/08

Title: Executive Director

2008 MAR 27 PM 1:58
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

Venezuela Information Office, LLC

Reg. #5609

Supplemental Statement - Financial Information - Insert for page 6

For Six Month Period Ending February 2008

Section IV , 15 (a) Disbursements

| Expenses | Amount Paid |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Operating Expenses | \$305,560.38 |
| Travel & Transportation | \$73,770.16 |
| Administrative Services | \$10,515.56 |
| Office Supplies | \$16,849.08 |
| Total | \$406,695.18 |

Complementary Information:

- 1- No U.S. Government Officials or media representatives were guest.
- 2- No disbursements made to sub-contractors.

2008 MAR 27 PM 1: 57
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

| FARA Reporting Log-VIO | | | <i>Olivia Goumbri Sept 2007 to Feb 2008</i> | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|------------------|--|--|
| | | | 2008 MAR 27 | | | |
| Date | Person Contacted | Position/TITLE | ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT Organization | Contacted | Subject Discussed | Position Advocated |
| 1-Sep-07 | Chuck Kauffman | Director | Venezuela Solidarity Network | Email | Upcoming delegations to Venezuela | update us so we can offer meeting assistance in Venezuela |
| 10-Sep-07 | Colin Burgon | MP | England | Email | recent trip to Colombia | coordinate information in future on Venezuela |
| 12-Sep-07 | Eric Wingerter | Editor of Borev.net | Bo rev | Email | Wash Post article | use it in your blog |
| 14-Sep-07 | News & Action list serve | | | email | Update on constitutional reforms | write opeds and letters on reforms |
| 14-Sep-07 | Eva Golinger | lawyer | | Email | upcoming referendum delegation | suggest lawyers for delegation |
| 14-Sep-07 | Shirley Pate | retired | Haiti Ven Cuba blog | Email | NDI and IRI event at World Affairs Council | attend and pass on to others |
| 14-Sep-07 | Julia Buxton | professor | University of Bradford | Email | Phil Gunson article on Chavez | write a response |
| 18-Sep-07 | Lisa Sullivan | former maryknoll lay missioner | | email | Upcoming delegations to Venezuela | can you help set up meetings |
| 18-Sep-07 | Steve Ellner | professor | University of the East, Venezuela | Email/Phone | Upcoming delegations to Venezuela | speak to delegation |
| 24-Sep-07 | Bob Schwartz | producer | Dan Rather news reports | email | possible interview with Dan Rather | send past news reports to us |
| 24-Sep-07 | Olga Vives and Jan Strout | VP of NOW | NOW | in person | future work on Venezuela and delegation | send delegation for women's day |
| 25-Sep-07 | Hillary Shelton | Legislative director | NAACP | phone | reforms dinner | attend dinner on constitutional reforms |
| 25-Sep-07 | Ted Radamaker | organizer | Democratic Club in Pomona | email | organizing a talk on Venezuela | do event on Venezuela soon |
| 26-Sep-07 | Laurie Ann Schagg | communications specialist/film maker | Cinelandia | email | LA Times article | write a letter to the editor |
| 27-Sep-07 | Audience | | Inter American Dialogue | in person | constitutional reforms | asked for more facts to be presented at public forums on Venezuela |
| 27-Sep-07 | Jessy Mejia | assistant | Councilman Marc Elrich, Montgomery Co. | in person | events in Montgomery Co. | get organizing group together to plan events on Venezuela |
| 1-Oct-07 | Jack Ellis | Mayor | Macon, GA | phone | referendum in Venezuela | observe election |
| 1-Oct-07 | Nancy Navarro | education worker | Board of Education | in person | Venezuelan progress | host meeting on Venezuela |
| 1-Oct-07 | Gustavo Torres | ED | Casa de MD | in person | Venezuelan progress | host meeting on Venezuela |
| 2-Oct-07 | Nane Alejandrez | ED | Barrios Unidos | Email | Upcoming delegations to Venezuela | suggest delegates |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--|-------------|---|--|
| 3-Oct-07 | Frank Pratkanis | organizer | Baltimore Sister City program | Email | Venezuela sister cities | organize meeting on Venezuela |
| 4-Oct-07 | Nicole Lee | director | TransAfrica Forum | Email | delegation to Venezuela | do a hip hop delegation |
| 10-Oct-07 | Tasha Coleman | international affairs | NAACP | Email | upcoming trip of Ambassador to Baltimore | organize a meeting at NAACP headquarters |
| 10-Oct-07 | Gabriela Sanchez | students | Temple University | Email | talk by Ambassador at Temple | hold faculty reception |
| 11-Oct-07 | Marjorie David | writer | Hollywood | Email | delegation to Venezuela | organize a delegation of film writers |
| 11-Oct-07 | Vivien We | film maker | Hollywood | Email | referendum in Venezuela | join delegation to observer elections |
| 15-Oct-07 | News & Action list serve | | | email | Colombian humanitarian accord, American families see hope in Chavez | become updated on breaking news and contact press and Congress on accord |
| 18-Oct-07 | editor | Pitt University | Jurist magazine | Email | article on constitutional reforms | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 18-Oct-07 | another editor | Pitt University | Jurist magazine | Email | article on constitutional reforms | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 18-Oct-07 | editor | editor | NY Sun | email | article on Citgo | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 19-Oct-07 | Charlie Hardy | former Maryknoll priest | | Email | delegation to Venezuela | help set up meeting with Bolivarian University |
| 19-Oct-07 | Lisa Sullivan | former Maryknoll lay missionary | | email/phone | speaking tour in US | identify Venezuelans to speak |
| 19-Oct-07 | Lisa Sullivan | former Maryknoll lay missionary | | Email | Sister Jenny speaking tour | have religious letter sent to Congress |
| 22-Oct-07 | Gustavo Torres | president | Casa de MD | Email | dinner on Venezuela | invited to dinner on Venezuela with Minister Cabezas |
| 22-Oct-07 | Chuck Kauffman | president | Venezuela Solidarity Network | Email | dinner on Venezuela | invited to dinner on Venezuela with Minister Cabezas |
| 22-Oct-07 | Emira Woods | co-director | Foreign Policy in Focus program at IPS | Email | dinner on Venezuela | invited to dinner on Venezuela with Minister Cabezas |
| 22-Oct-07 | Netfa Freeman | director | SALSA | Email | dinner on Venezuela | invited to dinner on Venezuela with Minister Cabezas |
| 22-Oct-07 | Graylan Hagler | Reverend | Plymouth Congregational Church of Christ | email | dinner on Venezuela | invited to dinner on Venezuela with Minister Cabezas |
| 22-Oct-07 | Gabriela Sanchez | student | Temple University | Email | educational information | distribute VIO booklets at Ambassador's talk |
| 22-Oct-07 | Denice Zeck | president | Media Forum | Email | Venezuelan press coverage during referendum | place some opeds for VIO |
| 23-Oct-07 | David Conforto | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | Email | referendum in Venezuela | organize a National Lawyers Guild delegation to observe referendum |
| 23-Oct-07 | Babette Grunow | organizer | Bolivarian Circle WI | Email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Dan Hellinger | professor | Webster University | Email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Greg Grandin | professor | NYU | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Gary Grass | organizer | | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|---|
| 23-Oct-07 | Justin Delacour | student | University of New Mexico | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Bob Naiman | writer | huffington post | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Shirley Pate | retired | Haiti Ven Cuba blog | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | John Locke | professor | Rochester College | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Gail and Peter Locke | organizers | Marin Interfaith Task Force | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Susan Scott | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 23-Oct-07 | Sue Ashdown | organizer | | Email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 24-Oct-07 | Dave Kane | staff member | Maryknoll | email/phone | Sister Jenny speaking tour | organize a local DC event for public with Sister Jenny |
| 24-Oct-07 | Laura Safer Espinosa | supreme court justice | state of NY | email | referendum press coverage | write oped for local paper |
| 24-Oct-07 | Jim Keller | Reverend retired | | email | referendum | write oped for local paper |
| 24-Oct-07 | Bob Snyder | teacher | Anne Arundel Co. | email | referendum | write oped on trip to Venezuela |
| 24-Oct-07 | Peter Cohn | lawyer | NAACP | email | referendum | write oped on reforms in CA press |
| 24-Oct-07 | Roy Levy Williams | retired | NAACP | email | referendum | write oped in IL press on reforms |
| 25-Oct-07 | Tasha Coleman | international affairs | NAACP | Email | delegation to Venezuela | observe elections with NAACP group |
| 5-Nov-07 | Nane Alejandrez | director | Barrios Unidos | Phone/email | trip to Venezuela | write oped or talk on radio about trip to Venezuela |
| 6-Nov-07 | Bo Taylor | director | Unity One | phone | trip to Venezuela | do radio show on recent trip to Venezuela |
| 6-Nov-07 | Urszula Masny-Latos | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | Email | referendum delegations | write oped before trip to Venezuela on constitutional reforms |
| 6-Nov-07 | Luis Cardona | board member | Barrios Unidos | Email | recent trip to Venezuela | organize meeting on Venezuela in Maryland |
| 6-Nov-07 | Carmen Perez | student | UCSB | Email | trip to Venezuela | write oped for CA paper on trip |
| 8-Nov-07 | Larry Rich | professor | NVCC | Email | upcoming Venezuela panel | incude cultural presentation |
| 11-Nov-07 | Tasha Coleman | international affairs | NAACP | Email | Venezuela events coming up | invtd to film on Venezuela |
| 12-Nov-07 | Ted Rademaker | | Pomona Democratic Club | email | LA Times article | write a letter to the editor |
| 12-Nov-07 | Hillary Shelton | Legislative director | NAACP | Email | referendum | help organize NAACP observer mission |
| 14-Nov-07 | editors | editors | Wall Street Journal | email | column on Venezuela | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 14-Nov-07 | Karyn Haller | chief of staff | Houston Councilwoman Ada Edwards | Email | Venezuela delegation | suggest radio interviews for VIO in Houston |
| 14-Nov-07 | editors | editors | USA Today | Email | article on Venezuela | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 14-Nov-07 | editors | editors | LA Times | Email | article on Venezuela | publish VIO letter to the editor |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--|-------------|--|--|
| 15-Nov-07 | New & Action List Serve | | | email | Student protests in Venezuela and distortions in press | write letters to the editor to NY Times, Washington Post |
| 15-Nov-07 | Laura Safer Espinosa | supreme court justice | New York state | email | biased articles in NY press | submit oped to local papers |
| 16-Nov-07 | editors | editors | Miami Herald | email | article on Venezuela | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 19-Nov-07 | editors | editors | USA Today | Email | article on Venezuela | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 19-Nov-07 | editors | editors | Boston Globe | email | article on Venezuela | publish VIO letter to the editor |
| 19-Nov-07 | Bob Naiman | writer | huffington post | email | Venezuela reforms | write oped for Chicago press |
| 21-Nov-07 | Cynthia McClintock | professor | GWU | email | biased articles in US press | write letter to Washington Times |
| 26-Nov-07 | Eva Golinger | lawyer | | email | delegation to Venezuela | meet with delegates |
| 30-Nov-07 | News & Action list serve | | | email | upcoming referendum vote & Colombia hostage situation | respond to biased coverage in press of referendum and hostage releases |
| 2-Dec-07 | News & Action list serve | | | email | Venezuela referendum | watch media and polls and check VIO website for up to date news coverage of vote |
| 3-Dec-07 | News & Action list serve | | | email | referendum results and media coverage | write letters to national media applauding Chavez conceding defeat of referendum |
| 6-Dec-07 | members | lawyers | National Lawyers Guild members in Boston | Email | Citgo discounted heating oil launch in Boston | attend launch in Boston |
| 6-Dec-07 | Judy Somberg | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | Email | recent electoral mission to Venezuela | write oped for local paper |
| 7-Dec-07 | David Conforto | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | phone | recent electoral mission to Venezuela | write oped for local paper |
| 7-Dec-07 | Chuck Kaffman | director | Venezuela Solidarity Network | phone | upcoming conference on Venezuela | have speaker on press bias toward Venezuela |
| 9-Dec-07 | Graylan Hagler | Reverend | Plymouth Congregational Church of Christ | phone | Citgo discounted heating oil launch in Washington DC | attend and MC launch in DC |
| 11-Dec-07 | Diode Walden | community organizer | Sister Cities DC | Email | Citgo discounted heading oil launch in Washington DC | attend launch in DC and invite others in community |
| 11-Dec-07 | Sharif Kadoul | producer | Democracy Now | email | Citgo discounted heating oil launch | cover event in Washington DC |
| 12-Dec-07 | various members | councilmembers | city of Washington DC | Email | Citgo discounted heating oil launch in Washington DC | attend event in Southeast for launch |
| 12-Dec-07 | Mark Sullivan | researcher and writer | Congressional Library Research Center | Email | referendum observer delegation | invited to attend Venezuelan holiday party |
| 13-Dec-07 | Jennifer Wager | film maker | independent | email | citgo launch in NYC | attend event in Bronx |
| 18-Dec-07 | Kendra Fehrer | grad student | Brown University | email/phone | upcoming conference on the Andes at Brown | make available a table for VIO education information at the conference |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|---|---|
| 19-Dec-07 | David Conforto | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | email | oped draft | submit to Boston Globe |
| 4-Jan-08 | News & Action list serve | | | email | Colombia hostage release & amnesty decree | write letters on peaceful moves of Chavez administration to submit to national papers |
| 4-Jan-08 | Tasha Coleman | international affairs | NAACP | email | referendum mission to Venezuela | write report on trip for publication |
| 4-Jan-08 | Dale Sorenson | co-director | Marin Interfaith Task Force | email/phone | upcoming Venezuela solidarity conference at Howard University | consider organizing a lobby day for attendees |
| 7-Jan-08 | Tasha Coleman | international affairs | NAACP | email | recent delegation to Venezuela | write article on recent trip |
| 9-Jan-08 | Medea Benjamin | president | code pink | email | upcoming protest on Posada Cariles | do media outreach on actions planned |
| 9-Jan-08 | Christy Thorton | staff member | NACLA | email | article on media coverage of Venezuela | publish VIO oped |
| 10-Jan-08 | Paulina Novo | staff member | BIC USA | email | event with Micheal Reid at InterAmerican Dialogue | attend event |
| 15-Jan-08 | Adora Nweze & Beverly Neile | Director and President | NAACP Florida | email/phone | NAACP recent mission in Venezuela | to meet in Florida |
| 16-Jan-08 | editors | editors | AlterNet | email | article on media coverage of Venezuela | publish VIO oped |
| 17-Jan-08 | editors | editors | Znet | email | article on media coverage of Venezuela | publish VIO oped |
| 17-Jan-08 | Michael Ray | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | email | Venezuela events in Florida | organize a meeting on Venezuela |
| 17-Jan-08 | Lucie Tondreau | lawyer | Haititan Grassroots Community Group | email/phone | Venezuela in general | help give ideas on events in Florida |
| 17-Jan-08 | Alvaro Fernandez | editor and writer | Progreso Weekly | email/phone | Venezuela in general | help give ideas on events in Florida |
| 23-Jan-08 | Jim Naureckas | editor | FAIR | email | Venezuela article | publish VIO oped |
| 23-Jan-08 | editor | editor | Common Dreams | email | Venezuela article | publish VIO oped |
| 25-Jan-08 | Dan Levin | producer | 3Kingdoms Entertainment | email | Artists for Heat benefit concert in Philly | give VIO a table at concert |
| 28-Jan-08 | Gabriela Sanchez | student | Temple University | email | Artists for Heat benefit concert in Philly | help with table and distributing material at concert |
| 28-Jan-08 | Roberto Lovato | writer | New America Media | email | Venezuela in general and media coverage | publish oped |
| 29-Jan-08 | Julie Ruben | director | Left Forum | email/phone | upcoming conference on the left | have a panel on Venezuela at forum |
| 2-Feb-08 | news and action list serve | | | email | new VIO blog & Human Rights Watch | visit new VIO blog |
| 4-Feb-08 | Kendra Fehrer | student | Brown University | email | upcoming conference on the Andes at Brown | include VIO at all luncheons with speakers and faculty |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 5-Feb-08 | Bill Fletcher | organizer | former TransAfrica Forum president | email | Left Forum | push for panel on Venezuela |
| 5-Feb-08 | Jim Keller & Councilman Miguel Luna | councilman in Providence | Providence | email/phone | upcoming Brown conference | organize meetings for the VIO during Brown conference with community leaders and others |
| 6-Feb-08 | Eric Ruben | former president | Florida Fair Trade Coalition | phone | upcoming VIO visit to FL | organize meetings with community for VIO |
| 10-Feb-08 | Linda Ramirez | lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | email | upcoming VIO visit to FL | organize meeting for VIO with lawyers |
| 19-Feb-08 | Sujatha Fernandes | professor | CUNY Queens College | email | Left Forum in NY | speak on Venezuela panel |
| 22-Feb-08 | Judy Somberg | Lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | phone | Lawyers guild visit to Venezuela | put VIO in touch with more members of Guild nationally |
| 26-Feb-08 | news and action list serve | | | email | recent Nation article | write letter to the editor on biased coverage |
| 26-Feb-08 | Chuck Kauffman & Banbose Shango | organizers | Venezuela Solidarity Network | email | Nation article on Venezuela | pass on VIO action alert |
| 27-Feb-08 | Chuck Kauffman | president | Venezuela Solidarity Network | email | upcoming conference on Venezuela | invite Rhode Island activists |
| 29-Feb-08 | Beverly Neile | ED | Florida NAACP | in person | upcoming Venezuela events | organize an event with Ambassador |
| 29-Feb-08 | Frank Corbishle | President | CAP-Providence | email | Venezuela solidarity conference | attend conference at Howard |

CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT
2008 MAR 27 PM 1:58

FARA Report**Venezuela Information Office****Megan Morrissey****September 2007 - February 2008**

| Date | Person Contacted | Position/Title | Organization | Subject Discussed | Contact | Position Advocated | |
|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 9/4/07 | James Ingham | Reporter | BBC | BBC News coverage | emailed | use VIO story idea | |
| 9/17/07 | Mark Sullivan | LatAm specialist | Congress Research Service | CSR Reports | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/18/07 | Chris Moore | Director | Sol Productions | Events on Venezuela | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/18/07 | David Adams | Reporter | St. Petersburg Times | News coverage | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/18/07 | David Kane | Missionary | Maryknoll Missioners | U.S.-Ven relations | emailed | sent info on 2002 coup | |
| 9/18/07 | Eva Golinger | Freelance Writer | Postcards from the Revolution | Website | emailed | Requested a link to the website | |
| 9/18/07 | | Website editor | Democratic Underground | Website | emailed | Requested a link to the website | |
| 9/19/07 | Krishnadev Kalamur | Reporter | UPI | News coverage | emailed | gave feedback on article | |
| 9/20/07 | Russel Porter | LatAm Dir | USAID OTI | USAID report | emailed | Requested correction to a report | |
| 9/25/07 | Lisa Rundle | Book Editor | Rabble.ca | Book reviews | emailed | review Chavez books | |
| 9/25/07 | Brenda Norrell | Freelance Writer | None | News coverage | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/25/07 | | News Editor | Rutgers Daily Targum | News coverage | emailed | Asked to correct a spelling error | |
| 9/26/07 | Clara Irazabal | Professor | Univ of South Cali | University of So Cali | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/26/07 | Matthew Walter | Reporter | Bloomberg | News coverage | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/26/07 | Alex Kennedy | Reporter | Bloomberg | News coverage | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/26/07 | Greg Wilpert | Reporter | Venezuelanalysis | Book reviews | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/26/07 | Chris Carlson | Reporter | Venezuelanalysis | News coverage | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 9/26/07 | | Permissions editor | Yes! Magazine | News coverage | emailed | Asked to reproduce article | |
| 9/27/07 | Rosa Campos-Britto | Professor | Loyola College | Resources | emailed | stay in touch on research | |
| 9/28/07 | David Kane | Solidarity worker | Venezuela Solidarity Network | U.S.-Ven relations | emailed | use information on 2002 coup | |
| 10/3/07 | Dan Hellinger | Professor | Webster University | Letter to the editor | emailed | Gave feedback on letter to editor | |
| 10/3/07 | Krista Kapralos | Reporter | Daily Herald (WA) | News coverage | emailed | cover land reform | |
| 10/3/07 | Ernesto Chacon | staffer | Governor Jim Doyle (D-WI) | Resources | emailed | use VIO as a resource | |
| 10/4/07 | Ricardo Astudillo | Solidarity worker | Bolivarian Society of Quebec | Resources | emailed | asked to send books | |
| 10/4/07 | Ruxandra Guidi | Freelance Writer | NPR | Resources | emailed | join listserv | |
| 10/4/07 | Paulina Novo | Analyst | Bank Information Center | Contacts on economy | emailed | write oped on economy | |
| 10/9/07 | Adriana Loeff | Student | NYU Graduate Student | Media | emailed | learn more about Ven econ | |
| 10/11/07 | Srikrishna Ayyangar | Professor | University of the South | Resources | emailed | replied to request for DVDs | |
| 10/11/07 | Elizabeth Ferrari | Freelance Writer | Beach Impeach | News coverage | emailed | update letter to editor | |
| 10/15/07 | Caroline Gilger | Student | American University | Media | emailed | learn more on Ven media | |
| 10/16/07 | Roy Carson | Freelance Writer | Vheadline.com | Resources | emailed | change byline on article | |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------|------------------------------------|
| 10/17/07 | Tyler Bridges | Reporter | Miami Herald | News coverage | emailed | balance reporting |
| 10/17/07 | James Ingham | Reporter | BBC | News coverage | emailed | balance reporting |
| 10/18/07 | Judith Ewell | Professor | William and Mary | News coverage | emailed | edit letter to the editor |
| 10/18/07 | Joe Macaron | Reporter | Kuwait News Agency | News coverage | emailed | asked to cover an event |
| 10/18/07 | Paulina Novo | Analyst | Bank Information Center | News coverage | emailed | asked to cover an event |
| 10/18/07 | Mark Sullivan | LatAm specialist | Congressional Research Service | Events on Venezuela | emailed | asked to cover an event |
| 10/22/07 | Cathy Rakowski | Professor | Ohio State University | Constitution | emailed | asked to cover an event |
| 10/23/07 | Elizabeth Ferrari | Freelance Writer | Beach Impeach | Constitution | emailed | use VIO information on reforms |
| 10/23/07 | Ricardo Astudillo | Solidarity worker | Bolivarian Society of Quebec | Resources | emailed | use VIO as a resource |
| 10/25/07 | John Wash | Andes Program Dir. | WOLA | Constitution | emailed | offered information on reforms |
| 10/26/07 | Joel Wendland | Editor | Political Affairs Magazine | Interviews | emailed | responded to interview request |
| 10/29/07 | Alex Grant | Solidarity worker | HOV Canada | News coverage | emailed | Asked about a letter to the editor |
| 10/29/07 | Ricardo Astudillo | Solidarity worker | Bolivarian Society of Quebec | News coverage | emailed | Asked about a letter to the editor |
| 10/29/07 | Michael Petrou | Reporter | Maclean's Magazine | News coverage | emailed | Gave feedback on reporting |
| 10/29/07 | Megan Hise | Reporter | Press TV in Caracas | News coverage | emailed | use VIO as a resource |
| 11/2/07 | James Ingham | Reporter | BBC | News coverage | emailed | use VIO story ideas |
| 11/5/07 | Esther Cepeda | Columnist | Chicago Sun-Times | News coverage | emailed | Find out more about Venezuela |
| 11/5/07 | Larry Birns | Director | Council on Hemispheric Affairs | News coverage | emailed | Offered feedback on report |
| 11/8/07 | Esther Cepeda | Columnist | Chicago Sun-Times | News coverage | emailed | Offered feedback on column |
| 11/8/07 | Netfa Freeman | Researcher | Institute for Policy Studies | Current events | emailed | use VIO info for interview |
| 11/9/07 | Saul Hudson | Reporter | Reuters | News coverage | emailed | asked to improve reporting |
| 11/9/07 | Brian Ellsworth | Reporter | Reuters | News coverage | emailed | asked to improve reporting |
| 11/9/07 | Patricia Rondon | Reporter | Reuters | News coverage | emailed | asked to improve reporting |
| 11/13/07 | Matt Labash | Reporter | Weekly Standard | Resources | emailed | offered information about reforms |
| 11/15/07 | Dan Hellinger | Professor | Webster University | Opinion pieces | emailed | Asked about writing an op-ed |
| 11/15/07 | Judith Ewell | Professor | William and Mary | Opinion pieces | emailed | Asked about writing something |
| 11/15/07 | Simon Romero | Reporter | New York Times | News coverage | emailed | offered info on recent events |
| 11/15/07 | Larry Sabato | Professor | UVA Center for Politics | Opinion pieces | emailed | do op-ed on constitutional reform |
| 11/19/07 | Virginia Bouvier | Grants admin. | US Institute of Peace | Letter to the editor | emailed | write a letter to the editor |
| 11/20/07 | Susan Scott | Meber | National Lawyers Guild | Opinion pieces | emailed | Asked about writing an op-ed |
| 11/27/07 | Mark Fitzgerald | Reporter | Editor and Publisher | News coverage | emailed | Gave feedback on an article |
| 11/27/07 | Robert Naiman | Blogger | Huffington Post | Opinion pieces | emailed | Gave feedback on an op-ed |
| 11/27/07 | Chris Kraul | Reporter | Los Angeles Times | News coverage | emailed | report on referendum observers |
| 11/28/07 | Phil Gunson | Reporter | Miami Herald | News coverage | emailed | better coverage of event |
| 11/29/07 | U.S. Media Contacts | reporters mass list | | | emailed | use updated polling info |
| 11/29/07 | James Ingham | Reporter | BBC | Contacts | emailed | offered contacts for interviews |
| 11/29/07 | Tal Abady | Reporter | South Florida Sun-Sentinel | Venezuela and FL | emailed | advised on contacts in Florida |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------|------------------------------------|
| 11/29/07 | Sandra Sierra | Reporter | Associated Press | Events on Venezuela | called | cover a press conference |
| 11/29/07 | Matthew Walter | Reporter | Bloomberg | Events on Venezuela | called | cover a press conference |
| 11/29/07 | Benedict Mander | Reporter | Financial Times | Events on Venezuela | called | cover a press conference |
| 11/30/07 | Fernando Coronil | Professor | University of Michigan | News coverage | emailed | advised on talking to reporters |
| 11/30/07 | Chris Kraul | Reporter | Los Angeles Times | News coverage | emailed | gave more info about observers |
| 11/30/07 | June Woods | Reporter | Madeira Tribune | News coverage | emailed | sign up for press release |
| 12/2/07 | U.S. Media Contacts | reporters mass list | | | emailed | sent a booking memo on reforms |
| 12/2/07 | Juan Forero | Reporter | Washington Post | News coverage | emailed | interview observers |
| 12/4/07 | Lindolfo Carballo | Reporter | Lowell 91.5FM | Interviews | emailed | answered request for interview |
| 12/12/07 | Julia Buxton | Professor | University of Bradford | Constitution | emailed | asked for info on referendum |
| 12/13/07 | Cathy Rakowski | Professor | Ohio State University | Gender issues | emailed | offered an article on women |
| 12/13/07 | Nestor Ikeda | Reporter | Associated Press | News coverage | emailed | follow-up on heating oil event |
| 12/13/07 | Sandino Martinez | Reporter | EFE | News coverage | emailed | follow-up on heating oil event |
| 1/15/08 | Steve Ellner | Professor | Universidad del Oriente | Book reviews | emailed | publicize book |
| 1/16/08 | Jim Naureckas | Director | FAIR | Submission | emailed | asked for submission guidelines |
| 1/17/08 | Marc Chernick | Professor | Georgetown University | Letter to the editor | emailed | Asked about a letter to the editor |
| 1/24/08 | T.M. Scruggs | Professor | University of Iowa | Contacts | emailed | asked for contact information |
| 1/24/08 | Dan Hellinger | Professor | Webster University | Research | emailed | suggested ideas for research |
| 1/24/08 | Nestor Ikeda | Reporter | Associated Press | News coverage | emailed | gave feedback on article |
| 1/24/08 | Mark Engler | Reporter | In These Times | News coverage | emailed | gave feedback on article |
| 1/25/08 | Ruxandra Guidi | Freelance Writer | NPR | News coverage | emailed | gave feedback on article |
| 1/31/08 | Zach Bigalke | Freelance Writer | Helum, freelance | News coverage | emailed | gave feedback on article |
| 2/7/08 | Seth Weiss | Editor | Monthly Review Press | Book event | called | send review copy of a book |
| 2/7/08 | Gisela Sanchez | Colombia Prog. Dir. | WOLA | Letter to the editor | called | write a letter to the editor |
| 2/7/08 | Imani Countess | Assistant | TransAfrica Forum | Letter to the editor | called | write a letter to the editor |
| 2/7/08 | Jesus Rivas | Professor | KSCC | News coverage | emailed | positive feedback on op-ed |
| 2/11/08 | Greg Wilpert | Reporter | Venezuelanalysis | Website | emailed | Asked to add a link to our blog |
| 2/12/08 | Nestor Ikeda | Reporter | Associated Press | Events on Venezuela | emailed | asked to attend an event |
| 2/13/08 | Esther Cepeda | Columnist | Chicago Sun-Times | Resources | emailed | use VIO as a resource |
| 2/13/08 | Ian Talley | Reporter | Dow Jones | Resources | called | offered resources on oil |
| 2/14/08 | Fernando Coronil | Professor | University of Michigan | Letter to the editor | emailed | write a letter to the editor |
| 2/15/08 | Deborah James | Policy Analyst | CEPR | Letter to the editor | emailed | write a letter to the editor |
| 2/15/08 | Alex Grant | Solidarity worker | HOV Canada | Letter to the editor | emailed | write a letter to the editor |
| 2/19/08 | U.S. Media Contacts | reporters | | | emailed | balance reporting |
| 2/21/08 | John Otis | Reporter | Houston Chronicle | News coverage | emailed | balance stories on Venezuela |
| 2/21/08 | Larry Birns | Director | COHA | News coverage | emailed | balance stories on Venezuela |
| 2/21/08 | Beth Portello | Producer | Cinema Studio Libre | Resources | emailed | balance stories on Venezuela |

| | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------|-------------------------------|
| 2/22/08 | Bart Jones | Reporter | Newsday | News coverage | emailed | offered feedback on interview |
| 2/25/08 | Loren Steffy | Reporter | Houston Chronicle | News coverage | emailed | offered feedback on column |
| 2/26/08 | Tyler Bridges | Reporter | Miami Herald | News coverage | emailed | gave feedback on reporting |
| 2/27/08 | U.S. Media Contacts | reporters mass list | | | emailed | balance stories on Venezuela |
| 2/28/08 | Jamie McCallum | Conference staff | Left Forum | Events on Venezuela | emailed | reserve table in exhibit hall |
| 2/29/08 | Stephanie Trainer | Freelance Writer | Pittsburgh Post-Gazette | News coverage | emailed | offered feedback on article |
| 2/29/08 | Nancy Olesen | Reporter | American Public Media | News coverage | emailed | asked to attend an event |
| 2/29/08 | U.S. Media Contacts | reporters mass list | | | emailed | cover trip of Ambassador |

2008 MAR 27 PM 1:58
 CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

| FARA Reporting Log-VIO | | | Natali Fani Sept - Feb. 2008 | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|
| Date | Person Contacted | Position/Title | Organization | Contacted | Subject Discussed | Position Advocated |
| 2-Sep-07 | Roy Williams | Chair | NAACP | phone | Events on Venezuela | Help organize a series of events on Venezuela in Detroit |
| 2-Sep-07 | Charlie Serrano | Consultant | Taino Caribbean | phone | Events on Venezuela | Help organize the logistics on the series of events happening in the Mid West on Venezuela |
| 3-Sep-07 | Elizabeth O'Connor | Latin America Coordinator | SEIU International | in-person | meetings with CTV | Organize meetings in Venezuela for the SEIU delegation with the Venezuelan labor union CTV |
| 4-Sep-07 | Maureen Taylor | President | Michigan Welfare Rights | email | Events on Venezuela | Help organize a series of events on Venezuela in Detroit |
| 4-Sep-07 | Kathie Dones-Carson | Principal Strategist | Executive Service Group | email | Events on Venezuela | Help organize a series of events on Venezuela in Detroit |
| 4-Sep-07 | Art Heitzer | Lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | email | Luncheon on Venezuela | Organize a luncheon to educate Milwaukee's lawyers on Venezuela |
| 4-Sep-07 | Juscha Robinson | Organizer | Liberty Tree Foundation | email | Luncheon on Venezuela | Organize a luncheon with the working community of Madison on Venezuela |
| 4-Sep-08 | Matt Earley | Co-Owner | Just Coffee | email | Luncheon with coops | Organize a luncheon with Madison Coops to seek opportunities of trading products in Venezuela |
| 4-Sep-07 | Linda L. Lewis | Scheduler | Office of Mayor Dave Cieslewicz | email | meeting | schedule meeting with Mayor Cieslewicz |
| 5-Sep-07 | Lamar Lemmons III | Former State Delegate | none | phone | Meeting with Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick | Help schedule a meeting with Detroit's mayor Kilpatrick. |
| 5-Feb-07 | Lucius Vassar | Chief Administrative Officer | Detroit City Government | email | Meeting with Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick | Schedule a meeting with Detroit Mayor Kilpatrick |
| 5-Sep-07 | Louis Fortis | Journalist | Shepherd Express | email | meeting for interview with Ambassador Alvarez | Inform Mr. Fortis about the achievements of Venezuela's government. |
| 5-Sep-07 | Roy Williams | Chair | NAACP | phone | Chrysler | Organize meeting with Chrysler to talk about their work in Venezuela |
| 5-Sep-07 | Dough Savage | Assistant Director | UWM Institute of World Affairs | email | event on Venezuela | Organize an event on Venezuela sponsored by the UWM Institute of World Affairs |
| 5-Sep-07 | Steve Ellner | Professor | Universidad de Oriente, Venezuela | email | lecture | Give a lecture on Venezuela's labor movement |
| 6-Sep-07 | Brandon Campos | Program Director/Fellow | Liberty Tree Foundation | phone | Events on Venezuela | Organize an event with local low-income organizations in Minneapolis to speak on Venezuela |
| 7-Sep-07 | Jenny Mero | Journalist | Fortune Magazine | email | interview | Following up on interview request |
| 7-Sep-07 | Ben Manski | Executive Director | Liberty Tree Foundation | email | press release | create a press release announcing the forum on Venezuela in Madison |
| 7-Sep-07 | Bomani Kyasa | Legislative Aid | State Rep. Lamar Lemmons, jr. | email | dinner with business leaders | Obtain a list of key business leaders in the city of Detroit |
| 7-Sep-07 | Pam Marcil | Coordinator | Detroit Institute of Arts | phone | tour | Visit of Diego Rivera's Exhibit in the Detroit Institute of Arts |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------------------|---|-------|--|---|
| 7-Sep-07 | Ender Parra | Coordinator | Venezuela's Ministry of Health | email | meeting and tour of hospital facility | Schedule a meeting with SEIU and a representative of the Ministry of Health. Schedule a tour in the Cardiological Children's hospital in Caracas for SEIU |
| 8-Sep-07 | Yasmin Torres | Chair | Bolivarian Circle of Minneapolis | phone | organize events with Venezuelans | Help organize an event with Venezuelans in Minneapolis |
| 9-Sep-07 | Gregory Standford | Journalist | Journal Sentinel | email | attend lunch | interview on Venezuela during the National Lawyers Guild Luncheon |
| 18-Sep-07 | Daniel Hellinger | Professor | Webster University | email | contact of professor on labor | Recommend a professor in Venezuela who understands the labor movement to talk to SEIU |
| 18-Sep-07 | Lisa Sullivan | Activists | none | email | interpretation services | Obtain Lisa's services as an interpreter for the SEIU delegation to Venezuela |
| 18-Sep-07 | Eric Bond | Editor | Takoma Voice | email | publish OpEd | Confirm publishing an OpEd on Venezuela's health care system |
| 18-Sep-07 | Carla Riehle | Student | Macalester college | email | participants list | send list of participants in the forum on Venezuela at Macalester College |
| 18-Sep-07 | Hector Lucena | Professor | Universidad de Carabobo, Venezuela | email | speaker | Speak to SEIU delegation in Venezuela about the labor movement |
| 18-Sep-07 | Jan Strout | Coordinator | National Organization of Women | email | schedule a meeting | help coordinate a delegation of NOW to Venezuela |
| 18-Sep-07 | David Hernandez | Activists | none | email | contact of professor on labor | Recommend a professor in Venezuela who understands the labor movement to talk to SEIU |
| 25-Sep-07 | Hillary Shelton | Executive Director | NAACP | email | dinner for Mayor Jack Ellis from Macon, Georgia. | Attend a dinner in honor of Mayor Ellis |
| 25-Sep-07 | Roberto Lovato | Writer | New America Media and The Nation | email | interview on Venezuela | Schedule an interview with the Ambassador of Venezuela |
| 25-Sep-07 | Eliseo Medina | Executive Vice President | SEIU International | email | event in Venezuela | Inquiry to attend the TV program Alo Presidente in Venezuela |
| 25-Sep-07 | Susan Scott | Lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | phone | lunch presentation | Give a lecture on the work of the National Lawyers Guild in Venezuela at the SEIU luncheon in Venezuela |
| 27-Sep-07 | Timi Gerson | Account Executive | Fenton Communications | email | contacts in Baltimore | Obtain contacts of activists in Baltimore City to invite to Venezuelan event |
| 27-Sep-07 | Maureen Taylor | President | Michigan Welfare Rights | email | Rev. Rowe | Obtain the email information of Rev. Edwin Rowe in Michigan |
| 27-Sep-07 | Leslie Salgado | Activists | Howard County Friends of Latin America | email | contacts in Baltimore | Obtain contacts of activists in Baltimore City to invite to Venezuelan event |
| 27-Sep-07 | Gloria Aparicio | Assistant | University of Maryland at College Park | email | information about community center | Obtain information about the community center sponsored by the University of Maryland to coordinate a possible visit of Venezuelans |
| 27-Sep-07 | Scott Gunderson Rosa | Director | Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute | email | information on CHCI event | Obtain information about CHCI event on presidential candidates on Venezuela. |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|--|-----------|---|--|
| 28-Sep-07 | Nancy Navarro | City Official | Montgomery county School System | email | dinner invitation | invite her for dinner to meet Venezuela's Ombudsman |
| 28-Sep-07 | Terry Lierman | Chief of Staff | Congressman Hoyer | email | dinner invitation | Invite him for dinner to meet Venezuela's Ombudsman |
| 16-Oct-07 | Gamaliel Ramos | Producer/Director | Hispanic Info and Comm Network | email | TV program on Venezuela | Offer to participate in his program "Latinamerica Hoy" |
| 17-Oct-07 | Eduardo Gonzalez | Professor | Johns Hopkins University | in-person | Forum on Venezuela | Organize an event on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |
| 17-Oct-07 | Rosa Campos-Brito | Professor | Loyola College | in-person | Forum on Venezuela | Organize an event on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University. Bring students from Loyola College |
| 22-Oct-07 | Jim Keller | Reverend | Retired | email | send OpEd to staffers | Send OpEd on Venezuela to Congressional Representatives |
| 24-Oct-07 | Ana Sol Gutierrez | State Delegate | Maryland Gov. | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's referendum on the constitutional reform |
| 24-Oct-07 | Gustavo Torres | Executive Director | CASA of Maryland | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's referendum on the constitutional reform |
| 24-Oct-07 | Ted Loza | Chief of Staff | DC Congressman Graham | email | International DC | Inquiry on the organization International DC |
| 24-Oct-07 | Fredy Tejada | Union Leader | SEIU | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's referendum on the constitutional reform |
| 24-Oct-07 | Art Heitzer | Lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's referendum on the constitutional reform |
| 24-Oct-07 | Rosa Campos-Brito | Professor | Loyola College | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's referendum on the constitutional reform |
| 24-Oct-07 | Antonio Gonzalez | Executive Director | Willie Velazquez Institute | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's referendum on the constitutional reform |
| 26-Oct-07 | Robert Snyder | Teacher | University of Maryland at College Park | email | meeting to follow up on Venezuela visit | Obtain a copy of his OpEd on his trip to Venezuela |
| 29-Oct-07 | Dave Kane | Organizer | Maryknoll Foundation | email | events for Sister Jenny | Obtain information on the events being planned for Venezuelan Sister Eugenia (Jenny) Russian |
| 1-Nov-07 | Francisco Cartagena | Church leader | Archdioceses of Washington | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 1-Nov-07 | Humberto Garces | Coordinator | Manuel Zapata Olivera Center | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 1-Nov-07 | Lawrence E. Couch | Director | Archdioceses of Washington | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 1-Nov-07 | Chris Wainwright | Director | Washington Archdiocese | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 1-Nov-07 | Edgar Palacios | Reverend | Calvary Baptist Church | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 1-Nov-07 | Whit Hutchinson | Reverend | Wesley Church | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 1-Nov-07 | Tasha Coleman | Coordinator | NAACP | email | invitation to event | Attend the forum on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |
| 1-Nov-07 | Eric Oribio | Editor | Latin Opinion | email | invitation to event | Attend the forum on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|---|--|-----------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 2-Nov-07 | Tom Perez | Secretary of Labor | Maryland State Gov. | email | invitation to event | Attend the forum on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |
| 2-Nov-07 | Katherina Diaz-Viana | Assistant | Organization of American States | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 2-Nov-07 | Dan Schedelman | Chair | SEIU Local 1 | email | labor contacts | Obtain labor contacts in the MidWest to educate them on Venezuela |
| 5-Nov-07 | Victor Landa | Spiritual Guide | Bethesda Spiritual Center | email | invitation to event | Attend the event with Venezuelan sister Jenny Russian |
| 6-Nov-07 | Duke Austin | Professor | University of Colorado at Boulder | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's referendum on the constitutional reform |
| 9-Nov-07 | Roberto Pagan | President | SEIU puerto Rico | in-person | Opportunities to speak on Venezuela | Identify events to address Venezuela in the Latino and international meetings of SEIU |
| 14-Nov-07 | Nick Brown | Professor | Goucher college | email | invitation to event | Attend the forum on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |
| 14-Nov-07 | Gilberto de Jesus | Board Member | Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | email | invitation to event | Attend the forum on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |
| 14-Nov-07 | Jennifer Bess | Professor | Goucher college | email | invitation to event | Attend the forum on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |
| 14-Nov-07 | Betty Robinson | Professor | Baltimore University | email | invitation to event | Attend the forum on Venezuela at Johns Hopkins University |
| 14-Nov-07 | Susan Scott | Lawyer | National Lawyers Guild | email | request information | Contact information of people participating in the Labor meeting on Venezuela at the National Lawyers Guild |
| 27-Nov-07 | Henrik Reh binder | Editor | La Opinion de LA | email | publish OpEd | Publish OpEd on the constitutional reform Referendum |
| 28-Nov-07 | German Campos | Director of Research and Public Opinion | Consultores 30.11 | phone | Conference Call with Press | Give a conference call via telephone with members of the press on the poll results of Venezuela's political climate ahead of the national referendum. |
| 03-Dec-07 | Jeremy Bigwood | Free lancer | none | email | information about NED | share information in press articule about NED |
| 04-Dec-07 | Suzanne Sangree | Chief Solicitor | Baltimore City Gov. | email | Heating Oil Program | Attend the Venezuelan Heating Oil Program event in DC with Deputy Mayor Marriott |
| 07-Dec-07 | Rudy Arredondo | Chair | Rural Coalition | in-person | Invite members | Invite the members of the Rural Coalition to learn about Venezuela's achievements on agrarian issues |
| 11-Dec-07 | Rosa Campos-Brito | Professor | Loyola College | email | Heating Oil Program | Attend the Venezuelan Heating Oil Program event in DC |
| 11-Dec-07 | Ana Sol Gutierrez | State Delegate | Maryalnd State Gov | email | Heating Oil Program | Attend the Venezuelan Heating Oil Progma event in dC |
| 11-Dec-07 | Jorge Romagoza | Executive Director | Clinica del Pueblo | email | Heating Oil Program | Attend the Venezuelan Heating Oil Program event in DC |
| 11-Dec-07 | Eric Wingerter | Editor | BoRev blog | email | Heating Oil Program | Attend the Venezuelan Heating Oil Program event in DC |
| 11-Dec-08 | Roselyn Rosal | Student | Johns Hopkins University | email | Heating Oil Program | Attend theVenezuelan Heating Oil Program event in DC |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 11-Dec-07 | Jennifer Freedman | Director | CASA of Maryland | email | Heating Oil Program | Attend the Venezuelan heating Oil Program event in DC |
| 11-Dec-07 | Fernando Ramirez | Assistant | DC government Latino Org | email | Heating Oil Program | attend the venezuelan heating oil program event in DC |
| 12-Dec-07 | Kendra Fehrer | Coordinator | Brown University | email | event on Venezuela's student movement | Organize a debate with Venezuelan students |
| 17-Dec-07 | Greg Wilpert | Editor | Venezuela Analysis website | email | meeting on Health | Meet with delegation of colorado University School of Public Health to discuss Venezuela's health care system |
| 3-Jan-08 | Jennifer Bess | Professor | Goucher college | email | contacts in Venezuela | Give her contacts in Venezuela to has a broaden sense on the political situation of the country |
| 4-Jan-08 | Jabari Morgan | Activist | none | email | add email to listserve | Request to add his email in VIO's listserv |
| 08-Jan-08 | Tino Duran | Editor | La Prensa | email | publish OpEd | Request to publish OpEd on Venezuela in La Prensa |
| 14-Jan-08 | Elizabeth Cohn | Professor | American University | email | speaking opportunity | Coordinate schedules to speak in her class about Venezuela |
| 16-Jan-08 | Eugene Fisher | Teacher | High School in Alexandria | email | radio stations | Call the local stations to raise his opinion on Venezuela |
| 29-Jan-08 | Gilda Valdez | President | SEIU Latino Caucus | email | lecture on Venezuela | Schedule a speaking opportunity in the upcoming Latino meeting of SEIU to discuss Venezuela |
| 31-Jan-08 | Gustavo Torres | Executive Director | CASA of Maryland | email | OpEd on Venezuela | Write an OpEd on Venezuela's humanitarian efforts in Colombia |
| 1-Feb-08 | Gustavo Torres | Executive Director | CASA of Maryland | phone | radio interview | Speak at the Local radio station on Venezuela's humanitarian efforts in Colombia |
| 6-Feb-08 | John de Armas | Vice President | Direct TV World Direct | in-person | Telesur | Possibility of adding TeleSUR in DirectTV MAS programming |
| 13-Feb-08 | Dennis McDonough | Senior Fellow | Center for American Progress | in-person | Venezuela | Update him on Venezuela's achievements |
| 20-Feb-08 | James Jordan | Coordinator | Venezuela Solidarity Network | phone | ExxonMobil | Inform the VSN about the facts on the dispute between ExxonMobil and PDVSA |
| 22-Feb-08 | Charlie Serrano | President | Taino Caribbean | phone | Remarks on Venezuela | Highlight Venezuela's economic relation with the US in TV interview |
| 25-Feb-08 | Brent Wilkes | Executive Director | LULAC | email | Latino Summit | Meet important people attending the LULAC policy briefing to bring awareness on Venezuela |
| 28-Feb-08 | Yasmin Torres | Chair | Bolivarian Circle of Minneapolis | phone | ExxonMobil | Organize a public awareness event at the Afro-Latino event in Minneapolis on ExxonMobil dispute against PDVSA |
| 2/28/08 | Rebecca Cramer | Chair | Health Committee | email | ExxonMobil | Organize a public awareness event at the Afro-Latino event in Minneapolis on ExxonMobil dispute against PDVSA |

COMM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT
 2008 MAR 27 PM 1:59



**Venezuela Information Office
Materials Disseminated
September 1, 2007-
February 29, 2008**

2008 MAR 27 PM 1:59
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

Part I: Fact Sheets

2008 MAR 27 PM 1:59
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES and the Bolivarian Vision in Venezuela

Official statistics place the Indigenous population of Venezuela around 535,000 people, or about 2.1% of the national population.¹ By other estimates, that number might be closer to one million. Though this may seem small, Indigenous groups form an immeasurably important part of the past, present, and future of Venezuela.

Given the grave injustices faced by Indigenous communities, an effort is now being made to repay the historical debt owed to them by the state. For the first time, Venezuela is recognizing the enormous cultural contribution of Indigenous peoples and working to assure their place in the future of national social, political, and economic life.



OVERVIEW

26 different ethnic groups exist in Venezuela today, and are known in their own languages as the Wayúu, Warao, Pemón, Añú, Yanomami, Jivi, Piaroa, Kariña, Pumé, Yecuana, Yukpa, Eñepá, Kurripakao, Barí, Piapoko, Baré, Baniva, Puinave, Yeral, Jodi, Kariná, Warekena, Yarabana, Sapé, Wanai, and Uruak.²

Indigenous communities are hardly the "primitive" cultures that Venezuelans and outsiders alike have imagined and depicted for so many years.³ A process of profound change began with European colonization, which had a devastating affect on the Indigenous population of Venezuela, particularly along the Caribbean coastline, but also throughout the country in the Amazon region, the central plains, and the Andes mountains. Throughout the political and economic throes of nation formation and rapid industrialization, Indigenous citizens were an afterthought, rarely acknowledged.

Previous administrations consistently neglected the needs of Indigenous communities in Venezuela. A case in point is the failure of the government to provide proper medical services to Warao Indigenous people in the Delta Region who suffered an outbreak of cholera in the early 1990s. Under president Carlos Andrés Pérez, not only were the Warao denied access to health care, and thus not treated as full citizens, they were also blamed by the government for the spread of cholera.⁴ 1992 marked the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Spanish Colonists, and little seemed to have changed. On the eve of the 20th Century, the time was ripe for the revalorization and empowerment of Indigenous communities in Venezuela.

LEGAL GUARANTEES FOR INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

The Venezuela Information Office is dedicated to informing the American public about contemporary Venezuela, and receives its funding from the government of Venezuela. Further information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

Indigenous rights have been constitutionally guaranteed in Venezuela since 1961, however, in actual practice, government policies with respect to this population remained backward until much more recently. Changes came with the 1999 Constituent Assembly, in which the participation of Indigenous organizations – among other types of civil society organizations – was requested by the government. The result was a constitution that is one of the most progressive in the Western Hemisphere on human rights issues. Chapter 8 of the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution establishes a framework for Indigenous rights. It begins with Article 119, which reads:

The State recognizes the existence of native peoples and communities, their social, political and economic organization, their cultures, practices and customs, languages and religions, as well as their habitat and original rights to the lands they ancestrally and traditionally occupy, and which are necessary to develop and guarantee their way of life.

Constitutional guarantees regarding Indigenous rights also include the use of natural resources within Indigenous territories, respect for ethnic and cultural identity, the exercise of traditional economic practices, protection of intellectual property, and the right to political participation. One quite progressive element of the constitution, for example, guarantees Indigenous peoples "the right to their own education, and an education system of an intercultural and bilingual nature, taking into account their special social and cultural characteristics, values and traditions."

More recently, a new constitutional reform proposal was put forth by President Chavez on August 15, 2007. It would modify Article 100 of the 1999 Constitution to recognize Indigenous heritage:

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is the historical product of the confluence of various cultures, hence the State recognizes the diversity of its expressions and values the indigenous, European, and Afro-descendant roots that gave rise to our great South American nation.

Apart from enacting strong national legislation that recognizes and defends Indigenous cultures, Venezuela also complies with important international norms regarding Indigenous rights. On May 22, 2002, President Chavez ratified the UN International Labor Organization Convention (ILO) 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, which lays out a comprehensive set of human rights provisions. ILO 169 also stipulates that "Governments shall have the responsibility for developing, with the participation of the peoples concerned, co-ordinated and systematic action to protect the rights of these peoples and to guarantee respect for their integrity."⁵

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Creating opportunities for Indigenous participation in democracy in Venezuela has been a priority of the current government. The 1999 Constitution was the first ever to require that the National Assembly, Venezuela's lawmaking body, must include Indigenous representatives. Like the other 164 members of the National Assembly, three Indigenous representatives are elected through a popular vote among their constituencies. In fact, the 1999 Constitution was penned with an unprecedented degree of involvement by Indigenous organizations and leaders from native communities. They helped draft the section on indigenous rights, which recognizes the existence of indigenous communities, and guarantees their right to demarcate their own territory.⁶



In the executive branch, a Ministry of Indigenous Affairs was created in January 2007.⁷ Previously, a small Office of Indigenous Affairs had fallen under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is currently headed by Nicia Maldonado, a leader from the Yecuana community of the Amazon region. Additionally, President Chavez appointed four Vice Ministers of Indigenous Affairs in August 2007; one Vice Minister each for the Delta region, the Andes, the Amazon, and urban areas.⁸

Communal councils provide a model for local government that is energizing citizen participation in Venezuela. These organizations allow community members to identify and solve problems in their own communities, and get financial support from the government to do so. In indigenous areas, the communal councils provide a new format for organization around the principles of democratic citizenship.⁹

GOVERNMENT-FUNDED SOCIAL PROGRAMS



- Mission Guaicaipuro, named for an Indigenous leader who resisted Spanish Colonial rule, was launched on October 12, 2003. The mission is a government-funded program that seeks to restore communal land titles and human rights to Venezuela's numerous indigenous communities, in addition to defending those rights against resource and financial speculation by the dominant culture.¹⁰
- Mission Identity is a massive citizenship and voter registration campaign which has given millions of Venezuelans national ID cards, including almost 274,000 Indigenous persons. With the granting of ID cards, they were able to exercise full citizenship rights – state benefits, constitutional protections – for the first time. This is just one way in which the state is attempting to undo past injustices that have kept Indigenous populations outside of democratic structures.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND GLOBALIZATION

As globalization has come to affect all cultures throughout the world, Venezuela has emerged as a leader in the effort to make Indigenous rights a truly international cause.

Indigenous organizing at the national level in Venezuela began in 1989, when the National Indigenous Council (CONIVE) was founded to protect traditional lands and defend Indigenous sovereignty against unbridled industrial and commercial development. CONIVE now incorporates 60 organizations and representatives from 32 ethnic groups in Venezuela. It has begun to work with other native groups in South America to discuss advocacy strategies and create international pressure to preserve indigenous lands and rights.¹¹



Since 2003, Venezuela has hosted an annual International Encounter of Resistance and Solidarity of Indigenous and Peasant Peoples.¹² Moreover, in August of 2007, Venezuela hosted the First International Meeting of Anti-Imperialist Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, in which delegates from 45 different countries participated.

"THE FIRST PRESIDENT EVER TO DO THIS"

Under President Chavez, Venezuela has seen unprecedented collaboration between the state and Indigenous communities. For example, the National Telecommunications Commission is training young people from 10 different ethnic groups in the Amazon region and other rural areas to produce community media. Infrastructure will be provided in October of 2007 to enable radio broadcasts in native languages on 8 new radio stations that will be networked with the public Venezuelan National Radio.¹³ This and other initiatives are helping to promote indigenous culture.

In June 2006, CONIVE's "First National March of the Indigenous People" expressed solidarity with the policies of President Chavez.¹⁴ The ideological orientation of the Chavez administration, which is focused around the valorization of history and the principles of equality, justice, and solidarity with all peoples, is a boon to the struggle for Indigenous rights in Venezuela and around the world. Noeli Pocaterra, an indigenous rights activist from the Wayúu community and a member of the Venezuelan National Assembly has said, "Simon Bolivar, the first liberator, gave back the lands, the best lands, to the original inhabitants. But President Chavez is the first president to ever do this to dispossessed Indigenous."¹⁵



¹ "How Chavez Changed Life in the Tribal Territories," By Maurice Lemoine, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 7, 2007. http://www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=13238§ionID=1

² *Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, Richard Gott, (Verso, 2005).

³ The Yanomami of the Amazon region of Venezuela were most famously misrepresented and exoticized in scholarship and popular culture as being intensely warlike. See the book: *Yanomami: The Fierce Controversy and What We Can Learn From It*, by Rob Borofsky (University of California Press, 2005).

⁴ *Stories in the Time of Cholera: Racial Profiling During a Medical Nightmare*, By Charles Briggs (University of California Press, 2004).

⁵ Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/62.htm>

⁶ "Rewriting the Constitution in Bolivia and Venezuela," by Sujatha Fernandez, *Venezuelanalysis*, June 13, 2007. <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2443>

⁷ "Comunidades originarias celebran creación del Ministerio para Pueblos Indígenas" Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, January 19, 2007. http://www.abn.info.ve/reportaje_detalle.php?articulo=404

⁸ "En Gaceta Oficial designación de viceministros del Poder Popular Indígena," Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, August 16, 2007. [http://www.abn.info.ve/go_news5.php?articulo=100579&lee=Array\[0\]](http://www.abn.info.ve/go_news5.php?articulo=100579&lee=Array[0])

⁹ "How Chavez Changed Life in the Tribal Territories," By Maurice Lemoine, *ibid*.

¹⁰ "The Guaicapuro Mission: The Promise of Restitution of Indigenous Rights in Venezuela," By Robin Nieto, *Venezuelanalysis*, October 20, 2004. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/745>

¹¹ Minorities at Risk Project, <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=10102>

¹² "Indigenous Peoples and Peasants of the Americas Promise to Globalize Resistance," *Venpres*, October 16, 2003. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/163>

¹³ "The Gift of Native Tongues, On the Air," By Humberto Marquez, *Inter-Press Service*, May 4, 2007.

¹⁴ "Indigenous March in Support of Chavez in Venezuela," By Michael Fox, *Venezuelanalysis*, June 11, 2006. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=1985>

¹⁵ "Venezuela: Justice for indigenous people 'for the first time'," by Laura Pullin, *Green Left Weekly*, October 12, 2005. <http://www.greenleft.org.au/2005/645/33652>

BANK OF THE SOUTH: THE ECONOMIC FUTURE OF SOUTH AMERICA

The Bank of the South was founded by six South American heads of state on December 9, 2007. Representatives of Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela gathered in Buenos Aires to sign an historic document to create an international financial institution that would recognize the need for integration and cooperation among South American economies while also acknowledging the sovereignty and unique characteristics of each nation.

In addition to furthering the development goals of South American nations, the Bank of the South promises to reduce the dependence of the Latin American region on Washington-dominated financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.¹

Critics of the Bank of the South have questioned the need for a regional bank that would bring greater economic unity to South America. In fact, detractors claimed that the institution would not be financially viable long before the Bank was founded. However, issues of transparency, accountability, and proper management have been prioritized by the Bank of the South from its very inception.



AP

DEVELOPMENT WITH A DIFFERENCE

The Bank of the South begins operations in 2008 with around \$7 billion in startup capital.² Contributions to this fund by each of the six member countries corresponds directly to the size of their economies. For example, large economic players Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela will have greater financial responsibilities in the Bank than the comparatively small Bolivia, Ecuador, and Uruguay. Venezuela's contribution has been estimated at \$1.4 billion, with Argentina at \$350 million (10% of foreign currency reserves), and so on.³

Each country will be given an equal vote in the managerial affairs of the institution. This prevents some members from wielding more influence over others. The one-country-one-vote model was chosen to foster equality among member countries.

Debates among founders of the Bank of the South have revolved around the question of what the role of the Bank will be in the region. Some countries, including Venezuela, had advocated Bank involvement in areas such as monetary policy and government financing. For its part, Brazil sought the participation of the Bank in investment matters relating the South American trading bloc Mercosur.⁴ In discussions thus far, member countries have agreed that the Bank should serve development purposes by funding projects in areas such as infrastructure, industry, housing, transportation, and human capacity-building. Bank initiatives aim to solve the persistent problems of poverty and inequality in the region with the world's biggest gap between the rich and the poor.

COMMON FUTURES: INDEPENDENCE, INTER-DEPENDENCE

South American heads of state describe the Bank of the South as an institution that will serve to further economic cooperation in the region. Upon signing the founding act, Brazilian President Lula da Silva highlighted this fact by saying, "Today we have taken the first step toward the integration of South America. ... We have the conviction that our futures are linked."

Meanwhile, President Rafael Correa of Ecuador explained that the Bank would also give member countries a new kind of autonomy, the freedom to chose their own destinies: "The signing of the Bank of the South agreement is going to help us establish our financial independence."⁵

For his part, Venezuela's President Chavez spoke of the tremendous shift in global power relations signified by the Bank of the South. "Not long ago there was a general chorus singing the praises of neoliberalism. ... But we are now hearing the great voice of our nations."⁶

Many experts are also talking about the Bank of the South. Noam Chomsky, the respected scholar and political analyst has explained:

The Bank of the South could turn out to be a viable institution. There are plenty of problems in the region. But one of the striking things that's been happening in South America for quite a few years now is that they are beginning to overcome for the first timesince the Spanish invasion, the conflicts among the countries and the separation of the countries.... The Bank of the South is a step towards integration of the countries. Could it weaken the IFIs, yes it can, in fact they're being weakened already. The IMF has been mostly thrown out of South America."⁷

As a possible solution to past problems and a powerful bid for common progress, the Bank of the South promises to be an important part of the economic future of South America.

¹ "A Bank of Their Own," By Mark Weisbrot, CEPR, October 31, 2007 <http://www.cepr.net/content/view/1346/45/>

² "Latin America Banks on Independence," By Mark Engler, In These Times, January 22, 2008 http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/3497/latin_america_banks_on_independence/

³ "Banco del Sur: A Reflection of Declining IFI Relevance in Latin America, By Vince McElhinny, Bank Information Center, April 2007. <http://www.bicusa.org/en/Article.3299.aspx>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Latin American Leaders Form Regional Bank, Seeking Independence," By Bill Faries and Christopher Swann, Bloomberg, December 10, 2007 <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a5wtQZeimbjE>

⁶ "Chavez, Allies Launch Bank of the South," By Bill Cormier, Associated Press, December 9, 2007 <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/news/12-09-07ap.html>

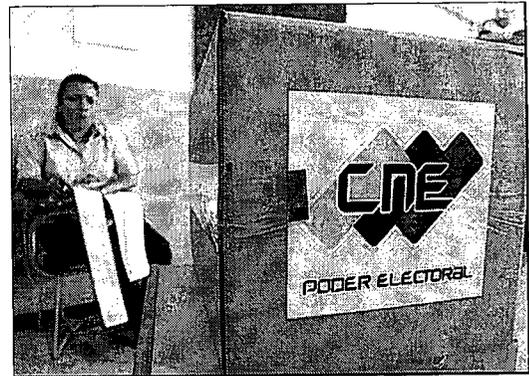
⁷ "Chomsky on the Rise of the South," By Michael Shank, Foreign Policy in Focus, January 30, 2008. <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4931>

RESULTS OF THE 2007 REFERENDUM ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

On December 2nd, 2007, Venezuelans went to the polls to vote on proposed reforms to 69 articles of the 1999 Constitution. The articles were divided into two blocs, "A" and "B," presented to voters separately on the ballot.

The "No" option won in the referendum by a small margin of less than 1.5 percent on average for both "A" and "B."

Voter turnout was 56 percent, lower than in previous years.



RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM:

| Proposal | Option | Votes | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------------|---------------|
| A | Yes | 4,379,392 | 49.29% |
| | No | 4,504,354 | 50.70% |
| B | Yes | 4,335,136 | 48.94% |
| | No | 4,522,332 | 51.05% |
| Total valid votes | | 8,883,746 | 100% |
| Null votes | | 118,693 | 1.31% |
| Turnout | | 9,002,439 | 56% |
| Abstention | | 7,107,225 | 44% |
| Total registered voters | | 16,109,664 | 100% |

Source: National Electoral Council of Venezuela

The Venezuela Information Office is dedicated to informing the American public about contemporary Venezuela, and receives its funding from the government of Venezuela. Further information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

After the National Electoral Council announced the results of the voting, in the early hours of December 3rd, President Chavez conceded the vote on live national television. With less than 90 percent of the votes counted, Chavez congratulated the opposition for its narrow 'No' victory and told his supporters to remain calm.

Despite claims by the opposition that the National Electoral Council is not impartial, the efficiency and transparency of this electoral process showed that the institution is legitimate and unbiased. Attacks on both the electoral body and the administration of President Chavez, however, continue to appear in the press. This is despite the fact that Venezuela has proven itself to be a well-functioning democracy with a true representative capacity and strong separation of powers.

The Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) Jose Miguel Insulza, responded to the national referendum in Venezuela by saying it was "a fair, clean process." Insulza told AFP reporters, "Quite a few myths on the Venezuelan democracy are falling down. It works, like all democracies."



Venezuela Information Office
2000 P Street NW Suite 240
Washington, DC 20036
Voice: (202) 347-8081
Fax: (202) 223-8029

2008 MAR 27 PM 1: 59

CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

LAND REFORM IN VENEZUELA: A "Return To The Countryside"

Latin America is the most unequal region in the world. This problem dates back to the Colonial period, when land was allotted according to the interests of the Spanish crown. In an economy based on mining and agriculture, land was an essential resource, a form of wealth that was concentrated in the hands of the few.

Venezuela inherited this legacy of inequality. Even today, 70% percent of cultivatable lands in the country are concentrated in the hands of just 3% percent of the population.¹

Most Latin American countries have struggled to redistribute land since achieving independence nearly two hundred years ago. Gains made by progressive governments in the mid-20th century however, were unsustainable. The redistribution programs failed even more miserably in Venezuela because their timing corresponded with the country's oil boom. When the Venezuelan leadership of the era focused its resources on state-led industrial development, it abandoned the agricultural sector. Thousands of rural peasants flocked to urban centers to look for jobs in oil and industry and their newly-granted farms were quickly reclaimed by wealthy landholders, shutting them out.

Oil and urbanization transformed the landscape of the country very rapidly, but the problem of land persisted. The economic consequences were high; large swaths of land lay unused, and the newly industrialized country became an importer of goods that were once produced domestically, such as corn, meat, and coffee. Today, Venezuela imports 70% of its domestic food needs.²

QUICK FACTS ON LAND REFORM:

- ❖ Land reform is the traditional third rail of left-of-center governments and social reform movements.
- ❖ President Chavez's plan is fundamentally different from other Latin American attempts at land reform. The proper historical parallel is President Lincoln's Homestead Act.
- ❖ Chavez's opponents, who see him as "another Castro," wrongly view his agrarian reform program as a total assault on private property.
- ❖ Land reform is one of the most progressive aspects of Chavez's "Bolivarian Revolution" as it seeks to alter the fundamental power structure of the landed versus the landless, reduce Venezuela's dependence on foodstuff imports, and redress the country's disastrous experience with "Dutch Disease" – the phenomenon of an economy slumping as a direct result of a rapid spike in one of its sectors while the others remain constant.

From the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, memorandum to the press 05.21, February 5, 2007.

The Venezuela Information Office is dedicated to informing the American public about contemporary Venezuela, and receives its funding from the government of Venezuela. Further information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

MAKING LAND REDISTRIBUTION LAW

Under President Hugo Chavez, whose first term in office began in 1999, serious attention was finally given to the question of how to change land ownership patterns and make them more equitable. Legal guarantees were put in place to democratize access to land. Article 307 of the 1999 Constitution of Venezuela reads:

The predominance of large land estates is contrary to the interests of society. Appropriate tax law provisions shall be enacted to tax fallow lands and establish the necessary measures to transform them into productive economic units, likewise recovering arable land. Farmers and other agricultural producers are entitled to own land, in the cases and forms specified under the pertinent law. The State shall protect and promote associative and private forms of property in such a manner as to guarantee agricultural production. The State shall see to the sustainable ordering of arable land to guarantee its food-producing potential.



In 2001 the Law on Land and Agricultural Development laid out the basic land redistribution agenda, which President Chavez called "Vuelta al Campo," or "return to the countryside." The law aimed to do the following: limit the size of landholdings; tax unused property as an incentive to spur agricultural growth; redistribute unused government-owned land to peasant families and cooperatives; and expropriate uncultivated land for redistribution, while compensating private owners at market value.³

Three new institutions were created to carry out these goals: the National Land Institute (INTI), to oversee land redistribution; the National Rural Development Institute, to provide infrastructure and technical assistance; and the Venezuelan Agricultural Corporation, to help farmers benefiting from land reforms to find markets for their agricultural goods. These institutions serve to regulate the land reform process and oversee complementary government-funded social programs.

RURAL LAND REFORM: PLAN ZAMORA



Ezequiel Zamora was a famed Venezuelan independence leader who coined the phrase, "free land and man." Zamora fought for peasants' land rights, and for that reason, his name was given to the contemporary land redistribution project in Venezuela. Plan Zamora is a government-funded project – one of 22 such "social missions" that address diverse social issues – designed to promote food security by supporting sustainable agricultural development based on more equitable land ownership patterns.

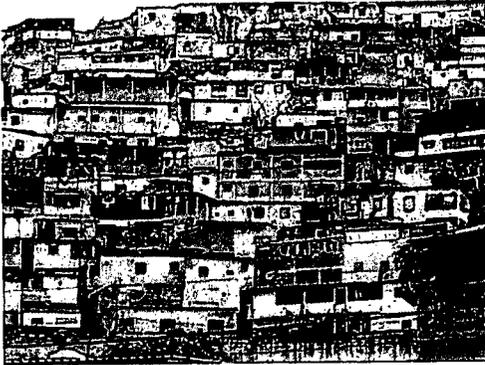
Small and medium-sized producers in rural areas benefit from Plan Zamora by receiving titles to land that they own and farm themselves. By breaking up larger landholdings, a more efficient use of agricultural areas is achieved. This way, more foodstuffs – including traditional crops and organic products – are available to Venezuelan consumers at more competitive prices.

Most of the land distributed under Plan Zamora was either owned by the government or entirely vacant. Where private property was affected, it was only as a last resort and with a guarantee of full

market-value compensation. Begun in February of 2003, Plan Zamora had redistributed 3.4 million acres of land to some 15,000 peasant families by 2007.⁴

URBAN LAND REFORM

Venezuela has a majority urban population, with some 87% of citizens residing in cities. Here, enormous disparities of wealth exist and are often strikingly visible; the capital city of Caracas is surrounded by shantytowns that cover the hillsides with crowded, haphazard housing.



The government of Venezuela is now giving a boost to city-dwellers by carrying out land reform in urban areas, a process by which land titles are granted to residents of poor neighborhoods.⁵ This allows residents to stay in their own communities while improving their circumstances by leaving informal, impermanent housing for stable home structures that constitute investments in family and future. Land titles are important routes to securing other kinds of economic, social, and political rights. Homeowners are more likely to prosper, become educated, and to exercise an active role as citizens, participating in elections and local politics.

Ivan Martinez, Director of the National Technical Office for the Regularization of Urban Land Tenancy, said that a proposed "Special Law to Regularize Land Tenancy in Poor Urban Settlements", proposed years ago and still up for consideration by the National Assembly, would impact more Venezuelan citizens than any government program – perhaps 40% of the population would see benefits from the redistribution. Granting land titles to barrio residents is "a recognition of the social debt which the state owes to the population," Martinez said.⁶

TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF

Venezuela's land reform is truly an impressive force for change. While honoring historical efforts to make land use and ownership patterns more just and equitable, thus democratizing important economic and citizen rights, the land reform effort also includes innovations that distinguish it from past attempts to do the same. At its root, the "return to the countryside" means that farmers and informal workers are empowered in local settings. It also allows economic diversification, food security, and higher levels of human development to be achieved at the national level.

The land reform process in Venezuela has been the subject of controversy, but also the source of high praise. Peter Rosset of the Institute for Food and Development Policy in California said; "Venezuela right now has the only serious government-administered land reform in Latin America... In the United States, Chavez is often painted as a villain or crazy, but this land reform, small and incipient as it is, shows that he is much more on the side of the poor than other presidents in the region."⁷



¹ Julia Buxton, "Economic Policy and the Rise of Hugo Chavez," In *Venezuelan Politics in the Chavez Era: Class, Polarization, and Conflict*, Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger, eds. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), p. 129.

² Maurice Lemoine, "Venezuela: The Promise of land for the people," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2003.

³ "Chavez's Agrarian Land Reform: More Like Lincoln than Lenin," Council on Hemispheric Affairs, February 25, 2005.

⁴ <http://www.misionesbolivarianas.gob.ve/misiones/mision-zamora.html>

⁵ Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chavez Government* (Verso, 2007).

⁶ Gregory Wilpert, *Ibid.*

⁷ Bart Jones, *Hugo! The Hugo Chavez Story From Mud Hut to Perpetual Revolution* (Steerforth, 2007).

PRESIDENT CHAVEZ AND THE HUMANITARIAN MEDIATION IN COLOMBIA

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez explains his political vision as inspired by the 19th Century independence leader, Simon Bolivar, who sought to unite the South American continent as a single political unit. Chavez has always pushed for a similar unity, but in a modern context that emphasizes the commonalities between nations as much as the right to sovereignty of each one. Venezuela took this vision of international cooperation to another level by offering support for a peace process in neighboring Colombia, where an armed conflict has lasted for over four decades.



In September 2007, President Chavez was approached by Colombian President Alvaro Uribe (pictured at left) to serve as the chief negotiator in a hostage-for-prisoner swap between the government and rebels. A Colombian opposition Senator tapped to facilitate the negotiations, Piedad Córdoba, had suggested that President Chavez could play a role. The hostage talks began promisingly, with communication between Chavez, Colombian state representatives, guerrilla leaders, and heads of state in solidarity abroad. Chavez and Uribe met several times to discuss the talks, which were aimed expressly at reaching an accord that would release 45 civilian hostages – including 3 US military contractors – in exchange for perhaps hundreds of guerrilla rebels who have been imprisoned over the years.

To the great disappointment of all parties involved in the talks, President Uribe called an abrupt and unexpected end to the process on November 21, 2007. He explained the decision to cancel the talks as a response to a short though unauthorized conversation between President Chavez and the head of the Colombian armed forces.

Nonetheless, in early January of 2008, the FARC rebels announced their intention to release two hostages to President Chavez. After several delays, which the hostages later said were due to the fact that they were under fire from Colombian armed forces, the release was achieved on January 10.¹ The humanitarian mediation called for by President Chavez is an effort to restore hope to a nation fraught with conflict and limit the spread of violence and displacement beyond Colombia.

President Chavez and many others remain committed to the cause of peace in Colombia and to the belief that the conflict can reach a political negotiated solution, not a military one. The future of the humanitarian mediation remains uncertain. In what follows, we will consider its course so far.

The Venezuela Information Office is dedicated to informing the American public about contemporary Venezuela, and receives its funding from the government of Venezuela. Further information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA: A HISTORY OF COOPERATION

Venezuela and Colombia have a long history of close relations, including strong cultural, political, and economic ties. Although Presidents Chavez and Uribe have often been described as ideological opposites, they have a history of cooperation on issues such as trade, migration issues, combating drug trafficking and terrorism, as well as security along the 1,400-mile long border shared by the two countries. Prior to the diplomatic discord caused by Uribe's cancellation of the humanitarian mediation, political analyst Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue commented that the two leaders had a "surprisingly cordial relationship, with a record of cooperation on energy and economic issues."²

This history of cooperation meant that President Chavez's role as chief negotiator in hostage talks in Colombia was a logical one. It also bodes well for the future of bilateral relations, which analysts generally agree will not likely suffer any long-term negative effects from the current clash.

PRESIDENT CHAVEZ AS PEACE NEGOTIATOR

Since September 2007, the victims of Colombia's conflict placed their hopes in President Chavez to negotiate a deal that would reinvigorate the peace effort. As chief negotiator between the FARC rebels and the Colombian State, Chavez bore the responsibility of striking a deal between two parties that have been locked in a stalemate, unable to trust one another for decades.

President Chavez was chosen to negotiate the humanitarian deal precisely because he counted on the confidence of both the government and the guerrillas in Colombia. The three-times elected leader of Venezuela came to office as an outsider candidate, and thus knows what it is like to struggle in the margins of the political system, as the FARC have done.

Moreover, during his presidency, Chavez gained credibility among leaders worldwide by overseeing a successful democratic project that has reduced poverty and revolutionized the representative capacity of the government since 1999. The constitution enacted that year, the first year Chavez was in office, was penned by a constituent assembly comprised of diverse civil society groups and approved in a national assembly that saw high voter turnout. Many experts recognize Venezuela's 1999 Constitution as one of the most advanced in the world on the issue of human rights, for it guarantees access to free healthcare and education for all citizens.

The Venezuelan government has often pledged to help achieve peace in Colombia. On August 24, 2007, the *Washington Post* reported: "Chavez, who has had cordial relations with Uribe despite ideological differences, has offered another, surprising proposal aimed at brokering a deal."³ President Chavez began the humanitarian mediation in Colombia with characteristic enthusiasm, inviting the families of Colombian hostages to Caracas to suggest ways to solve the crisis.

On August 31, 2007, President Chavez met with President Uribe in Colombia to discuss the possible hostage swap. Colombian Senator Piedad Córdoba (pictured at right with Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives) was to be the only party present at the talks besides Chavez and guerrilla leaders. Córdoba met FARC leader Raul Reyes in September and brought a recorded message to Chavez agreeing to a preliminary meeting in October.⁴ Córdoba also traveled to Washington, DC to draw attention to their cause in the US Congress.



When President Uribe refused to grant the guerrillas a demilitarized zone in which to hold negotiations, Chavez proposed hosting them in Venezuela. Preliminary talks between Chavez and the FARC were scheduled to take place in Caracas on October 8, but were again delayed when President Uribe balked at the idea of allowing the FARC to leave Colombia. Uribe only cautiously expressed his faith in the process, saying, "I hope the rebels free the hostages at President Chavez's request. But we will express all of our gratitude to President Chavez ... whether or not the effort proves successful."⁵

This, however, was no longer the case after November of 2007, when Uribe dictated an abrupt end to Chavez's humanitarian mediation. The switch led to harsh words between the two presidents, and at present, Uribe still does not endorse the hostage releases being brokered by President Chavez.

"THIS IS THE HIGHEST OUR HOPES HAVE EVER BEEN"

Washington Post columnist on Latin American and Latino affairs Marcela Sanchez has written that Chavez is perhaps the individual best suited to negotiate the prisoner swap, for he has earned the respect of all parties involved. Sanchez, who has frequently been critical of the Venezuelan government, said, "Chavez's involvement is the single most important element that makes this attempt the most promising in recent memory."⁶

Accordingly, support for the humanitarian mediation has come from international organizations as well as many governments around the world. UN High Commander Antonio Guterres congratulated the Chavez administration on its powerful bid for peace during the 58th session of the Executive Committee of the Office of the UN High Commission for Refugees.⁷ Brazilian President Lula da Silva offered to help by lending the use of Brazilian territory to carry out negotiations. A government representative said, "Brazil trusts President Chavez as a mediator of this conflict and has offered the possibility, should it be necessary, of holding meetings on Brazilian soil."⁸

French President Nicholas Sarkozy has also been an enthusiastic supporter of Chavez's role in the negotiations. French-born former Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt has been held captive by the FARC since 2002, and is among the 45 hostages that Chavez worked to liberate. Chavez met with a French diplomat and traveled to Paris to discuss the negotiations.

On October 6, 2007, the US National Latino Congreso passed a resolution to support Venezuela's humanitarian mediation in Colombia. Some 2,000 participating organizations signed the agreement to "recognize this humanitarian effort led by Venezuela as the most important step in the peaceful resolution of so many decades of war and all its destructive consequences in its sister nation, Colombia." Likewise, US Ambassador to Colombia William Brownfield recognized the importance of the humanitarian mediation by Chavez. Brownfield, also a former US Ambassador to Venezuela, said "we welcome the efforts of anybody... to facilitate the liberation of all the people kidnapped, including the US citizens."⁹

In late September 2007, during a meeting in Caracas between Chavez and the relatives of the US citizens who are among those being held hostage in Colombia (pictured here), Chavez appealed to the US for assistance in the negotiations by saying, "To President Bush: hopefully you can help us."¹⁰ Some political analysts judged the involvement of Chavez in the likely



hostage swap as a threat to US dominance in the region.¹¹ However, Venezuela sought to make the hostage negotiation an act of international solidarity throughout the hemisphere and the world, an effort around which a global consensus could emerge.

Families of the US hostages in Colombia were not disheartened by delays in the talks. The relative of one of three US citizens among those expected to be freed in the hostage-for-prisoner swap said, "This is the highest our hopes have ever been.... The eyes of the world are upon us."¹² Another affirmed that Chavez is providing "a hope, a light that we haven't seen for a long time."¹³

REACTIONS TO URIBE'S UNTIMELY CANCELLATION OF TALKS

On November 30, 2007, new video footage was released showing that hostages held in Colombia, including former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three US citizens, are indeed alive. The news came a little over a week after Colombian President Alvaro Uribe abruptly canceled the negotiations by President Chavez and Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba. Uribe claimed that Chávez had disobeyed orders by speaking briefly to the head of the Colombian armed forces.

French President Sarkozy responded to the unfortunate news by urging Uribe to reconsider and saying, "We continue to think that President Chavez is the best chance for freeing [French citizen] Ingrid Betancourt and all the other hostages." Families of the hostages were less diplomatic, saying "It is clear that the Colombian president does not want to hear about a humanitarian accord."

According to the BBC, Uribe's halt to the accord was met by marked disappointment in Colombia, where half a century of conflict has created a nation desperate for peace. The *Washington Post* reported that the families of the US hostages also lamented Uribe's decision. A Connecticut woman said, "Shame on him is all I can say. The eyes of the world are on him."

THE HUMANITARIAN MEDIATION BEGINS TO BEAR FRUIT

As 2007 came to a close, and with talks seemingly tabled, President Chavez got word from the FARC that the rebels indeed planned to release two captives into his care. The first days of 2008 brought only more waiting. On January 10, the FARC finally appeared to hand over Consuelo Gonzalez and Clara Rojas, and the women were flown to safety by the Red Cross. They later told the press that their earlier release was prevented by attacks from the Colombian armed forces.¹⁴

On January 31, the FARC announced their intention to release three more hostages. This second release is expected to grant freedom to Gloria Polanco, Luis Eladio Perez and Orlando Beltran, all of whom were kidnapped in 2001. In a statement, the FARC explained that "These releases are a direct consequence of the realistic, transparent and integral efforts of President Chavez."¹⁵

President Chavez said on February 9th that the first steps had been taken to ensure that the hostages would be liberated. He urged "calm and patience," but remained optimistic, saying "We are hoping that everything will turn out the best way possible."¹⁶

Despite obstacles including opposition from the governments of Colombia and the US, President Chavez and facilitator Piedad Cordoba have continued to work for a negotiated end to the conflict. Their conviction that the conflict cannot be solved through military ends came under criticism, particularly when Chavez argued for dropping the "terrorist" label assigned the FARC by the US after 9/11 in favor of recognizing the combatants as legitimate armies. This was likely an effort to emphasize the particularity of the Colombian context and the role of the FARC as historical actors

with a political agenda. However, audiences critical of Chavez have dismissed his insistence on a peaceful political solution as a show of sympathy for the FARC.

Instead, President Chavez contends that he is firmly "on the side of peace" in the humanitarian mediation, as allegations questioning his motives continue to surface. Meanwhile, as the violence continues in Colombia and increasingly affects Venezuela and the rest of the region, Chavez's humanitarian mediation remains the best hope for the hostages and the only current effort toward reaching true reconciliation. As expressed by the sister of Colombian captive and former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, the Venezuelan leader "knows how to advance things. For us today President Chavez is indispensable."¹⁷

¹ "Freed Colombian Hostage Relied on Radio," Frank Bajak, Associated Press, February 5, 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/05/AR2008020502870.html>

² "Can Hugo Chavez Help Americans?" By Michael Shifter, *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 2007. http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/sunday/commentary/la-op-shifter7oct07_1_2798947_story

³ "After a Long Trek Across Colombia, Hostage Advocate Not Ready to Rest," by Juan Forero, *Washington Post*, August 24, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/23/AR2007082302331.html>

⁴ "Colombia Captives' Families Undaunted by Talks Delay," By Helen Murphy, Bloomberg, October 4, 2007. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aVhQaTQ9GbNs>

⁵ "Uribe Cautious on Talks to Free Captives," By Alexandra Olson, Associated Press, September 26, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/26/AR2007092602021.html>

⁶ "Farc's Chance to Do Right for Colombia," By Marcela Sanchez, *Washington Post*, September 28, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/27/AR2007092701137.html>

⁷ Venezuelan Efforts Praised, Meeting Postponed in Colombian Hostage Negotiation, By Kiraz Janicke, *Venezuelanalysis*, October 4, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2686>

⁸ "Chavez Offered Neutral Spot to Deal With Colombian Rebels," By Michael Astor, Associated Press, September 20, 2007. <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/venezuela/story/244218.html>

⁹ "US backs President Chávez's mediation for freedom of hostages" *El Universal*, October 11, 2007. http://english.eluniversal.com/2007/10/11/en_pol_art_us-backs-president-c_11A1125629.shtml

¹⁰ "Anti-US Chavez Urges Bush Help on Colombia Hostages," Reuters, September 26, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/news/news-venezuela-usa-chavez.html>

¹¹ "Can Hugo Chavez Help Americans?" By Michael Shifter, *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 2007.

¹² "Colombia Captives' Families Undaunted by Talks Delay," By Helen Murphy, Bloomberg, October 4, 2007. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aVhQaTQ9GbNs>

¹³ "Farc's Chance to Do Right for Colombia," By Marcela Sanchez, *Washington Post*, September 28, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/27/AR2007092701137.html>

¹⁴ "Latin America News Coverage: Half the Story is Worse Than None," By Mark Weisbrot, *Alternet*, February 1, 2008. <http://www.alternet.org/mediaculture/75697/>

¹⁵ "Colombian Guerrillas to Set Free Three More Hostages" By Matthew Walter, Bloomberg, February 3, 2008. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=azf3utJ.VRjk>

¹⁶ "Venezuela's Chavez says 'first steps' taken to release rebel-held hostages," Associated Press, February 10, 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/02/09/news/Venezuela-Colombia-Hostages.php>

¹⁷ "Chavez 'needed' for Betancourt release" *Press TV*, January 30, 2008. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=40950§ionid=351020703>

VENEZUELA'S FIGHT AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING

Historically, Venezuela's geographic position has been exploited by smugglers seeking to use the country as a transit point for drugs originating in Colombia – the largest cocaine producer in the world – and destined for markets in the US and Europe.¹ This situation requires that the Venezuelan government take a pro-active approach in the fight against drug trafficking, something that was seldom done under past administrations. To compound the situation, Washington has diminished Venezuela's efforts at combating drug trafficking and even presented significant obstacles to its advancement.

THE "MAJORS LIST" FOR 2008

In September 2007, the White House released its Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2008. Also known as the "Majors List," this identifies countries that are perceived as problems. Though "not necessarily an adverse reflection of its government's counternarcotics efforts or level of cooperation with the United States," the Majors List *does* entail economic sanctions for those countries that are deemed to have poor performance. Venezuela was one of two countries the report said "failed demonstrably during the previous 12 months to adhere to ... obligations under international counternarcotics agreements."²

Despite this penalizing designation, the curtailment of US democracy programs that fund opposition groups in Venezuela – that is, political parties that oppose the government of President Hugo Chavez, – were waived, as they were considered "vital to the national interests of the United States." Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Counter Narcotics, Christy McCampbell, told a press conference in Washington that, "The waiver allows us to continue to support some of their democratic institutions and their society."³ The economic sanctions associated with the "Majors List," then, would seem to be employed strategically based on the imperatives of current US government policy, not primarily the anti-drug efforts they are purportedly designed to promote.



2007 INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL STRATEGY REPORT (INCSR)

The US State Department publishes an annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) that evaluates the performance of countries with regard to anti-drug enforcement, production, demand, legal measures, corruption and related financial crimes. The 24th report, released on

March 1, 2007, makes a number of misleading accusations against Venezuela and omits a significant number of its achievements in combating drug trafficking, most importantly the high level of international cooperation that Venezuela has embarked upon in recent years.

The report comes almost two years after President Hugo Chavez announced that Venezuela would suspend its cooperation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). On August 8, 2005, he stated, "The DEA was using the fight against drug trafficking as a mask, to support drug trafficking and to carry out intelligence in Venezuela against the government... We have detected intelligence infiltration that threatened national security and defense. Under those circumstances we decided to make a clean break with those accords."⁴



VENEZUELA'S INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In this context, the State Department's 2007 INCSR report cited a "lack of international counternarcotics cooperation"⁵ by Venezuela, even though the record clearly shows that the Venezuelan government has a history of cooperating with foreign states and international organizations to combat drug trafficking and terrorism.

In November 2001, Venezuela was elected chair of the Commission for Drug Abuse Control of the Organization of American States (CICAD), after having served as Vice Chair the year before and hosting the annual meeting of that organization in the Venezuelan capital city of Caracas. Also that year, Venezuela participated in hemispheric efforts to develop its Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) to improve counternarcotics cooperation.⁶ In November of 2005, Venezuela hosted the OAS' First Inter-American Observatory on Drugs, in which more than forty countries participated. During this three-day conference, experts shared their methodological and technical expertise in combating drug trafficking.

Moreover, according to the State Department's own 2003 report, Venezuela has signed or is a party to the following international agreements:⁷

- 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs
- 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances
- 1972 Protocol Amending the Single Convention
- 1988 UN Drug Convention
- UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons
- Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants
- Inter-American Convention Against Corruption

Venezuela has also signed a number of important bilateral agreements with the U.S. to help fight drug trafficking, including a ship-boarding agreement in 1991 (and updated in 1997), a Memorandum of Understanding concerning cooperation in narcotics, and a customs mutual assistance agreement.⁸ Venezuela is a party to numerous bilateral and multilateral narcotics control agreements, including bilateral agreements with 15 other nations in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as one country in Asia and three countries in Europe.

COOPERATION BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA

In September of 2006, the Venezuelan government captured Colombia's second-most wanted narco-trafficker, Farid Feris Domínguez, and immediately handed him over to

Colombian officials. The State Department's INCSR report however, asserts that "arrests are limited to low-level actors" in Venezuela. In recent years, increased cooperation between Venezuela and Colombia in the areas of counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism have resulted from a pact signed by the countries in 2005, pledging mutual support for drug control authorities and more effective joint enforcement mechanisms to combat drug trafficking. Since then, Venezuela has caught and turned over many suspected criminals to Colombian authorities, including the well-known guerrilla leader Gentil Alvis Patino.⁹



Additionally, Venezuela and Colombia have developed a joint eradication program targeting coca, marijuana, and poppy crops in the Perija Mountains along their common border. Known as Operation Sierra, the plan is supported by the UN and the OAS. It has led to the eradication of 110 hectares of poppies, 80 hectares of coca plants, and 15 hectares of marijuana. 18 laboratories of coca-based paste and 11 rural camps containing supplies for the processing of coca leaves have been destroyed.¹⁰

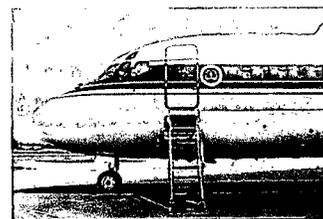
More recently, last December, Venezuela acquired new radar systems that enable increased law enforcement patrols and monitoring along the 1400-mile border with Colombia. These new radar systems also fill the gap in coastal surveillance that resulted when the U.S. discontinued radar equipment rentals to Venezuela in 2004.¹¹

COOPERATION BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Venezuela has entered into two agreements with the European Union.¹² The scope of these agreements includes efforts in anti-trafficking and reducing demand for illicit goods, as well as controlling money laundering and chemicals used in narcotics production.¹³ In May 2006, Venezuela's main opposition newspaper, *El Universal*, highlighted the cooperation between Venezuela and European authorities in detaining a Venezuelan ship carrying drugs:

"A joint operation between the Venezuelan National Guard and the Spanish and French militaries led to the May 23 interdiction of a Venezuelan ship carrying more than two tons of cocaine. The operation took place in international waters off the African coast...According to information provided, the ship departed from Sucre state and was interdicted at sea after Venezuelan authorities communicated intelligence on the cargo to French and Spanish authorities, which allowed the operation to proceed. ...Venezuelan authorities have detained 624 people for drug trafficking in 2006. Additionally, they have confiscated more than 18 tons of a variety of illegal drugs, a number that represents an increase of 34 percent from 2005."¹⁴

Furthermore, Venezuela signed accords with France and Spain in 2005 that allow the country to process satellite images that detect illegal airstrips and airplanes carrying drugs. Venezuelan anti-drug officials are being trained by the French government in interception methods at airports,¹⁵ and an agreement with Germany is planned.



THE U.S. ARMS EMBARGO ON VENEZUELA

On May 15, 2006, the U.S. State Department decided to restrict the sale of weapons to Venezuela while continuing to accuse Venezuela of "backsliding in the global war on drugs."

By imposing an arms embargo blocking the acquisition of military equipment and parts, the U.S. refuses to recognize the right of Venezuela to obtain necessary systems of defense and internal patrol, many of which are crucial in the fight against drug trafficking.

Since the embargo, the U.S. has actively interfered with Venezuela's right to purchase military equipment from other countries by blocking the sale of Spanish patrol boats as well as Brazilian aircraft to Venezuela. In the case of the Brazilian aircraft, the president of the Brazilian Aeronautics Company (Embraer), Mauricio Botelho, stated that "The plane we are talking about is not an attack plane. Its purpose is law enforcement in missions directed against drug and arms trafficking." The Brazilian Minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Amorim, also remarked that Brazil was not in agreement with the U.S. position.¹⁶

The sale of planes and boats to Venezuela was also defended by Spanish President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who characterized them as helpful to the war on drugs by saying: "The sale of aircraft and ships has the objective of patrolling the coasts..., controlling the sea borders,... against narco-trafficking... and in no way does it have any offensive nature."¹⁷

The arms embargo bars U.S. equipment sales to Venezuela as well as sales from any company utilizing U.S. parts. Currently, Venezuela is the only country on which the U.S. has imposed an arms ban that has not also been designated as a state sponsor of terrorism.

VENEZUELA'S ADVANCES IN COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS

Despite these constraints, Venezuela is increasing its efforts to combat drugs domestically. Recent legislation sends a clear message to those involved in the illegal narcotics trade. New laws in 2005, including the Organic Law Against Illicit Traffic and Consumption of drugs and Psychotropic Substances and the Organic Law Against Organized Crime were passed. These laws stipulate that those who engage in drug trafficking or harbor drugs and illegal chemical substances will face six to eight years in prison. The punishment increases if the offender is a member of the government, the National Guard, or judicial authorities.¹⁸

In January 2006, Venezuela made a very significant advancement in transforming the National Commission Against Illegal Drug Use (CONACUID) into the National Anti-Drug Office (ONA), handing over financial and administrative responsibilities to the institution that would now implement public policies and strategies of the State against the production, trafficking, money laundering and consumption of illicit drugs. ONA achievements include:



- *Rising drug seizures.* In 2004 (the last full year of cooperation with the DEA), 43.2 tons of drugs were seized in Venezuela. In 2005, 77 tons of drugs were seized by Venezuelan authorities, including a striking increase in quantities of ecstasy at international airports. In 2006, 60.3 tons of drugs were captured.
- *The discovery of clandestine transit routes.* In March 2006, Venezuelan authorities used GPS systems to discover two runways that were used for drug trafficking in the states of Bolivar and Sucre. Both runways operated between Venezuela, Colombia and the Caribbean Sea and were used to store drugs.¹⁹

- *New technological capacities.* In March 2007, Venezuela's national tax authority installed unobtrusive X-ray machines at ports, making it possible to search entire ships for illicit goods. This was already being done with imports, but law enforcement agents are now applying the practice to exports as well.

FINDINGS OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT: POLITICS OVER EVIDENCE?

The 2007 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) finds particular fault with drug trafficking enforcement in Venezuela and Bolivia, two countries whose political and economic agendas are at odds with the goals of the Bush administration in the region. Meanwhile, the efforts of close U.S. allies like Mexico and Colombia are praised, which raises questions about the report's basis in fact. High praise for Colombia's drug enforcement seems particularly undue, given that Colombia is the world's primary producer of cocaine and South America's top producer of heroin, even despite the \$4.7 billion that the U.S. has spent in anti-drug efforts in Colombia since 2000.²⁰ In fact, cocaine production in Colombia is on the rise, and a recent political scandal has linked high-level government officials to paramilitary groups known to be involved in drug trafficking.²¹ This raises serious questions about the credibility of the U.S. State Department's report and objective nature of its findings.

¹ "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," U.S. Department of State, 2007.

<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2007/vol1/html/80855.htm>

² "Memorandum for the Secretary of State: "Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2008, U.S. Department of State, September 14, 2007.

<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/prsr/ps/92155.htm>

³ "Venezuela Dismisses U.S. Criticism on Cooperation Against Drug Trafficking," By Kiraz Janicke, *Venezuelanalysis*, September 19, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2615>

⁴ "Venezuela Leader Accuses DEA of Espionage", Associated Press, August 07, 2005.

⁵ "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," U.S. Department of State, 2007.

<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2007/vol1/html/80855.htm>

⁶ "2002 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for Venezuela," U.S. Department of State, 2002.

<http://caracas.usembassy.gov/wwwh1695.html>

⁷ "2003 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for Venezuela," U.S. Department of State, 2003.

<http://caracas.usembassy.gov/wwwh2135.html>

⁸ "2002 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for Venezuela," *ibid*.

⁹ "En 24 horas, Farid Domínguez fue atrapado y deportado," *El Universal*, September 24, 2006.

¹⁰ "Plan Sierra 2005 Erradica 215 hectarias de Drogas," http://www.ona.gob.ve/Noticias/09112005_1.htm

¹¹ "New radars in anti-drug efforts," *El Universal*, December 15, 2006.

¹² "Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Venezuela on precursors and chemical substances frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances."

[http://europa.eu.int/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=EN&numdoc=21995A1230\(14\)&model=guichett](http://europa.eu.int/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=EN&numdoc=21995A1230(14)&model=guichett)

¹³ "2003 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for Venezuela," *ibid*.

¹⁴ "Venezuelan Ship Detained With Drugs in Cape Verde." *El Universal*, May 26, 2006.

¹⁵ "Embajada de Francia y ONA dictan seminario en trafico aereo de drogas,"

http://www.ona.gob.ve/Noticias/05032007_1.htm

¹⁶ "Embraer comments on impasse blocking sale of airplanes to Venezuela," *Agencia Brasil* January 23, 2006.

¹⁷ "Venta de armas de España a Venezuela no inquieta a Colombia," *Agence France Presse*, March 29, 2005.

<http://www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=2&t=15423>

¹⁸ "Official Gazette No. 38.287," Caracas, October 5, 2005; "Official Gazette No. 38.281," September 27, 2005.

¹⁹ Venezuelan Ministry of Interior and Justice, http://www.mij.gov.ve/article.php3?id_article=510

²⁰ "Rethinking Plan Colombia: some ways to fix it," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 29, 2006.

²¹ "Colombia political scandal imperiling US ties," *Boston Globe*, February 25, 2007.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS IN VENEZUELA

On August 15th, 2007, President Chavez made headlines when he proposed a set of 33 reforms to the Venezuelan Constitution during a speech in the National Assembly in Caracas. A commission to study the reforms was immediately set up by the lawmakers and was declared in permanent session. President of the National Assembly Cilia Flores stated that all issues relating to the draft reforms would be discussed, including the strategy of the National Assembly for addressing each one, as well as public consultations designed to allow for citizen participation in debates.¹

President Chavez was criticized for making the legal argument that the proposed modifications are "reforms" rather than "revisions," thus avoiding another constituent assembly and sending his proposals directly to the National Assembly for review. However, critics overlook the fact that the public must still approve the new reforms through a referendum. Miguel Tinker Salas, a Venezuelan Professor of History at Pomona College, said, "the process up to now has been rather closed, [but] from here forward we're going to be seeing a broad and ample national debate... It's not just a matter of a president proposing it and the assembly rubber stamping."²



A high degree of consensus within the National Assembly has been cited as preventing a thorough review and discussion of the articles slated for reform, but in fact, critical and dissenting voices came from different political parties within the lawmaking body.³

During its review of the proposed reforms, the National Assembly carried out public consultations in all 23 states in Venezuela. The text of the reforms were distributed to an estimated 5.4 million households, particularly in rural and poor areas, which were visited by mobile units equipped with videoconference and wireless systems.⁴ Interest groups including students, workers, and civil society groups were also consulted, and feedback was given through local elected leaders who presented citizens' perspectives before the National Assembly. The National Plan to Debate the Constitutional Reform was designed to "activate a national political debate and the participation of the people in the process of constitutional reform aimed to strengthen revolutionary consciousness,

¹ "Mixed Commission is in permanent session to deal with Constitutional Reform," ABN, August 16, 2007. http://www.abn.info.ve/go_news5.php?articulo=100668&lee=17

² Chris Kraul, "Venezuela Leader Aims to Scrap his Term Limit," *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 2007.

³ "Changes to Venezuelan Constitutional Reform Proposal Provoke Strong Criticism," By Chris Carlson, *Venezuelanalysis*, October 17, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2739>

⁴ "Congress to visit 5.4 million Venezuelan houses to discuss changes to the Constitution", *El Universal*, September 24, 2007. http://english.eluniversal.com/2007/09/24/en_pol_art_congress-to-visit-5_24A1062479.shtml

The Venezuela Information Office is dedicated to informing the American public about contemporary Venezuela, and receives its funding from the government of Venezuela. Further information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

stimulate popular mobilization, and guarantee the sovereign expression of the majority on the occasion of the referendum.”⁵

Lively debates about the content of the proposed reforms ensued throughout all sectors of Venezuelan society. The media served as an important site for the expression of viewpoints by individuals from across the political spectrum. In open forums held at downtown public plazas, students in the nation’s capital carried out their own discussions of the tenets of the reforms.⁶

The National Assembly began the third and final round of discussions on the reform proposal on October 15th, at which time an additional 36 provisions were presented by lawmakers. On November 2nd, the National Assembly voted to pass the final set of 69 constitutional articles to finalize its review of the reforms. Political campaigning on the reforms also began that day.

Venezuelans are now being exposed to views from across the political spectrum during a month of campaigns, which may include a series of nationally televised debates between opposition and pro-government political parties moderated by the National Electoral Council, the body that will oversee a national referendum scheduled for December 2nd.⁷ Law requires that constitutional reforms be put to voters within 30 days of being drafted, and so on December 2nd, 2007, Venezuelans will choose either to accept or reject the final draft of the proposals.

CONTEXT: THE 1999 CONSTITUTION

If approved, the new package of constitutional reforms would alter Venezuela's 1999 Constitution, which was drafted by a Constituent Assembly shortly after President Chavez began his first term in office. The 1999 Constitution was ratified only after it won approval by the general public in a national referendum, in which 71.78% of Venezuelans gave the document a 'yes' vote.

With the approval of the 1999 Constitution by popular vote, significant political and institutional changes were adopted. The national legislature was changed from a bi-cameral system to the current uni-cameral one, known as the National Assembly. The lawmaking body now consists of 167 deputies elected through a system of proportional representation to serve five-year terms. Two new branches of government – a National Electoral Council and Human Rights Ombudsman – were added to the preexisting executive, legislative, and judicial branches. These changes gave the population more direct representation in national politics.



⁵ Kiraz Janicke, "Venezuela Launches Massive Plan to Debate Constitutional Reform Proposal," Venezuelanalysis, August 21, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=2393>

⁶ "Students discuss changes to the Constitution", El Universal, September 20, 2007, http://english.eluniversal.com/2007/09/20/en_pol_art_students-discuss-cha_20A1047277.shtml

⁷ "Venezuela's Electoral Council Presents Rules for Constitutional Reform Referendum," By Kiraz Janicke, Venezuelanalysis, October 31, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2790>

The 1999 Constitution was groundbreaking in that it guaranteed citizens a new and impressive set of human rights, including free education, universal health care, and increased civil rights. Minorities like Afro-Venezuelans and Indigenous peoples were recognized, and the work of housewives was considered a productive contribution to society meriting compensation. The 1999 Constitution is considered today to be one of the most comprehensive and progressive in the world.

In nearly a decade since the 1999 Constitution has been in force, the government has invested an enormous amount of resources in empowering citizens and fostering their participation in democratic politics. Through initiatives like voter registration campaigns and the mass issuance of national ID cards, voter turnout and citizen involvement in local and national politics have increased significantly.

OVERVIEW: THE 2007 REFORMS

In Venezuela, constitutional reforms may be proposed by either the President of the Republic, the National Assembly, or 15% of registered voters organized through petitioning. Constitutional Articles 342, 343, 344, and 345 stipulate that reform proposals must be debated three times in the National Assembly, modified if needed, and then each reform must be approved by two-thirds of the members in order to move forward. Those approved must then be voted on no more than thirty days later by the public in a national referendum. In this final stage, reforms can only be ratified if supported by a majority of the voting population. As of this writing, the third round of debates was being carried out (October, 2007).

If the entire package of 2007 reform proposals is passed by the National Assembly, changes would affect 68 of the 350 articles comprising the 1999 Constitution, or slightly less than twenty percent of the legislation. New proposed constitutional reforms would make changes to laws regarding politics, the economy, property law, the military, the national territory, and culture and society. They would not however, have a significant impact on the political structure of the government, as did the 1999 Constitution. Their most important aim, according to President Chavez, is to create a “new geometry of power” that increases citizen power and government accountability.

POLITICS

In an effort to increase voter participation in Venezuela, where an estimated 60 to 70 percent of the population is under the age of 30, **Article 64** would reduce the age at which citizens may legally vote from 18 to 16 years of age.

Campaign financing is addressed through **Article 67**, which would prohibit political parties and candidates from accepting funds or resources from foreign governments, and foreign organizations whether public or private. The State would be permitted to finance electoral activities.

One of the most talked about reforms in the international press is **Article 230**, a proposal to add one year to the current six-year presidential term and allow for continual reelection. Currently, the executive office is subject to a two-term limit. Despite claims that the change is a bid by President Chavez to remain in office, the removal of term limits would not affect the basic system of electoral competition in Venezuela. It would not restrict the right of citizens to run candidates against Chavez or his party. Nor would it do away with the ability of voters to petition for a national recall referendum to oust the sitting president mid-term. This provision, part of the 1999 Constitution, was invoked in 2004.

Debates within the National Assembly led lawmakers to alter some of the initial reform proposals, most notably **Article 337**, which would no longer ban citizens' right to due process during states of emergency. Also still guaranteed would be the right to life, freedom from torture, disappearance, and silencing. Under Article 337, the right to information will be suppressed during national emergencies. This measure is consistent with past law in Venezuela that has been explained as a legal reaction to media manipulation of events during the 2002 coup against President Chavez.⁸

Article 337 has been criticized by some political parties represented in the National Assembly as well as opposition groups.⁹ However, it is fully consistent with international law, which recognizes the right of governments to limit certain rights in extreme circumstances.¹⁰ Similar laws outlining the imposition of a state of exception or a state of emergency are in place in many of the world's prominent democracies, including the US, Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Spain and the UK.

THE ECONOMY

Many of the reforms currently under review are markedly economic in nature, for, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, the changes aim to "redistribute power and resources to the poor and disadvantaged."¹¹ Venezuela has experienced record growth rates in recent years, and an attempt is being made by the government to use oil revenues in a manner that is truly equitable.

On a recent visit to Venezuela, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz commented that Venezuela has stood out in recent years for its remarkable progress in making oil revenues directly benefit citizens. Stiglitz also stated that "The key to success is finding the right balance between the private sector and the government, which is different for each country."¹²

Article 112 of the current constitution would be altered to allow a "social economy" to replace existing economic policies, which have for decades favored privatization and state non-intervention based on a neo-liberal conception of economics. Instead of fostering primarily private initiatives, the state would become responsible for promoting development "based on humanistic values such as the cooperation and the preponderance of common interests that guarantee the fulfillment of the social needs of the people, social and political stability and happiness." Consideration would also be given to companies and economic units of social production – both "direct" or communal economic units, and "indirect" state-run economic units.¹³

Additionally, **Article 113** would officially prohibit monopolies and the unjust consolidation of economic resources.

Another important change affects Venezuela's Central Bank, which would no longer be entirely independent of the government. **Article 318** would hand over the Bank's primary task to elected

⁸ "National Assembly Concludes Revision of Constitutional Reform Proposal," By Gregory Wilpert, Venezuelanalysis, October 31, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2789>

⁹ "Changes to Venezuelan Constitutional Reform Proposal Provoke Strong Criticism," By Chris Carlson, Venezuelanalysis, October 17, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2739>

¹⁰ United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm

¹¹ Chris Kraul, "Venezuela Leader Aims to Scrap his Term Limit," Los Angeles Times, August 16, 2007.

¹² "Stiglitz, in Venezuela, Pushes Public-Private Balance," By Matthew Walter, Bloomberg, October 10, 2007. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aqop3ptj2ktg>

¹³ "Chavez proposes social economy for the nation in the constitutional reform," Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, August 16, 2007 http://www.abn.info.ve/go_news5.php?articulo=100605&lee=17

officials: the control of monetary policy, largely through short-term interest rates. Neo-liberal economists frown upon this method because it relegates the market and elite interests to a less powerful position. However, interest rates are an essential part of the national economy because they have a direct effect on growth rates as well as employment, wages, and inflation. Currently, the government makes decisions on economic development and tax and spending policy. This proposed reform would increase the government's ability to effectively coordinate economic policies by requiring the Executive and the Central Bank to work together to increase economic growth and development.

New provisions regarding workers rights would build on important guarantees put forth in the 1999 Constitution. Under **Article 90**, the work week would be shortened from 44 hours to 36 hours. **Article 87** would extend benefits to independent contractors by creating a "Social Stability Fund" for workers including housewives, domestic workers, taxi drivers, and informal vendors.

PROPERTY LAW

The 2007 reforms mark the first time that the phrase "private property" has ever been mentioned in the Venezuelan Constitution.¹⁴ Under them, **Article 115** would expand the definition of property to include five specific categories: public (that which belongs to state entities), social (belonging to citizens), collective (belonging to people or social groups either in social or private form), mixed (both public and private), and private (belonging to individuals and private entities).

Property law in Venezuela would continue to guarantee that, "Only for reasons of public benefit or social interest by final judgment, with timely payment of fair compensation, may the expropriation of any kind of property be declared."¹⁵ As in the past, private property would only be retrieved by the state in the interest of the public good and fair compensation would accompany it.

Further guarantees for private property are seen in a reform to **Article 82**, which would guarantee housing protection to families by making it illegal for homes to be expropriated or repossessed.

THE MILITARY

The reform proposal would also affect Venezuela's military structure. A proposed change to **Article 320** would make the National Guard a branch of the armed forces called "Bolivarian Popular Militias." Under Chavez, the National Guard has assumed important roles in disaster relief and development projects. Changes would give the National Guard a role in national defense, in addition to maintaining internal order. Venezuela's armed forces would also be renamed the Bolivarian Armed Forces.

Also affected would be **Article 329**, which currently establishes that "The Army, Navy and Air Force have as their essential responsibility, the planning, execution and control of military operations as required to ensure the defense of the Nation." **Article 11** would incorporate Venezuela's maritime regions into its sovereign territory and would allow military regions to be

¹⁴ "Revised Venezuelan Constitucional Reform Proposal Presented to Legislatura," By Michael Fox, Venezuelanalysis, October 16, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2732>

¹⁵ "Propuesta de reforma constitucional plantea cambio de 33 articulos," Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, August 16, 2007 http://www.abn.info.ve/go_news5.php?articulo=100540&lee=1

designated to carry out specific activities ranging from counter narcotics operations to national defense.

TERRITORIAL REDEFINITION

As is true in many countries, Venezuela's internal boundaries have largely served the interests of economic and political elites. Reforms to **Article 16** aim to rectify this imbalance. To begin, resources will be made more accessible to communities that have historically suffered from poor economic development and infrastructure by designating these areas as federal districts on state, city and local levels.

To compliment Venezuela's existing political and territorial categories, new ones will be created, including insular districts, cities, and maritime regions. Neighborhood activists and community organizations will likely benefit from these proposed changes, and from the official recognition of "communes." The hope is that this will encourage more formal participation by the community in local public affairs. Under **Article 184**, national law would be drafted to make municipalities responsible for providing the resources and services requested by community organizations.

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

In general, the reform proposal being put forth builds on provisions in the 1999 Constitution that recognize the social and cultural diversity of Venezuela. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation would be banned by **Article 21**. A step toward undoing centuries-old racial prejudices is evidenced in **Article 100**, which is slated to recognize Afro-Venezuelan heritage alongside the Indigenous and European influences as part of the nation's historical and cultural foundation. Additionally, progress on women's rights is seen in provisions that would extend social benefits to informal workers and require that political parties promote both female and male candidates.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Venezuela has had 26 different constitutions, but it was not until 1999 that citizens were consulted during the process of formulating the national charter. Venezuelans were given a historical opportunity to vote on the final draft of the 1999 Constitution in a national referendum, just as they will vote on the new reforms in a referendum planned for early December of 2007.

In the lead-up to the referendum, has been no shortage of debate on these issues in society. Citizens from all different walks of life have been encouraged to learn about the reforms and to vote in the national referendum. The government is encouraging all eligible voters to come out on referendum day so that their views might be heard. In the end, the public will be given the final say about whether the reforms are signed into law.

As Venezuela goes about redefining its political path and developing a new form of socialist democracy, it is important that observers take a thoughtful look at this process. In times of rapid change, mistakes may come with the territory. However, observers of Venezuela will also find many triumphs that are just waiting to be discovered, including impressive experiences in citizen-government collaboration, active political engagement, and anti-poverty efforts.

¹⁶ "Venezuelan Legislature Approves 30 Articles for Constitutional Reform," By Gregory Wilpert, Venezuelanalysis, October 22, 2007. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/2750>

^{xv} Embajada de Francia y ONA dictan seminario en trafico aereo de drogas,"

http://www.ona.gob.ve/Noticias/05032007_1.htm

^{xvi} "Embraer comments on impasse blocking sale of airplanes to Venezuela," *Agencia Brasil*

Part II: Press Releases



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

2008 MAR 27 PM 1: 59

CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 10, 2007

Contact: Olivia Gombri
Tel: 301-613-4767

US LATINO GROUPS BACK VENEZUELAN HUMANITARIAN EFFORT IN COLOMBIA

Civil society groups participating in the Latino Congreso held in Los Angeles last week passed a resolution in support of a humanitarian mediation in Colombia by Venezuelan President Chavez. On Saturday, October 6th, delegates from some 2,000 groups from across the US signed the statement in support of Venezuela's efforts in negotiating a hostage-for-prisoner swap and asking Congress to lend its support for the process "through all legal and diplomatic means available."

The Latino Congreso resolution also deems negotiations between the Colombian government and guerrilla group FARC, which are slated to take place under the guidance of Chavez, "the most important step in the peaceful resolution of so many decades of war and all its destructive consequences in its sister nation, Colombia."

Among the 45 high-profile hostages that may be released by the FARC guerrillas in exchange for jailed rebels are three US citizens. International support for the humanitarian mediation by President Chavez is growing. Heads of state in the European Union have also signed a statement backing the negotiations, which was submitted to Venezuela by Portugal on Tuesday, October 9th.

Please read the text of the resolution passed at Latino Congreso below.

Resolution 6.04 - Resolution to Support Humanitarian Mediation In Colombia by The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

This Resolution was Approved by the National Latino Congreso on Day Two Saturday October 6th

WHEREAS from October 5 - 9, 2007, the National Latino Congreso was convened in Los Angeles, California, by numerous Latino organizations that work in this country for the betterment of all peoples who reside within the United States, our hemisphere and the world in an effort to initiate a broad and ongoing debate on tactics and strategies for more effectively using Latino electoral influence, governance, and policy assets that will better achieve greater social change and economic justice for our communities; and

WHEREAS in May 2004, the UN announced that Colombia's 39-year-long drug war had created the worst humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere, where more than 2 million people have been forced to leave their homes and several Indian tribes are close to extinction, since Colombia now houses the third-largest displaced population in the world, where hundreds of thousands of Colombians from both sides of the internal conflict have been killed, and since Colombia's internal civil conflict threatens and destabilizes the 5 surrounding countries, compounding economic and social strife

THE VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE IS DEDICATED TO INFORMING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ABOUT CONTEMPORARY VENEZUELA, AND RECEIVES ITS FUNDING FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELA. FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM THE FARA OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE IN WASHINGTON, DC.

through rampant immigration and military fallout throughout the region; and

WHEREAS sporadic peace talks and efforts by the Colombian governments and the various paramilitary and rebel groups throughout the decades have resulted fruitless, since peace is fundamental for the social and economic development of the peoples of Latin America and the world, and for peace to be achieved in the region the proactive cooperation between South and Central American nations is essential, and since the families of the persons taken captive in the Colombian internal conflict, accompanied by Senator Piedad Cordoba of Colombia have officially requested the participation of The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, through its President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, to mediate in the negotiations between the armed organizations FARC and the ELN and the Government of Colombia; and

WHEREAS after the expressed approval and support of president Alvaro Uribe of Colombia, Venezuela accepted the crucial role in this humanitarian and historic mission and since it also meets with the support of President Sarkozy of France, President Lula of Brasil, as well as the Non-Aligned Nations Movement;

1) THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the organizations of the National Latino Congreso this conference express their full support of Venezuela's humanitarian endeavor, independent of national biases, whereby Colombian and United States citizens, brothers and sisters in captivity, may be able to gain their freedom and return to their loved ones thanks to Venezuela's valuable mediation in the direction of this process so desired by Colombians and the rest of Latin America; and

2) FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the organizations of the National Latino Congreso recognize this humanitarian effort led by Venezuela as the most important step in the peaceful resolution of so many decades of war and all its destructive consequences in its sister nation, Colombia; and

3) FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the organizations of the National Latino Congreso call on the Congress and the government of the United States of America to actively support through all legal and diplomatic means available this humanitarian endeavor that will also help attain the freedom of three US citizens, Keith Donald Stansell, Marc David Gonsalves and Thomas R. Howes.

###



VENEZUELA
INFORMATION
OFFICE

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:00

CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 26, 2007

CONTACT: MEGAN MORRISSEY
202-347-8081 x602
media@veninfo.org

BOOKING MEMO: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS IN VENEZUELA

Experts on Venezuela Available for Commentary on Dec. 2nd National Referendum on Constitutional Reforms

Experts at the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC are available for comment regarding the national referendum on constitutional reforms on December 2nd.

These commentators can speak about the content and significance of the reforms in Venezuela, student protests, the voting process, public sentiment, and the overall political climate in the country. They can help U.S. audiences distinguish fact from fiction regarding the reforms and related issues such as presidential reelection, private property, and central bank autonomy.

The Venezuela Information Office has helped facilitate electoral observer missions in the past, and will do so during the upcoming referendum. This year, observer missions from the U.S. will include organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Lawyers Guild.

AVAILABLE EXPERTS:

Olivia Goubri, Executive Director, Venezuela Information Office

Contact: 301-613-4767

The Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office, Olivia Goubri will be on-the-ground in Venezuela from November 28th to December 4th, and can be contacted via her US cell phone number. She is the editor of *The Venezuela Reader* (EPICA, 2005).

Natali Fani, Associate Director, Venezuela Information Office

Contact: 301-442-8459

A native of Venezuela, Natali Fani does public outreach for the Venezuela Information Office. She is a frequent commentator on Venezuelan affairs for Spanish-language U.S. media.

###

THE VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE IS DEDICATED TO INFORMING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ABOUT CONTEMPORARY VENEZUELA, AND RECEIVES ITS FUNDING FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELA. FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM THE FARA OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE IN WASHINGTON, DC.



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 29, 2007

Contact: Megan Morrissey
202-347-8081, ext. 602

Press Conference Call Today with Venezuelan Pollster

Washington, D.C. - Yesterday evening, the Venezuelan polling firm Consultores 30.11 released its latest survey of the political climate in Venezuela ahead of the national referendum on Sunday, December 2nd.

The Consultores poll is based on 1,600 interviews conducted across Venezuela between November 21st and 27th. Consultores 30.11 accurately predicted the results of the 2006 Venezuelan presidential elections. This data is the most recent analysis of the views of Venezuelans regarding this Sunday's national referendum.

Today at 2:30 pm EST, Director of Research and Public Opinion Germán Campos will discuss the poll in a teleconference for members of the press. Mr. Campos will speak in Spanish with simultaneous English translation.

WHEN: November 29, 2007
TIME: 2: 30 pm EST
WHO: Germán Campos, Director of Research and Public Opinion, Consultores 30.11

CONFERENCE CALL IN NUMBER: 616-712-8000 Access Code: 386602#

To view full poll results, please visit VIO's website at www.veninfo.org or click directly on: [Poll in English](#) - [Poll in Spanish](#)



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 30, 2007

CONTACT: MEGAN MORRISSEY
202-347-8081 x602
media@veninfo.org

BOOKING MEMO: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS IN VENEZUELA

Experts on Venezuela Available for Commentary on Dec. 2nd National Referendum on Constitutional Reforms

Experts at the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC are available for comment regarding the national referendum on constitutional reforms on December 2nd.

These commentators can speak about the content and significance of the reforms in Venezuela, student protests, the voting process, public sentiment, and the overall political climate in the country. They can help U.S. audiences distinguish fact from fiction regarding the reforms and related issues such as presidential reelection, private property, and central bank autonomy.

The Venezuela Information Office has helped facilitate electoral observer missions in the past, and will do so during the upcoming referendum. This year, observer missions from the U.S. will include organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Lawyers Guild.

AVAILABLE EXPERTS:

Olivia Goubri, Executive Director, Venezuela Information Office

Contact: 301-613-4767

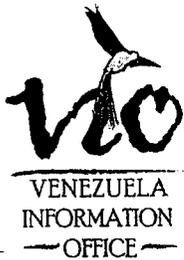
The Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office, Olivia Goubri will be on-the-ground in Venezuela from November 28th to December 4th, and can be contacted via her US cell phone number. She is the editor of *The Venezuela Reader* (EPICA, 2005).

Natali Fani, Associate Director, Venezuela Information Office

Contact: 301-442-8459

A native of Venezuela, Natali Fani does public outreach for the Venezuela Information Office. She is a frequent commentator on Venezuelan affairs for Spanish-language U.S. media.

###



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 30, 2007

CONTACT: **Megan Morrissey**
202-347-8081 ext. 602
media@veninfo.org

U.S. Electoral Observers in Venezuela Available for Comment

U.S. electoral observer missions from the NAACP and the National Lawyers Guild will be present in Venezuela to monitor the national referendum on constitutional reforms and will be available for interviews the evening of December 2nd as well as all day on December 3rd. Observers were invited earlier this fall to serve as official monitors by the National Electoral Council (CNE).

The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is the oldest national vote monitoring organization in the U.S., and as such will play a key role in monitoring the referendum. Both organizations will issue preliminary findings on December 3rd and will be available for comment and one-on-one interviews by appointment only.

The following individuals, all of whom are prepared to evaluate the validity of the results of the referendum, will be available to the press on the evening of December 2nd through December 3rd.

NAACP Mission

Tasha Coleman is the International Affairs Coordinator for the NAACP. Her work involves promoting and protecting international human rights and educating NAACP members on rights issues. A member of the NAACP Washington Bureau team, Ms. Coleman was closely involved in organizing the electoral observer mission to Venezuela during the 2006 presidential elections.

Victor L. Goode is Assistant General Counsel for the national office of the NAACP in Baltimore, MD. He also co-chairs the NAACP Police Misconduct Working Group. He has done election protection work, including work on systemic voting rights litigation, in Florida, Texas, and Indiana. Mr. Goode is licensed to practice law in Texas and Ohio.

Gary Bledsoe has been President of the Texas NAACP since 1991. He chairs the National Criminal Justice Committee of the NAACP. Mr. Bledsoe is an Austin lawyer specializing in public interest, employment and civil rights. He has received lawyer of the year awards from the NAACP, the Texas Attorney General, the Travis County Bar Association, and the Austin Area Urban League.

National Lawyers Guild Mission

THE VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE IS DEDICATED TO INFORMING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ABOUT CONTEMPORARY VENEZUELA, AND RECEIVES ITS FUNDING FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELA. FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM THE FARA OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE IN WASHINGTON, DC.

Judith E. Somberg is an Executive Vice President of the National Lawyers Guild. She has worked as an attorney in private practice for the past 30 years. Ms. Somberg was an electoral observer in Nicaragua in 1990.

David Conforto is on the Executive Board of the National Lawyers Guild. He is a recipient of the National Lawyers Guild's Denise Carty-Bennia Award for commitment to social justice. Mr. Conforto is an attorney in Boston, Massachusetts and the Founder of Conforto Law Group, where he concentrates in employment law.

Urszula Masny-Latos has been Executive Director of the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild since 1996. She holds degrees from The New School for Social Research and the University of California at Santa Cruz. Ms. Masny-Latos is a Fulbright scholar (1991-1993), and did research on the legal and social status of women in the United States and Poland.

**TO SPEAK TO ANY OF THESE INDIVIDUALS OR FOR MORE INFORMATION,
CONTACT:**

Olivia Goubri
Executive Director, Venezuela Information Office
In Caracas dial: 001-301-613-4767
From the U.S. dial: 301-613-4767
olivia@veninfo.org

Natali Fani
Associate Director, Venezuela Information Office
Office: 202 347 8081, ext. 603
Cell: 301-442-8459
natali@veninfo.org

###



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 2, 2007

CONTACT: MEGAN MORRISSEY
202-347-8081 x602
media@veninfo.org

COMMENTATORS ON VENEZUELA REFERENDUM AVAILABLE

Experts with the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC are available to provide commentary on the December 2nd national referendum on constitutional reforms as the results of the voting are announced.

Olivia Goubri, the Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office, is on-the-ground in Venezuela and can give an eyewitness account of what happened at the polls. Ms. Goubri is prepared to give audiences the most informed and up-to-date analysis of the referendum. Associate Director Natali Fani can speak about the political climate in Venezuela and the significance of the referendum both there and abroad.

Both of these commentators are experienced observers of the Venezuelan political scene, and can provide analysis of the poll results as they are made available. See contact information below.

The Venezuela Information Office is helping to facilitate electoral observer missions in Venezuela for the referendum. It also helped coordinate international monitoring groups during the 2006 presidential elections in Venezuela. This year, observer missions from the U.S. will include organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Lawyers Guild.

AVAILABLE EXPERTS:

Olivia Goubri, Executive Director, Venezuela Information Office

Contact: 301-613-4767

The Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office, Olivia Goubri will be on-the-ground in Venezuela from November 28th to December 4th, and can be contacted via her US cell phone number. She is the editor of *The Venezuela Reader* (EPICA, 2005).

Natali Fani, Associate Director, Venezuela Information Office

Contact: 301-442-8459

A native of Venezuela, Natali Fani does public outreach for the Venezuela Information Office. She is a frequent commentator on Venezuelan affairs for U.S. media including CNN, Univision, and Telemundo.

###



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 2, 2007

CONTACT: Megan Morrissey
202-347-8081 ext. 602
media@veninfo.org

U.S. Electoral Observers in Venezuela Available for Comment

Members of U.S. electoral observer missions from the NAACP and the National Lawyers Guild present in Venezuela to monitor the national referendum on constitutional reforms are available for interviews the evening of December 2nd and all day on December 3rd.

Observers were invited earlier this fall to serve as official monitors by the National Electoral Council (CNE). The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is the oldest national vote monitoring organization in the U.S., and as such will play a key role in monitoring the referendum. Both organizations will issue preliminary findings on December 3rd.

The following individuals, all of whom are prepared to evaluate the validity of the results of the referendum, are available for interviews beginning on the evening of December 2nd.

NAACP Mission

Tasha Coleman is the International Affairs Coordinator for the NAACP. Her work involves promoting and protecting international human rights and educating NAACP members on rights issues. A member of the NAACP Washington Bureau team, Ms. Coleman was closely involved in organizing the electoral observer mission to Venezuela during the 2006 presidential elections.

Victor L. Goode is Assistant General Counsel for the national office of the NAACP in Baltimore, MD. He also co-chairs the NAACP Police Misconduct Working Group. He has done election protection work, including work on systemic voting rights litigation, in Florida, Texas, and Indiana. Mr. Goode is licensed to practice law in Texas and Ohio.

Gary Bledsoe has been President of the Texas NAACP since 1991. He chairs the National Criminal Justice Committee of the NAACP. Mr. Bledsoe is an Austin lawyer specializing in public interest, employment and civil rights. He has received lawyer of the year awards from the NAACP, the Texas Attorney General, the Travis County Bar Association, and the Austin Area Urban League.

National Lawyers Guild Mission

THE VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE IS DEDICATED TO INFORMING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ABOUT CONTEMPORARY VENEZUELA, AND RECEIVES ITS FUNDING FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELA. FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM THE FARA OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE IN WASHINGTON, DC.

Judith E. Somberg is an Executive Vice President of the National Lawyers Guild. She has worked as an attorney in private practice for the past 30 years. Ms. Somberg was an electoral observer in Nicaragua in 1990.

David Conforto is on the Executive Board of the National Lawyers Guild. He is a recipient of the National Lawyers Guild's Denise Carty-Bennia Award for commitment to social justice. Mr. Conforto is an attorney in Boston, Massachusetts and the Founder of Conforto Law Group, where he concentrates in employment law.

Urszula Masny-Latos has been Executive Director of the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild since 1996. She holds degrees from The New School for Social Research and the University of California at Santa Cruz. Ms. Masny-Latos is a Fulbright scholar (1991-1993), and did research on the legal and social status of women in the United States and Poland.

**TO SPEAK TO ANY OF THESE INDIVIDUALS OR SCHEDULE FACE-TO-FACE
INTERVIEWS, CONTACT:**

Olivia Gombri

In Caracas dial: 001-301-613-4767

From the U.S. dial: 301-613-4767

olivia@veninfo.org

###



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 3, 2007

CONTACT: MEGAN MORRISSEY
202-347-8081 x602
media@veninfo.org

VENEZUELA EXPERT AVAILABLE TO DISCUSS REACTIONS TO 'NO' VOTE

The Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office, Olivia Goumbri, is on-the-ground in Caracas and available for interviews regarding reactions to Sunday's national referendum on constitutional reforms.

Olivia Goumbri offers an eyewitness account of what happened at the polls in Venezuela and how the country is reacting to the 'no' result. Her commentary will provide audiences with the most informed and up-to-date analysis of the aftermath of a referendum that has been widely considered a decisive event for democracy in Venezuela and the administration of President Hugo Chavez.

Ms. Goumbri can speak about the political climate in Venezuela and the significance of the referendum both there and abroad. She will be in Venezuela until December 4th, and can be contacted via her US cell phone number (listed below). She has been a commentator on current events in Venezuela for NPR and the BBC.

FOR INTERVIEWS, PLEASE CONTACT:

OLIVIA GOUMBRI
301-613-4767
olivia@veninfo.org

###

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:00

CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 10, 2008

CONTACT: OLIVIA GOUMBRI 301-613-4767

COLOMBIAN HOSTAGES FINALLY FREED: Experts available for comment

Washington, D.C. - Today at 2:40 p.m. (EST), helicopters transporting two women held hostage by Colombian rebels for more than six years safely arrived to the state of Tachira, Venezuela, thanks to President Chávez's efforts to reach a humanitarian accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Clara Rojas, an aide to former Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, and former Colombian congresswoman Consuelo Gonzalez, were rescued earlier today by Venezuela's Minister of Interior Relations and Justice, Ramón Rodríguez Chacín; Cuban Ambassador Germán Sánchez; Colombian Senator Piedad Córdoba; and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Colombia authorized Venezuela to lead this rescue mission after relatives of the hostages urged the Venezuelan President to continue his efforts towards peace in the neighboring nation.



Humanitarian mission arriving to Venezuela

Despite last week's claims by the press that the attempts of Chávez had failed, his efforts today bore fruit. This most recent endeavor by Venezuela's head of state accompanies other initiatives aimed at sewing peace and reconciliation in South America. On New Year's Eve, Chávez signed an amnesty decree granting immediate release to persons who had been involved in the economic sabotage and short lived coup against him in 2002.

EXPERTS AVAILABLE FOR ANALYSIS AND COMMENT:

Olivia Gombri, Executive Director: 301-613-4767 (English interviews)
Natali del Carmen Fani, Associate Director: 301-442-8459 (English/Spanish interviews)

###



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 20, 2008

Contact: Megan Morrissey
202-347-8081 ext. 602
media@veninfo.org

VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE CALLS FOR COVERAGE OF AMNESTY DECREE BY PRESIDENT CHAVEZ

Washington, D.C. -- The Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC, is calling for improved U.S. news coverage of events in Venezuela, particularly amnesties given by President Chávez to individuals involved in a 2002 coup d'etat against his government.

Executive Director Olivia Goubri, in an op-ed on ZNet entitled "The Price of Dumbing Down Venezuela," pointed out errors and omissions in the U.S. mainstream media regarding recent major events in this South American nation. After President Chavez granted amnesty to 30 coup plotters on January 1, 2008, "US newspapers remained astonishingly silent." In the past year, dozens of news articles and opinion pieces in top newspapers have accused the Venezuelan government of silencing dissent, however, just two outlets acknowledged Chavez's recent bid for reconciliation between the government and the opposition.

A constitutional reform proposal in 2007 was portrayed in the U.S. media as steering Venezuela toward dictatorship, although the proposal was subject to public approval in a national referendum, and included a provision allowing voters to recall presidents. When the proposal lost and President Chávez conceded defeat despite claims he would insist on being "president-for-life," none of the major U.S. newspapers ran original stories about the event.

Ms. Goubri of the Venezuela Information Office said that poor reporting on Venezuela does a disservice to the U.S. public, and indicated that "a more balanced depiction of current affairs in Venezuela is in order."

###



VENEZUELA
INFORMATION
OFFICE

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:00

CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 27, 2008

CONTACT: MEGAN MORRISSEY
202-347-8081 ext. 602
media@veninfo.org

Venezuela Helps to Free Colombian Captives: Experts Available for Comment



Washington, DC -- Today at around 1 pm, Venezuelan helicopters picked up four Colombian hostages that were released by the rebel group FARC as a result of a humanitarian mediation by President Chavez.

The captives were greeted by doctors from the International Red Cross as well as Venezuela's interior minister, and flown to the Venezuelan border town of Santo Domingo before being reunited with their families in the capital city of Caracas.

The hostage release ended more than six years in captivity for former Colombian Representatives Gloria Polanco and Orlando Beltran and ex-Senators Luis Eladio Perez and Jorge Gechem.

Colombia authorized Venezuela to lead the rescue mission after relatives of the hostages urged the Venezuelan President to continue his efforts towards peace in the neighboring nation.

EXPERTS AVAILABLE FOR ANALYSIS AND COMMENT:

Olivia Goumbri, Executive Director: 301-613-4767 (English interviews)
Natali del Carmen Fani, Associate Director: 301-442-8459 (English/Spanish interviews)

###



VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE
2000 P STREET NW SUITE 240
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
VOICE: (202) 347-8081
FAX: (202) 223-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 29, 2009

CONTACT: NATALI FANI
301-442-8459

MINNEAPOLIS HOSTS EVENT ON AFRICAN ROOTS IN THE AMERICAS



Minneapolis, MN – The Minnesota-Venezuela Solidarity Committee and other local groups present a conference on "The African Diaspora in the Americas: Political and Cultural Resistance," on Saturday, March 1, in honor of Black History and Women's History Months.

Featured presenter Jesús "Chuco" García, the founder of the Afro-Venezuelan Network, will give the keynote address at 1 pm on Saturday. The event offers a cross-cultural discussion of the role played by people of African descent in political movements in the Americas, and brings to

Minneapolis speakers from Haiti, Cuba, Liberia, Venezuela, Colombia, and Puerto Rico.

Sponsors include the University of Minnesota La Raza Cultural Center, Macalester College, the Minnesota Immigrant Freedom Network, the Minnesota-Venezuela Solidarity Committee, the Minnesota-Cuba Committee, and the Haiti Justice Committee of Minnesota.

Afternoon panels begin at 2:30 pm, and are followed by a dinner and concert at 5:30 pm. This event is free and open to the public.

Location: Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
1301 10th Ave N, Minneapolis

More info.: 301-442-8459

###

Part III: Articles

Editorial

Chavez innocent in 1992 coup

The Op-Ed column "Shills for Chavez" (Feb. 12) invoked history to make a claim that history simply does not support. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez did not, as the column says, murder civilians in the failed 1992 coup against the Perez administration. Instead, he halted the military act and famously told the nation on live television that the revolution was impossible, at least "for now."

The 1992 coup was against a government that had slaughtered hundreds if not thousands of Venezuelans four years earlier, when it had repressed dissent after an economic shock. That event, known as the "Caracazo," was the bloodiest in Venezuela's recent history, not Mr. Chavez's attempt to unseat the leader who caused it. The injustices of the 1989 repression inspired Mr. Chavez to fight for the poor. That did not make him a "terrorist" then, nor is he one now for sending heating oil aid to low-income U.S. citizens.

MEGAN MORRISSEY

Venezuela Information Office

Washington

What is an 'illegal' gun?

Accompanying the article "Mayors eye gun offender database" (Metropolitan, Friday) was a photo of a bunch of ordinary-looking guns described in the caption as "Illegal guns seized in Maryland." My question is: What is an "illegal gun"? Is it a gun sold without proper papers or a gun used in a crime or what?

Those guns lying on the table look perfectly legal and innocent to me. How do I know they are not just props? If the guns are illegal, are not the pants worn by the perpetrators at the time of the crimes also illegal? For that matter, why aren't the perpetrators lying on a table? They are the only ones who can



The Price of Dumbing Down Venezuela

February, 15 2008

By Olivia Burlingame Gombri

[Olivia Burlingame Gombri's ZSpace Page](#)

[Join ZSpace](#)

All is fair in love and war. No statement ever rang truer in describing the American media. From politicians to celebrities, and even on down to your average Joe; when the political pundits make their mind up about you, all bets are off. And as Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez can attest, the American media can be cruel and downright vindictive.

Today, our national popular imagination is shaped by media outlets that are largely owned by a tiny group of corporations with annual revenues ranging between 10 and 40 billion dollars. In one of the most highly regarded scholarly works on media ownership, *The New Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian documents that almost 99% of the media industry is controlled by just five corporations: Time Warner, Disney, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom (formerly CBS). When Bagdikian first started keeping track in 1983, the list was ten times longer. With such a rapid acceleration of media consolidation over the last few decades, the pressures to serve the profit motive have increased at an ever-expanding pace, while diverse political perspectives have dwindled. Former New York Times Chief of Staff John Swinton candidly admitted this when he said, "We are the tools and vassals for rich men behind the scenes. We are intellectual prostitutes. The business of the Journalist is to destroy truth; to lie outright; to pervert; to vilify."

Venezuela serves as an excellent case in point. Though democratically elected, Venezuela's larger than life head of state continues to be portrayed in the US media as a "left-wing dictator" and "autocratic strongman." Over the last two months, I have watched with sad amazement as the largest circulating and most revered newspapers in America artfully evade accurate reporting on arguably the two most newsworthy events in recent Venezuelan history, all in the hopes of safeguarding Chavez's "bad boy" image. This does an enormous disservice to us all. And despite our own President's notions to the contrary, it is still possible to learn from other nations.

As last year came to a close Venezuelan voters rejected a series of constitutional reforms proposed by Chávez. This marked the first electoral loss for the South American leader since he was elected by an overwhelming majority in 1998. In the run-up to the referendum, however, most American newspapers were cynical that a democratic election could be carried out. Empty rumors spread by Chávez's political opponents were repeated, alleging that the National Electoral Council was corrupt and biased. Influential newspapers issued articles characterizing the democratically elected leader as a "strongman" hoping to consolidate power through the passage of some 69 constitutional updates. Polls were cited, opposition leaders were quoted, and the general tone was set: the reforms were inherently undemocratic and would serve only to centralize state power.

Soon after, most of those same news dailies issued editorials expanding upon their already existing bias. Editorials appearing in the *Houston Chronicle* and *Chicago Tribune* wrongly stated that

Venezuelans would lack due process during states of national emergency, a provision not included in the reforms. The Washington Post claimed that the reforms would curtail freedom in Venezuela. The Washington Times inaccurately stated that Chávez "controls most major Venezuelan media," an allegation debunked by any quick review of Venezuela's print and TV media. This particularly uninformed editorial followed an opinion piece earlier in the month penned by none other than notorious Cold War hawk Oliver North, who argued that Chávez had already "pulled a coup" on the Venezuelan people.

Similarly egregious opinion pieces were disseminated in the national press. A Los Angeles Times op-ed - written by an opposition journalist who elsewhere compared President Chávez to Bin Laden - made the unsupported and very emotional claim that constitutional reforms would cause a global recession due to higher oil prices. The Miami Herald predicted an end to freedom of expression. What these exaggerated accounts ignored was the fact that voters would ultimately decide for themselves at the polls.

As Venezuelan citizens eagerly awaited the election results in the early morning hours of December 3rd, opposition leaders led a series of public tirades on the steps of the National Electoral Council. Accusations of fraud were lodged and the public was told to be wary of the outcome of the election. When the official results were announced shortly thereafter, the constitutional reforms had lost: 51% to 49%.

In a move that logically should have shocked the press and elicited story after story, President Chávez gracefully accepted defeat; affirming on live television that the people of Venezuela had sent a message and that their will would be respected. He asked Venezuelans to celebrate peacefully, and congratulated the opposition for their victory.

Over the following days, no newspapers focused on the president's extraordinary response. Given his status as "dictator" and "autocrat" his gracious acceptance of defeat certainly merited a word or two. In fact, an entire expose could have been crafted on the leader's sudden change of heart! After all, how many dictators concede defeat? Alas, the democratic overture was largely overlooked and instead the American print media regurgitated previous dismissals of Venezuela's democracy.

Even more disturbing, though, was the fact that the top ten largest circulating newspapers in the nation gave no attention to the story that followed.

In a provocative move unforeseen by opposition and government supporters alike, President Chávez rang in the New Year by pardoning more than 30 persons involved in the unsuccessful coup d'etat that briefly deposed him in 2002.

Chávez appeared live on state television to hold out an olive branch to the opposition, remarking that the time was ripe to begin "turning the page." The new law would further safeguard civilians' rights to engage in acts of civil disobedience and allow for the immediate release of accused and convicted criminals imprisoned during the attempted coup, so long as they had previously submitted to authorities. Those who fled or those who were being held for crimes against humanity would not be pardoned, he said.

Again, the largest circulating US newspapers remained astonishingly silent. Among them, only two - the Chicago Tribune and Washington Post - even mentioned the historic event, and they did so by merely publishing one reprint each from the newswires. The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, and the Dallas Morning News all neglected the story and in the days following the amnesty decree, chose to run feature stories criticizing Chávez.

Madeline Albright wrote in the Los Angeles Times that the coming foreign policy battle would be one between democratic and autocratic tendencies, and used President Chávez as an example of the latter. The next day, the Times published an opinion piece on free trade that categorically rejected Venezuela's alternative model of trade and development. The Wall Street Journal followed

suite with "Liberty Theology," which bashed the religious movement of liberation theology for its links to socialist leaders.

Others ran headlines on the "failure" of President Chávez's efforts to secure the release of Colombian hostages being held by FARC guerrillas. Headlines such as "Chávez's Promised Hostage Release Fizzles" (New York Times) and "Chavez Led Alliance Fails to Get Hostages" (Washington Post) made it apparent that only negative stories would surface. Despite these dismissals, in a most unexpected twist to the saga, the Colombian hostages were indeed liberated just days later, on January 10th.

Conclusion

In addition to forward thinking about political compromise and reconciliation, inspiring models of citizen participation are increasingly occurring in South America but are often lost on us because we have no alternative reference point to compare them to. In Venezuela alone, 18 million people have received new or updated ID cards, enabling them to register to vote - 5.5 million of them - for the first time in their lives. Even more astounding are the results of Venezuela's last presidential election which saw the highest voter turnout in Venezuelan history - with nearly 75% participation-rates that have not been matched in the U.S. since 1820.

As Americans await the results of national primaries, and gubernatorial and mayoral campaigns approach in Venezuela, an exciting series of newsworthy events are due to unfold. With the Venezuelan opposition energized from a win at the polls, and with President Chavez calling on his supporters to reflect and re-energize, heated battles for local public office are just around the corner. American presidential contenders will not be the only candidates calling for change this year. They will however, be the only ones wondering how to get the majority to the ballot box.

How newsmakers cover the developments of this Caribbean nation remains to be seen, but if past coverage is any indicator I am afraid we are headed down a dangerous road where "objective" reporting is sacrificed for the official line of Washington. In light of that unfortunate trend, a more balanced depiction of current affairs in Venezuela is in order and it would behoove all of us to advocate for it.

Olivia Burlingame Gombri is the editor of The Venezuela Reader: The Building of a People's Democracy and has appeared on various national radio programs as a Venezuela expert including NPR's To The Point and BBC World News. She is currently the Executive Director of The Venezuela Information Office in Washington DC.

From: Z Net - The Spirit Of Resistance Lives

URL: <http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/16521>

 [Print](#)

[Imprimir esta página](#)

Referendo en Venezuela: Sí: reforma mejora la democracia

NATALI FANI

02 de diciembre de 2007

A mediados de agosto de 2007, el presidente Hugo Chávez propuso un grupo de reformas para la Constitución de Venezuela, enfocándose en 33 artículos de los 350 de la Constitución. Seguidamente, dichas reformas fueron discutidas en una ronda de tres debates en la Asamblea Nacional y debatidas en más de nueve mil actividades de consulta pública alrededor del país, enriqueciendo así el texto constitucional que hoy será sometido a referendo.

Basado en este proceso nacional de consultas con el pueblo venezolano, se propusieron 25 reformas adicionales y 11 cambios menores, creando un total de 69 reformas. Hoy las reformas serán votadas en dos bloques: uno conteniendo el grupo original de reformas propuestas por el Presidente y un segundo grupo con las reformas añadidas por la Asamblea Nacional. Los venezolanos votarán por el Sí o el No en cada bloque.

A pesar de la información sesgada por parte de muchos medios de comunicación, para muchos venezolanos esta reforma a la Constitución es una herramienta definitiva para una de las metas más importantes del gobierno de Venezuela: la reducción a cero de la pobreza.

La realidad es que la reforma constitucional busca acelerar la re-distribución de los recursos del país en beneficio de los pobres y ampliar la participación directa de los ciudadanos en los procesos democráticos. Igualmente busca guiar al país hacia un nuevo modelo de desarrollo basado en la democracia participativa y en una economía mixta, respondiendo a las necesidades sociales del país y promoviendo una sociedad multi-polar.

Para llegar a esta meta, la reforma estipula, entre otras propuestas, que los Consejos Comunales, los cuales son grupos conformados por miembros de la comunidad que discuten y buscan solución a los problemas de su comunidad, reciban los recursos de manera más directa ya que serán parte de los poderes constituidos.

Otra reforma vital se enfoca en el artículo 112 de la Constitución actual, el cual garantiza la libertad de cualquier venezolano a involucrarse en la actividad económica que desee, mientras obliga al gobierno a promover empresas privadas "que generen y garanticen la distribución justa de la riqueza". La reforma propuesta obligaría a que el gobierno trabaje para asegurar un sistema económico que sea "diversificado e independiente" fundado en "valores humanos de cooperación y de la

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:00
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

preponderancia del interés general". Es decir, la reforma a este artículo expandirá la actividad económica para incluir no sólo a la empresa privada, sino también cooperativas con orientación social y modelos de actividad económica comunitarios.

Por otro lado, el artículo 115 actualmente establece el derecho a la propiedad privada, aclarando que cualquier propiedad puede ser expropiada "sólo por causa de utilidad pública o interés social mediante sentencia firme y pago oportuno de justa indemnización". La reforma propuesta dejará sin cambios el derecho y la protección de la propiedad privada e incluye nuevas clasificaciones de propiedad. De acuerdo a la reforma, la propiedad que no está en manos del sector privado puede ser clasificada en: Pública, Social, Colectiva y Mixta.

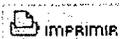
Referente a los periodos presidenciales, el Artículo 230 de la Constitución establece que el periodo en el cargo de Presidente de la República será de seis años y que puede ser reelegido una sola vez. Bajo la reforma propuesta, el periodo presidencial será extendido a siete años y cualquier presidente en el cargo podrá optar a otro periodo consecutivo, participando en nuevas elecciones.

Cabe aclarar que el presidente continuará enfrentando la reelección y el "referéndum revocatorio" —la innovadora herramienta que permite a los votantes recortar el mandato de las autoridades electas— continuará en la Constitución. Este último recurso del referendo revocatorio fue exitosamente utilizado por la oposición del gobierno en agosto de 2004, cuando 60% del pueblo de Venezuela votó por permitir al presidente Chávez terminar su primer mandato.

Estas son sin duda las reformas más polémicas que han sido discutidas en varios sectores en Estados Unidos. Pero al final, el pueblo venezolano es el que decide. Este domingo más de 16 millones de venezolanos tendrán la oportunidad de votar para aprobar o no las reformas en un referendo nacional. Igualmente, los más de 60 mil venezolanos residentes en el exterior podrán ejercer su derecho al voto en las diferentes embajadas y consulados de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela asentadas en el exterior.

A través de esta reforma, el gobierno de Venezuela busca escapar de los fracasos de un modelo económico y social erróneo mediante la expansión de oportunidades para la participación democrática y la promoción de políticas que facilitan el crecimiento económico y desarrollo social. Este domingo, el pueblo de Venezuela decidirá su camino.

Natali del Carmen Fani es la vicedirectora de la Oficina de Información de Venezuela en Washington, D.C. www.veninfo.org



Los Angeles Times

GET TOGETHER
WITH
A VOLVO

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/letters/la-le-saturday1dec01,0,3923335.story?coll=la-news-comment-letters>
From the Los Angeles Times

Letters to the editor

December 1, 2007

Venezuelan voters will make a choice

Re "Fooling most Venezuelans," *Opinion*, Nov. 24

Although Venezuelans will likely approve a set of constitutional reforms this month, William Ratliff concludes that they are wrong to do so. If we truly believe that free and fair elections are the hallmark of a democratic society, and that citizens have the right to choose their own leaders, then we must support Venezuelans when they exercise their right to do so. Even if those they elect, and the measures they approve, stray from our narrow understanding of democracy, what matters is that they participate and express the will of the people.

We would do well as Americans to remember that rather than underestimating the ability of entire populations to rule themselves. The very same mentality was used by the British to keep Americans enslaved, and we all know how that turned out.

Olivia B. Gombri

Executive Director

Venezuela Information

Office

Washington

Ratliff hits the nail on the head regarding Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his ultimate goals. Chavez has sought since his "election" to become the new Fidel of South America and is moving toward implementing a Marxist state under his control. The result ultimately will be a Venezuela that looks like Zimbabwe. Marxism as economics and politics never works except for the dictators and their retinue. The signs of failure are already extant in Venezuela in the food shortages and in other areas, but you can bet that neither Chavez nor Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe are going to miss any meals.

George Schirtzinger

Pasadena

Ratliff calls what Venezuela may become after its Dec. 2 election "a populist dictatorship." This is a contradiction in terms. The people of Venezuela have a choice on Dec. 2. They can vote the reform down, or they can accept it. That's democracy. The issue isn't that Venezuela is a dictatorship. The issue is that Chavez has challenged U.S. policies in Latin America. This is a no-no to an ideologue like Ratliff.

The country is in the middle of a revolution that has many problems. The reforms in Venezuela are a continuation of handing over more power to the vast majority of people who are poor and formerly disenfranchised. Yes, there is strong opposition, but it represents the upper classes that have lost much ground in the revolution. There is much work to be done in Venezuela, but I've never seen a more engaged and intelligent electorate.

Luis J. Rodriguez

San Fernando

Code of conduct for Internet firms

Re "Technology's soul," *Opinion*, Nov. 25

The Times editorializes about Internet companies' work on a code of conduct to include "a demand that governments follow formal legal procedures to obtain information about Internet users." The Times also says that the "efforts could relieve the competitive pressures that often lead companies to become complicit in political crackdowns."

Current: 81°
82° / 69°
Complete Forecast

MiamiHerald.com



He shouldn't have to fight for health care.



Search: News Archives Web Search powered by YAHOO! SEARCH



Welcome Guest
Login | Register

NEWS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS TROPICAL LIFE OPINION JOBS CARS REAL ESTATE SHOPPING CLASSIFIEDS ELNUEVOHERALD.COM
Editorials | Editorial Cartoons | Letters | Columnists | Blogs | SpeakUp Online



Sean Taylor's death

Posted on Wed, Nov. 28, 2007 email print reprint AIM del.icio.us Digg

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- Hearings are open
- Trash ruins Peacock Park
- MIA a 'disgrace' hed here
- We need Colombia trade deal
- End 'Thug U' image
- More

MOST POPULAR STORIES

- Police: We have confessions in Sean Taylor slaying
- Dolphins picks Booker, Moses have been patient
- Overwhelming victory for Northwestern
- Chances for Venezuelan reforms growing slim
- Andy Garcia: Taylor saved niece's life
- Booker T. gets scare but advances
- Activists protest Burger King
- Immigration and the politics of hysteria
- Sean Taylor viewing set for Sunday
- Dolphins' young defenders growing up fast

NEWS ON THE GO

- News by Mobile
- News by Email
- RSS feeds
- Podcasts

I was in tears over the death of a young man of whom I had never heard until Monday.

The tragic murder of Sean Taylor is the result of what happens when young children do not have strong moral teaching.

People who can commit murder are not born, they are made. Weak, immoral character develops at an early age when their parents fail to teach them right from wrong. Immorality in a culture is further reinforced by a society that celebrates the material over the spiritual.

Such behavior is celebrated every day in media, which feature celebrities who bling-binge, music lyrics praising crime and television programs like *Dexter*, the hit series that glamorizes a serial killer. We don't punish and shun immorality, we celebrate it.

I am sick over Taylor's death, and I am sick over the spiritual bankruptcy of society.

My tears are not only for the loss of Taylor; they also are for the loss of morality in America.

KATHRYN JOHNSON, Miami

Matters of style

Re the Nov. 25 *Speakup* letters headlined: *Baggy pants: Style or anarchy*: The issue of baggy pants now is in the public eye. But what about young men who are constantly grabbing their crotches?

Many rappers do that when they perform, and I have seen students coming down the hall at school doing the same thing. Drive by any neighborhood where young men are standing around, and you'll see this ridiculous habit. These folks need to find something else with which to brand their generation.

ROBERT GONZALEZ, Miami

Opa-locka's baggy-pants ban reminded me of when I was in college in 1970 and attended a new-employee training class at Jordan Marsh.

Of the many do's and don't's, "No bell-bottom pants" was stressed over and over, complete with a picture of this unacceptable attire.

PETER R. EVANS, Miami

Praise for Dermer

Re the Nov. 26 story *Mayor helps to put a check on bonds*: Kudos to Miami Beach Mayor David Dermer for averting a bailout of Mount Sinai Hospital at residents' expense and proposing a new ordinance to prevent a recurrence.

However, the new ordinance should go further by requiring three independent professional appraisals before the city agrees to buy property with our tax money.

STEVEN LEVINSON, Miami Beach

Mexican migrants

In the Nov. 24 story *U.S. policies offending more*, Antonio Gonzalez, a Mexico City accountant, said that President Bush is a "modern-day Hitler." Fernando Garcia, a Mexico City office administrator, says that, "I think the current American government has gone too far against illegal Mexicans." And Mexican President Felipe Calderón scolded the U.S. presidential candidates for using migrants as "thematic hostages." He announced a media campaign to influence American public opinion.

How dare they? I'm an independent voter and no fan of Bush. But I'm angered that Mexico is offended by our immigration policies. What Mexico fears is that the hundreds of millions of dollars that illegal immigrants send back home to their families will dry up as more undocumented immigrants are sent back across the border.

This would create a humanitarian crisis for the Mexican government, and Calderón wouldn't know how to deal with it. CNN's Lou Dobbs has challenged the Mexican president to a debate on immigration, but to date, Calderón hasn't accepted. Calderón doesn't understand that it isn't just the Bush administration that's fed up with illegal immigrants pouring across our borders from all countries. The American people are just as angry and want something done to stop them. If Calderón starts creating jobs in Mexico, his citizens won't have to feed their families from the United States.

BUZZ REHE, Kendall

Election monitors

Re the Nov. 25 story *Foreign observers won't monitor voting*, about the upcoming national referendum in Venezuela: On Dec. 2, when voters head to the polls to cast their ballots on a

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS AND SEE HOW YOU SCORE

START

FREE 60-DAY TRIAL

Constant Contact

QUICK JOB SEARCH

Enter Keyword(s):

Enter City:

Select a State:

Select a Category:

Search by Category

Search

Advanced Job Search

NATIONAL NEWS VIDEO

Bush Continues Wrangling With Congress

In Okla., Pregnant Woman's Body Found

AP Top Stories

series of constitutional reforms, the NAACP will be there.

Just as with the previous year during presidential elections in which President Hugo Chávez won by an overwhelming majority, and voter turnout was 75 percent, the NAACP will be sending an observer mission along with many other organizations from around the world.

Last year, the NAACP found that Venezuela's elections were free and fair, and that the government went to great lengths to uphold its citizens' right to privacy.

OLIVIA B. GOUMBRI, executive director, Venezuela Information Office, Washington, D.C.

Bush's vetoes

When the Democratic Congress sends President Bush a bill that he plans to veto, he blames them for wasting time: "I am right. You are wrong. Do not question me."

Someone in his inner circle should explain to him the term "checks and balances." It's a control mechanism that our Founding Fathers developed to protect our rights. It is not about the money some of his friends are making off the war in Iraq.

R. BELONGIE, Fort Lauderdale

Israel at risk

Before the Annapolis Summit, Israel was known as the state of Israel. After the summit, it will be called the "mini-state of Israel."

DAVID SALVER, Miramar

| | | | |
|---------------|---------|---------------|----------|
| NEWS | SPORTS | ENTERTAINMENT | BUSINESS |
| TROPICAL LIFE | OPINION | CLASSIFIEDS | SERVICES |

Join the discussion

The Miami Herald is pleased to provide this opportunity to share information, experiences and observations about what's in the news. Some of the comments may be reprinted elsewhere in the site or in the newspaper. We encourage lively, open debate on the issues of the day, and ask that you refrain from personal comments and remarks that are off point. Thank you for taking the time to offer your thoughts.

Recent Comments

Sad to hear about Sean Taylor, should have been Cam Cameron instead!

sean taylor was my favorite player.when i heard the news it took...

[»Read More](#)

Post Your Comment

[Empty comment box]

Name:

Car Insurance Quotes Online
Compare auto insurance quotes from top companies online.
www.insurance.com

Orchard Bank Mastercard®
Rebuild credit with our MasterCard. Apply online - instant
www.OrchardBank.com

House Payments Fall Again
See Rates, No Credit Check Req. Calculate Your New Mortgage
www.LowerMyBills.com



Partners: WLRN|Miami Herald News | CBS 4 WFOR-TV | Newspaper in Education | More Partners
[About Us](#) | [About the McClatchy Company](#) | [About the Real Cities Network](#) | [Terms of Use & Privacy Statement](#) | [Copyright](#)

Copyright 1996-2007 The Miami Herald Media Company | [User Agreement and Privacy Policy](#) | [Rights and Permissions Help](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Search

venezuelanalysis.com

Venezuela News, Views, and Analysis

Menu

- Home
- News Briefs
- News
- Opinion & Analysis
- Audio
- Video
- Documents
- Featured Articles
- Newsletter Issues
- Letters
- Blog Entries

Static

- About
- Constitution
- Basic Facts
- Bibliography
- Books
- Links
- Economic Indicators
- What's new?

Interactive

- Contact Us
- Letter to the Editor
- Sign up for Newsletter
- RSS & Podcasts
- Search

Text Size



Donate



Help keep us online - donate to Venezuela Analysis

Recommended Links



Home » Opinion & Analysis » Civil Society

Related Articles

[An Engaged Political Culture in Venezuela](#)

[Venezuela's Resurgent Revolutionary Student Movement](#)

[Talking Dirty About Revolution: Sexual Health and Gender Inequality in Venezuela](#)

[Scaling the Heights in Venezuela](#)

[The New Politics of Political Aid in Venezuela](#)

Opinion & Analysis

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS**
[U.S. Companies Behind Anti-Reform Propaganda in Venezuela](#)
Michael Fox - Venezuelanalysis.com

THE BOLIVARIAN PROJECT
[Is Latin America's "New Left" Really New?](#)
Larry Birns and Montana James - COHA

CIVIL SOCIETY
[Venezuela's Youth Movement Misunderstood](#)
Megan Morrissey

CONSTITUTION, LAW & JUDICIARY
[What is Venezuela's Constitutional Reform Really About?](#)
Chris Carlson - Venezuelanalysis.com

CONSTITUTION, LAW & JUDICIARY
[Venezuela's Constitutional](#)

Venezuela's Youth Movement Misunderstood

November 27th 2007, by Megan Morrissey

Students in Venezuela are at the center of a national debate on constitutional reforms. Recently, a violent clash on a university campus in Caracas made international news. But what do we really know about Venezuela's newest political actors?

On December 2nd, a referendum on constitutional reforms will allow the Venezuelan electorate to vote 'yes' or 'no' on two sets of proposed articles. Throughout the reform process, students have been at the center of the action. They held open sessions in downtown Caracas to discuss the reform proposal while it was still being debated in the National Assembly. Since then, students have been received by representatives of three of Venezuela's five branches of government. Lawmakers invited opposition student leaders to debate the reforms with other youngsters who defended the changes to the constitution, and allowed student protesters to enter congress and express their demands. The Supreme Court of Venezuela accepted a proposal from the students asking them to scrutinize the legality of the reforms. The independent National Electoral Council also heard student demands, namely the request that it postpone the referendum.

All of this took place amid an air of tolerance that few would expect from the politically divided Venezuela. In truth, the events showed a level of openness on the part of government officials that surpasses what we have come to expect in the U.S.

Then last week, the peace was shattered when news reports came that gunfire erupted at the Central University after a march. Two were wounded. Images of the violence were shocking. Press reports made it appear as though students in favor of the reforms had attacked those against them. However, the opposite occurred; participants in an opposition demonstration targeted a group of pro-government students at the social work school by trapping them inside a burning building. Finding themselves surrounded by flames, the social work students made desperate phone calls asking friends to help them escape. Some of their rescuers were armed and fired shots in the confusion of the hasty exodus.

The straight story is buried amid a recent *Wall Street Journal* article on student movements that glorifies opposition leader Stalin Gonzalez. The article reads: "The law school's student-center room, a base for Chávez supporters, still smells of charred wood and plastic from a fire that recently destroyed it. Workmen are still cleaning up the School of Social Work. There, pro-Chávez students



barricaded themselves for several hours during a standoff with a crowd of students, until a group of armed civilians on motorcycles intervened to allow the Chávez supporters to escape."

The *Journal* describes "students" pitted against "pro-Chavez students," as though the latter were some kind of exception. This is hardly the case. Marches in favor of the reforms consistently draw tens of thousands of Venezuelans, both young and old, to the streets.

President Chavez has said that the opposition students are the children of wealthy elites such as those who led an abortive coup against him in 2002. While the student movement cannot be reduced entirely to the issue of social class, young people's politics do tend to break down along the same lines as divisions among the rest of Venezuelan society. Traditional elites stand to gain the least from the new pro-poor government policies under Chavez, and so are unsupportive of the president they deridingly call a "monkey," while on the other hand, the large underclass of poor and marginalized Venezuelans - including Black and Indigenous citizens - is gradually becoming more empowered. New voter registration campaigns have targeted minorities and millions of families are benefiting from new state-subsidized programs in medicine, nutrition, sanitation, literacy, and other essential areas of human development. Elites complain that the state should lessen social expenditures, that such efforts are a waste or an effort to buy votes.

It is no surprise, then, that students at private and elite universities are those most likely to oppose the constitutional reforms. Meanwhile, students at state-run "Bolivarian" universities, where hundreds of thousands of low-income Venezuelans are finally gaining access to higher education, are overwhelmingly in support of the changes.

Two of the reforms that will be put to Venezuelan voters next week pertain to specifically students' rights. Article 109 would allow university students to choose their school administrators through elections in which one student vote would have the same weight as one faculty vote in campus politics (instead of ten students equaling one professor). Instead of the "crackdown" on universities that some claim is President Chavez's true intention, the reform would increase student self-determination in all institutions of higher learning.

A second article would reduce the legal voting age to just sixteen. Since about three-quarters of Venezuelans are under the age of thirty, this could give access to the ballot to about two million youths. And, if student participation in electoral processes resembles student prominence in street-level political actions such as marches, these young people may truly become an amazing force for change.

Some claim that Venezuela's reforms would keep President Chavez in office for life and allow him to censor dissent. Neither of these things is likely to happen. Democratic culture in Venezuela is thriving, as is clearly demonstrated by the student movements. Whether young people in Venezuela advocate pro- or anti-government positions, their active engagement in local and national debates should be taken as a positive sign.

Megan Morrissey spent a year in Venezuela as an exchange student with AFS Intercultural Programs. She now works as a media analyst at the Venezuela

Reform: An
Article-by-Article
Summary
Gregory Wilpert -
Venezuelanalysis.com

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS
CONSTITUTION, LAW &
JUDICIARY

Venezuela: Still A
Democracy
Mark Weisbrot - *New
Statesman*

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY
"We're Number 2!"
And Other Stories
You'll Never Read
About Venezuela
BoRev.net

THE BOLIVARIAN PROJECT
Without Worker -
Management, There
is no Socialism, pt. 2
Michael Lebowitz - Links

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
The Big Oil Leak: The
Secret Plan to Beat
Hugo Chavez
Aldo Vidali -
*Communication
Evolution*

CONSTITUTION, LAW &
JUDICIARY
Reforming
Venezuela's
Constitution
*Bernardo Alvarez
Herrera*

License

This work has been
published under a
Creative Commons
license:



More info about
Creative Commons
Licensing

Information Office in Washington, DC.

PRINTER-FRIENDLY VERSION

venezuelanalysis.com :: website realized with drupal using free software only :: site best viewed with mozilla firefox

 Click to Print

SAVE THIS | EMAIL THIS | Close

TODAY'S LETTERS: Non-Combat Deaths In Iraq, Grassroots Media And Venezuela

By E&P Staff

Published: November 28, 2007 10:30 AM ET

NEW YORK Readers wrote in today about [non-combat deaths in Iraq](#), [grassroots media](#) and [Venezuela](#).

Far be it from me to enter into combat with Army Mom, but I would point out to her, as gently as possible, that she is dead wrong when she says that most of those in service who have committed suicide in time of war were equally likely to kill themselves in a period of stress in civilian life.

There are relatively few events in civil life that compare with the sight of comrades being torn apart under heavy, constant bombardment or on seemingly placid city streets along which bombs have been rigged with cunning finesse.

Wesley Pedersen

An Important Lesson About Grassroots Media

Steve Outing's column about the failure of his online media empire calls into question just about all of the "valuable advice" that E&P readers have endured in his past columns.

I've long felt that Outing's proprietorship of an online news organization represented a conflict of interest at E&P, particularly in that he often proselytized about the coming "death of print" and berated newspaper publishers for being too timid when it came to the brave new world of the Net.

Outing's business paradigm was perfect, right up until it got to the point that revenue was needed to sustain it. Even the shabbiest newspaper ad salesman will tell you that "if you build it, they will come" is not the sort of model one employs if actual success is the objective.

Now I suppose we'll be subjected to a year's worth of columns in which the failed mogul attempts to make lemonade out of lemons by dissecting his disappointment so that others won't repeat his bush league mistakes.

He shouldn't bother. Those who have found success in journalism as a business weren't paying any attention anyway.

Mike Hudson
Editor, Niagara Falls Reporter

I find very little difference between today's "user/grassroots" content with a reporter using sources for a story.

The only real difference is that there are far fewer reporters at work than there used to be, and so now we let the sources do the writing, even though their information probably is not vetted.

Grandma's home remedies (user content) may work sometimes, but it is usually better to go to the doctor (journalist) to get the job done professionally.

Ken Anderberg

You said better in your column "An Important Lesson in Grassroots Media" something I have thought for a long time and recently expressed to the news director of my old site, sfgate.com. That the approach of going either with all or mostly user-generated material or of keeping it separate in its own zone on the professional site is both incorrect and won't generate

enough energy to sustain itself.

Exercise news judgment and mix what's best from the community in with what your own staff puts out. I would add to that doing some fact checking to make sure someone's assertion or breaking story is true. But if it is, and if the writing is decent enough, go with it and say where it came from.

This mingling of professional and community was the original vision for sfgate.com. I know that pros don't much like these ideas, but this is the tide of history and can't be stopped. Someone is going to do it right, demonstrate it and soon enough it will be the way it works.

John Coate

Exclusive: A Trip to 'Polarized' Venezuela

I read Mark Fitzgerald's article on the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) delegation to Venezuela with interest. First off, I want to congratulate E&P for taking the time to travel and gain firsthand knowledge of how the media functions in that country. This puts the magazine in a good position to produce an informed account.

The piece rightly points out the arrogance of IAPA's Executive Director, who claimed that the 63% of Venezuelan voters who support President Chavez are simply "stupid." Fitzgerald, on the other hand, approaches the topic in a more balanced way by taking stock of the buzz around freedom of expression in Venezuela, looking at graffiti, and attending political rallies on constitutional reforms that are the subject of a national referendum on December 2nd.

Missing from the article, however, is an analysis of how claims about a deterioration of press freedoms in Venezuela hold up against observed realities. During the visit, was the writer surrounded by pro-Chavez messages? Was there a noted shortage of debate regarding proposed constitutional reforms? Did people seem afraid of making statements against the government? Was there evidence of censorship in newspapers or TV?

I feel quite certain that the answer to all of those questions is a resounding no. Private ownership still dominates in Venezuela. While TV stations Venevisión, Televen, and Globovision toned down their political posturing in recent years, they did so in order to maintain viewers and not because of meddling by the state. The claim that Chavez is curtailing press freedoms comes consistently from opposition groups looking for ways to denounce the government. Others, including the vast majority of journalists and citizens, will affirm that freedom of the press is in fine shape. Higher-ups know it, too; OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza stated even after the non-renewal of RCTV last May that press freedoms were "in full force." I do not suggest that E&P should reject IAPA findings, but merely tell both sides of the story.

Finally, in a country as politically polarized as Venezuela, IAPA is not without its own positioning. Future articles on the delegation should take this into account. IAPA has felt targeted by the Chavez administration, but that is owed to its dogged attempts to discredit the elected government. This is a government that survived a coup attempt just five years ago. Some of the IAPA folks are seen as associated with that coup because Venezuela's privately-owned mass media supported the illegal actions. IAPA recently gave the Grand Prize for Press Freedom to Marcel Granier, the owner of RCTV, which was proven to have manipulated information during the coup. These connections make clear that IAPA is not an impartial observer of political events in Venezuela. E&P, on the other hand, can and should be.

Megan Morrissey
Media Analyst
Venezuela Information Office

E&P Staff (letters@editorandpublisher.com)

Links referenced within this article

non-combat deaths in Iraq
http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/columns/pressingissues_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003668890
grassroots media
http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/columns/stopthepresses_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003677395
Venezuela
http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/columns/newspaperbeat_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003677635
letters@editorandpublisher.com
<http://www.mediainfo.com/eandp/news/mailto:letters@editorandpublisher.com>

boston.com

THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

A power grab that just isn't

The Boston Globe

November 26, 2007

THE ARTICLE "Chávez faces opposition to proposed constitutional changes" (Page A8, Nov. 18) incorrectly portrays constitutional reform in Venezuela as a mere bid for power by the president.

The reforms, up for a national vote on Dec. 2, were not drafted solely by the president or Congress. Public debate ensued when the first proposals were submitted, and as a result of repeated consultations with civil society more have been proposed. These include measures such as criminalizing discrimination based on sexual identity to upholding the right to due process during states of emergencies.

About 9,020 public events have been held to collect citizen input. A hotline was even established and received 80,000 calls from the electorate offering critiques and suggestions of their own. Although we may not like the outcome, it is only fair that we support the Venezuelan people's right to update their constitution.

Let us not forget the words of Thomas Jefferson, who supported this democratic measure, "no society can make a perpetual Constitution. . . . The Earth belongs always to the living generation."

OLIVIA GOUMBRI
Washington, D.C.

The writer is the director of the Venezuela Information Office and the editor of The Venezuela Reader. ■

© Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company



OPINION Letters

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:00
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

Letters: King Juan Carlos vs. Hugo Chávez

09:46 AM CST on Saturday, November 17, 2007

Fact check on Venezuelan reforms

Re: "Shut Up, Indeed – Juan Carlos, we couldn't have said it any better," Tuesday Editorials.

The editorial sided with Spanish King Juan Carlos in his recent admonition to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez during the Ibero-American summit. However, *The Dallas Morning News* may not have done so for the right reasons. Constitutional reforms that will go to a referendum in Venezuela next month were inaccurately portrayed.

The reforms make no reference to the free press or to freedom of expression, which José Miguel Insulza, secretary-general of the Organization of American States, says is "in full force in Venezuela." A reform to civil liberties during national emergencies would still guarantee the right to due process and other important protections.

As for presidential term limits, it is true that if the reforms were approved in a national referendum, incumbents would be allowed to run for office indefinitely. However, this would not affect the multiparty system of electoral competition in Venezuela allowing voters to freely choose their leaders or recall them mid-term.

Megan Morrissey, Venezuela Information Office, Washington, D.C.

Spain's royal couple plainly popular

That was a wonderful and appropriate editorial about the king of Spain. As my sister-in-law in Madrid would attest, the people of Spain, be they on the political left, middle or right, greatly admire and respect King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia.

Arnell L. Engstrom, Plano



FILE 2005/The Associated Press
Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, right, with King Juan Carlos of Spain.

venezuelanalysis.com

Venezuela News, Views, and Analysis

Menu

- Home
- News Briefs
- News
- Opinion & Analysis
- Audio
- Video
- Documents
- Featured Articles
- Newsletter Issues
- Letters
- Blog Entries

Static

- About
- Constitution
- Basic Facts
- Bibliography
- Books
- Links
- Economic Indicators
- What's new?

Interactive

- Contact Us
- Letter to the Editor
- Sign up for Newsletter
- RSS & Podcasts
- Search

Text Size

Donate



Help keep us online - donate to Venezuela Analysis

Recommended Links



Postcards from the Revolution



Home » Opinion & Analysis » Political Developments

Related Articles

Venezuela's Communist Party and the PSUV: To Join or Not to Join?

The Threat to Dissidence and Democracy in the United Socialist Party of Venezuela

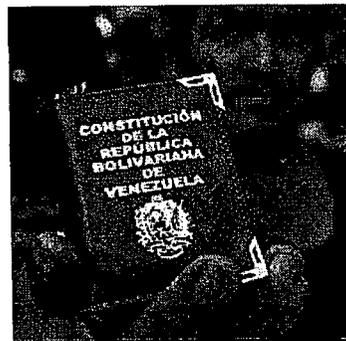
Corruption in Venezuela

Bush, Rebel Chief Have Key Role to Play in Hostage Swap

"Crazy" Time Change for Venezuela Sets Clocks Back to 1964

Venezuela Anticipates Constitutional Reform Vote

November 2nd 2007, by Megan Morrissey - VIO



Over the next month, Venezuelans from across the political spectrum will debate a package of constitutional reforms put forth by the National Assembly. This period of political campaigns, which could include a series of nationally televised debates between opposition and pro-government political parties moderated by the National Electoral Council, will precede a national referendum scheduled for December 2nd. The referendum will give Venezuelans the

final word on the proposed constitutional changes.

The National Assembly approved a final draft of 69 constitutional reforms on Friday November 2nd, a process which began last August when President Chavez submitted a constitutional reform proposal to the lawmaking body. The National Assembly built on those reforms, adding changes to an additional 36 articles on top of the initial 33 slated for reform. The review process by the National Assembly drew on citizen participation, as lawmakers received public input on the reforms in open sessions called "street parliaments."

Opposition groups have made their demands known by calling on the National Electoral Council to push back the referendum on the reforms until 2008 and to allow each constitutional change to be voted on separately. However, Venezuelan law dictates that all reform proposals - whether they are submitted by the President, lawmakers, or voters - must be put to a national referendum within 30 days of their completion.

The CNE announced last week that it will adhere to this law. However, President Chavez conceded to opposition groups by announcing Wednesday that the 69 proposed reforms may be put to the public in blocks during the referendum, rather than as a single up-or-down vote. The National Electoral Council indicated that, by law, one third of the proposed articles may be voted on separately. This will give Venezuelans more choice on the issues.

Debates within the National Assembly led lawmakers to alter some of the initial reform proposals, most notably Article 337, which in its original language would have banned citizens' right to due process during states of national emergency.

Opinion & Analysis

SOCIAL PROGRAMS
Youth Orchestra of Venezuela's Poor Wows the World
Ami Albernaz - Christian Science Monitor

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS
Venezuela Anticipates Constitutional Reform Vote
Megan Morrissey - VIO

ECONOMY
Changing Income Distribution in Venezuela: Sorting Out Data and Bias
Steve Brouwer

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
ECONOMY
Latin America's New Petro-Politics
Nadia Martinez - Multinational Monitor

THE BOLIVARIAN PROJECT
LABOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY
Without Workers Management There



Due process is now guaranteed under Article 337, along with the right to life, freedom from torture, disappearance, and silencing. The right to information, however, will be suppressed during national emergencies - a measure is consistent with past law in Venezuela that has been explained as a legal reaction to media manipulation of events during the 2002 coup against President Chavez.

Article 337 was initially the subject of harsh criticism from opposition groups as well as by some political parties represented in the National Assembly. However, it is fully consistent with international law, which recognizes the right of governments to limit certain rights in extreme circumstances. Similar clauses outlining the imposition of a state of exception or a state of emergency are part of constitutional law in many of the world's prominent democracies, including the US, Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Spain and the UK.

Criticism has also arisen over Article 230, a proposal to add one year to the current six-year presidential term and allow for continual reelection. Currently, presidents in Venezuela are subject to a two-term limit. Despite claims that the change is a bid by Chavez to remain in office for life, the removal of term limits would not affect the basic system of electoral competition in Venezuela.

Changes to article 230 would not restrict the right of citizens to run candidates against Chavez or his party. Nor would it do away with the ability of voters to petition for a national recall referendum to oust the sitting president mid-term. This provision, introduced under the 1999 Constitution, was invoked in 2004.

On the issue of term limits, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, pointed out that President Chavez "is not saying anything about eliminating the parties in opposition." Insulza concluded, "I do not believe the multi-party system is at stake in Venezuela."

Rather than concentrating power in the executive, constitutional reforms in Venezuela would increase citizen involvement in the system of participatory democracy. A measure proposing to lower the legal voting age by two years is based on the fact that 60-70% of Venezuelan population is under 30 years of age.

This is just one way in which citizen participation in democracy would be enhanced. Additionally, article 158 would guarantee government funding to communal councils, neighborhood groups that allow local knowledge to be put to use in identifying and solving local problems.

From the point of view of human rights, the proposed constitutional reforms build on provisions in the 1999 Constitution recognizing the social and cultural diversity of Venezuela. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation would be banned by Article 21. A step toward undoing centuries-old racial prejudices is evidenced in Article 100, which is slated to recognize Afro-Venezuelan heritage alongside the Indigenous and European influences as part of the nation's historical foundation. Workers' rights will be furthered by measures to shorten the work week to 36 hours and extend social security benefits to the self-employed. Additional progress on women's rights is seen in a provision that requires political parties to promote both female and male candidates.

As political campaigning for and against the constitutional reforms begins, the

Can Be No Socialism
Kiraz Janicke -
Venezuelanalysis.com

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Bush's Cuba Detour
Tariq Ali

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
"Crisis in the Americas" - A Page Out of Washington's Propaganda Playbook on Venezuela
Michael Fox -
Venezuelanalysis.com

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
ECONOMY
The Bank of the South: An Alternative to IMF and World Bank Dominance
Stephen Lendman

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
SOCIAL PROGRAMS
Venezuela's Debt to Cuba
Salim Lamrani

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
ECONOMY
Venezuelan Diamonds Under the Microscope
Stephen Leahy -
Tierramerica

License

This work has been published under a Creative Commons license:



More info about Creative Commons Licensing

government and its supporters are gearing up to face challenges launched by the opposition. In response to protests taking place in Caracas during debates on the reform proposal by lawmakers, President Chavez has stated, "Those who don't agree with the project, have the right not to. They should prepare themselves for December 2 and try to convince people to vote against the reform."

However, opposition groups in Venezuela seems set to encourage the public to reject the national referendum altogether. Statistics from the polling firm Datanalysis suggest that those in favor of the reforms will vote in the referendum, while those opposing the reforms plan to boycott the referendum. Voter abstention is a serious danger. A similar boycott of congressional elections by the political opposition in 2006 sought to discredit the government, and led to the exclusion of opposition groups from the National Assembly.

Political divisions may run deep, but by sabotaging the referendum, those opposed to Chavez will hinder the representative nature of democracy in Venezuela, undermining the system of which they themselves are part.

Megan Morrissey is a media analyst at the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC.

PRINTER-FRIENDLY VERSION

venezuelanalysis.com :: website realized with drupal using free software only :: site best viewed with mozilla firefox

Search

venezuelanalysis.com

Venezuela News, Views, and Analysis

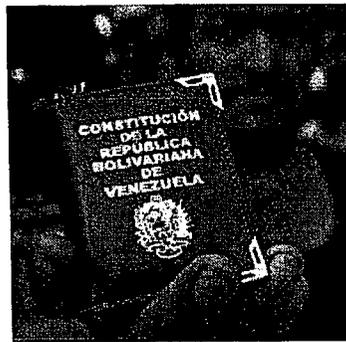
- Menu**
- Home
 - News Briefs
 - News
 - Opinion & Analysis
 - Audio
 - Video
 - Documents
 - Featured Articles
 - Newsletter Issues
 - Letters
 - Blog Entries
-
- Static**
- About
 - Constitution
 - Basic Facts
 - Bibliography
 - Books
 - Links
 - Economic Indicators
 - What's new?

Home » Opinion & Analysis » Political Developments

Related Articles

Venezuela Anticipates Constitutional Reform Vote

November 2nd 2007, by Megan Morrissey - VIO



Over the next month, Venezuelans from across the political spectrum will debate a package of constitutional reforms put forth by the National Assembly. This period of political campaigns, which could include a series of nationally televised debates between opposition and pro-government political parties moderated by the National Electoral Council, will precede a national referendum scheduled for December 2nd. The referendum will give Venezuelans the

final word on the proposed constitutional changes.

The National Assembly approved a final draft of 69 constitutional reforms on Friday November 2nd, a process which began last August when President Chavez submitted a constitutional reform proposal to the lawmaking body. The National Assembly built on those reforms, adding changes to an additional 36 articles on top of the initial 33 slated for reform. The review process by the National Assembly drew on citizen participation, as lawmakers received public input on the reforms in open sessions called "street parliaments."

Opposition groups have made their demands known by calling on the National Electoral Council to push back the referendum on the reforms until 2008 and to allow each constitutional change to be voted on separately. However, Venezuelan law dictates that all reform proposals - whether they are submitted by the President, lawmakers, or voters - must be put to a national referendum within 30 days of their completion.

The CNE announced last week that it will adhere to this law. However, President Chavez conceded to opposition groups by announcing Wednesday that the 69 proposed reforms may be put to the public in blocks during the referendum, rather than as a single up-or-down vote. The National Electoral Council indicated that, by law, one third of the proposed articles may be voted on separately. This will give Venezuelans more choice on the issues.

Debates within the National Assembly led lawmakers to alter some of the initial reform proposals, most notably Article 337, which in its original language would have banned citizens' right to due process during states of national emergency.

- Venezuela's Communist Party and the PSUV: To Join or Not to Join?
- The Threat to Dissidence and Democracy in the United Socialist Party of Venezuela
- Corruption in Venezuela
- Bush, Rebel Chief Have Key Role to Play in Hostage Swap
- "Crazy" Time Change for Venezuela Sets Clocks Back to 1964

Interactive

- Contact Us
- Letter to the Editor
- Sign up for Newsletter
- RSS & Podcasts
- Search

Text Size



Donate



Help keep us online - donate to Venezuela Analysis

Recommended Links



Postcards from the Revolution



Opinion & Analysis

- SOCIAL PROGRAMS**
 - Youth Orchestra of Venezuela's Poor Wows the World
Ami Albernaz - Christian Science Monitor
- POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS**
 - Venezuela Anticipates Constitutional Reform Vote
Megan Morrissey - VIO
- ECONOMY**
 - Changing Income Distribution in Venezuela: Sorting Out Data and Bias
Steve Brouwer
- INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**
 - ECONOMY
 - Latin America's New Petro-Politics
Nadia Martinez - Multinational Monitor
- THE BOLIVARIAN PROJECT**
 - LABOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY
 - Without Workers Management There



Due process is now guaranteed under Article 337, along with the right to life, freedom from torture, disappearance, and silencing. The right to information, however, will be suppressed during national emergencies - a measure is consistent with past law in Venezuela that has been explained as a legal reaction to media manipulation of events during the 2002 coup against President Chavez.

Article 337 was initially the subject of harsh criticism from opposition groups as well as by some political parties represented in the National Assembly. However, it is fully consistent with international law, which recognizes the right of governments to limit certain rights in extreme circumstances. Similar clauses outlining the imposition of a state of exception or a state of emergency are part of constitutional law in many of the world's prominent democracies, including the US, Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Spain and the UK.

Criticism has also arisen over Article 230, a proposal to add one year to the current six-year presidential term and allow for continual reelection. Currently, presidents in Venezuela are subject to a two-term limit. Despite claims that the change is a bid by Chavez to remain in office for life, the removal of term limits would not affect the basic system of electoral competition in Venezuela.

Changes to article 230 would not restrict the right of citizens to run candidates against Chavez or his party. Nor would it do away with the ability of voters to petition for a national recall referendum to oust the sitting president mid-term. This provision, introduced under the 1999 Constitution, was invoked in 2004.

On the issue of term limits, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, pointed out that President Chavez "is not saying anything about eliminating the parties in opposition." Insulza concluded, "I do not believe the multi-party system is at stake in Venezuela."

Rather than concentrating power in the executive, constitutional reforms in Venezuela would increase citizen involvement in the system of participatory democracy. A measure proposing to lower the legal voting age by two years is based on the fact that 60-70% of Venezuelan population is under 30 years of age.

This is just one way in which citizen participation in democracy would be enhanced. Additionally, article 158 would guarantee government funding to communal councils, neighborhood groups that allow local knowledge to be put to use in identifying and solving local problems.

From the point of view of human rights, the proposed constitutional reforms build on provisions in the 1999 Constitution recognizing the social and cultural diversity of Venezuela. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation would be banned by Article 21. A step toward undoing centuries-old racial prejudices is evidenced in Article 100, which is slated to recognize Afro-Venezuelan heritage alongside the Indigenous and European influences as part of the nation's historical foundation. Workers' rights will be furthered by measures to shorten the work week to 36 hours and extend social security benefits to the self-employed. Additional progress on women's rights is seen in a provision that requires political parties to promote both female and male candidates.

As political campaigning for and against the constitutional reforms begins, the

Can Be No Socialism
Kiraz Janicke -
Venezuelanalysis.com

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Bush's Cuba Detour
Tariq Ali

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
"Crisis in the Americas" - A Page Out of Washington's Propaganda Playbook on Venezuela
Michael Fox -
Venezuelanalysis.com

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
ECONOMY
The Bank of the South: An Alternative to IMF and World Bank Dominance
Stephen Lendman

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
SOCIAL PROGRAMS
Venezuela's Debt to Cuba
Salim Lamrani

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
ECONOMY
Venezuelan Diamonds Under the Microscope
Stephen Leahy -
Tierramerica

License

This work has been published under a Creative Commons license:



More info about Creative Commons Licensing

government and its supporters are gearing up to face challenges launched by the opposition. In response to protests taking place in Caracas during debates on the reform proposal by lawmakers, President Chavez has stated, "Those who don't agree with the project, have the right not to. They should prepare themselves for December 2 and try to convince people to vote against the reform."

However, opposition groups in Venezuela seems set to encourage the public to reject the national referendum altogether. Statistics from the polling firm Datanalysis suggest that those in favor of the reforms will vote in the referendum, while those opposing the reforms plan to boycott the referendum. Voter abstention is a serious danger. A similar boycott of congressional elections by the political opposition in 2006 sought to discredit the government, and led to the exclusion of opposition groups from the National Assembly.

Political divisions may run deep, but by sabotaging the referendum, those opposed to Chavez will hinder the representative nature of democracy in Venezuela, undermining the system of which they themselves are part.

Megan Morrissey is a media analyst at the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC.

PRINTER-FRIENDLY VERSION

venezuelanalysis.com :: website realized with drupal using free software only :: site best viewed with mozilla firefox

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:00
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

Megan Morrissey

From: Natali Fani [natali@veninfo.org]
Sent: Wednesday, September 19, 2007 11:13 AM
To: Alex Main; Megan Morrissey; Olivia B. Gombri; Angelo Rivero-Santos; Asier Achutegui; Bernardo Alvarez; Carlos Figueredo; David Diaz; Fravia Marquez; General Lameda; Livia Suarez; Orlando Montanez; Patricia Abdelnour; Regzeida Gozalez; Robinson Zapata; Roraima Albornoz
Subject: Healthcare for the Masses: Venezuela considers healthcare a human right, shouldn't the U.S.?

Published at the Takoma Voice and also at the Silver Spring Voice

<http://www.takoma.com/>

Commentary

September 2007

By Natali del Carmen Fani

Healthcare for the Masses

Venezuela considers healthcare a human right, shouldn't the U.S.?

The well over 15 percent of the U.S. population (47 million people), lacking access to the most basic health care services are acutely aware that the U.S. health care system is not working for everyone. Indeed, there is a growing recognition that major problems from the privatization of the health care industry have led to rising costs and a lack of access to basic services.

This increased privatization of healthcare has prompted the closing of public medical facilities across the nation, leaving millions of families with no option for quality care. In essence, the expansion of private insurance and the reduction of publicly insured services have not improved health services for the poor. In these times, the wise words of Rev. Martin Luther King seem urgently relevant, "Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

Outside our nation's borders; however, some countries are trying a new model to enhance the delivery of public-sector services to those in need, rather than continuing to implement the largely failed policies of privatization. Imagine for a second, that the largest children's cardiology hospital in Latin America was inaugurated last year; that thousands of free community health clinics had been established since 2003 for the neediest citizens; that this past April about two thousand students were awarded medical degrees debt-free; and that just last week plans were announced to build 15 new public hospitals throughout the land. This is all happening in the nation of Venezuela, where public health is now being promoted as a tool for social inclusion and citizen development, alongside a well-established and functioning private health industry.

To understand why Venezuelans have voted overwhelmingly to support a democratic system that bans privatizing public services in the areas of health and education, one must understand the history of the country. Despite Venezuela's great oil wealth, the majority of the population has historically lived in poverty with no or little access to healthcare. This is no surprise considering that during the 1980s and 1990s, the public health sector saw very little growth compared with the rapid expansion of its private sector counterpart. For example, only 50 new public health facilities were established in those two decades versus some 400 private clinics, out of reach to the average Venezuelan.

The privatizing trend effectively ruled out the universal delivery of public health services. Moreover, during this period, public investment in health was on the decline. Health expenditures accounted for 13.3 percent of the national budget in 1970, falling to 9.3 percent in 1990 and a mere 7.89 percent in 1996. The World Health Organization documented the results, pointing out that between 1990 and 1998, Venezuela's impoverished population experienced reduced access to medical drugs because of cost-recovery policies.

Constitutional reforms initiated in 1999, shortly after Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was first elected, made the country the first in the region to consider health as a human right. Article 83 of the Constitution afforded the State responsibility for ensuring universal access to healthcare. In real terms, this meant that the nation's oil wealth started to be used to finance direct healthcare and an array of other aid programs known as social missions. Among them is one that provides free quality medical care to the entire population while simultaneously investing in upgrades and the expansion of the nation's public health institutions.

The Pan American Health Organization estimates that, since the mission's inception, known as Barrio Adentro, doctors have conducted over 40 million free consultations and health professionals have held millions of educational activities focusing on prevention and nutrition. Some impressive outcomes have resulted. Most strikingly, Venezuela's postnatal mortality rates have dropped by half between 1995 and 2005, and the country is now the only in South America set to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

By most measures, this new health care policy in Venezuela has been successful at solving the question of access to services and preventive-care, some of the most serious boundaries to quality medical care faced by the U.S.'s poor and middle classes.

The commitment of Venezuela's federal government to provide free high level care that is geographically situated in each and every poor neighborhood across the country has turned out to be a success. In Venezuela today, every person can receive this care without having to worry about medical insurance, and for those who opt for private care, they can purchase that as well.

While certainly, this system is in its infancy, there may be things we can learn from a dual system of health care – government-sponsored and private - that has removed the motive of profit from its State funded programs.

Natali del Carmen Fani is the Associate Director of the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC. Her email is natali@veninfo.org

OrlandoSentinel.com

September 4, 2007

Search OrlandoSentinel.com Web enhanced by

HOME DELIVERY

Login or register



Home > Top News > Letters To The Editor

OPINION READER VIEWS HUGO CHAVEZ CHANGES IN VENEZUELA

Not 'anti-American'

September 2, 2007

Classifieds

- Place an Ad
- Jobs
- Cars
- Real Estate
- Apartments/Rentals
- Items for sale
- Pets
- Services
- Public/legal notices
- Dating/Personals
- Celebrations

News

Business

Entertainment

Lifestyle

Sports

Opinion

- Editorials
- Letters to the Editor
- Other Views
- Columnists
- The Position Page
- Blog
- National Columnists
- From the Left
- National Columnists
- From the Right
- Other National Columnists
- Corrections

Weather

Traffic

Travel

Technology

Neighborhoods

Blogs

Columnists

Multimedia

Shopping

Yellow Pages

Resources

- Calendar of Events
- Orlando-Disney Info
- Hurricane Survival
- News on Your Cell
- Archive
- Message Boards

Site Services

Today's Newspaper

Newspaper Services

- See the Ads
- Subscriber Services
- Buy Back Issues
- Buy Photos
- Advertise With Us
- Sweepstakes

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is not "anti-American," as your Aug. 26 editorial, "Counter Chavez's Mischief," claims. Despite diplomatic clashes between our countries, Venezuela has donated millions of dollars in aid to the U.S. in the form of reduced-cost heating oil for the poor. In order to counter the influence of Chavez, whose three electoral victories are due to successful anti-poverty efforts, the U.S. must do something more humanitarian than push for more free trade in a region where neoliberalism has already failed.

Reforms to the Venezuelan constitution proposed by Chavez, including the possibility of continual re-election, should not cause concern. Colombia is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid outside of the Middle East, and no one batted an eye when President Alvaro Uribe changed the constitution to permit his re-election. Unlike in Colombia, Venezuelans must approve the constitutional changes in a national referendum, and can oust the president at any time through a recall vote.

U.S. influence in Latin America depends on a demonstrated commitment to the people of the region -- as history shows, the poor majority rarely benefit from free trade -- and by taking democratically elected leaders there seriously. Free trade alone just isn't the answer.

Article tools

- E-mail
- [Share](#)
- Print
- Single page view
- Reprints
- [Reader feedback](#)
- Text size:

Ads by Google

Venezuela Photo Gallery
National Geographic's collection of pictures from all over Venezuela.
NationalGeographic.com

Venezuela Dating
Venezuelan singles seek dating and marriage. Join free today.
www.LatinAmericanCupid.com

Beautiful Singles
Hot Venezuelans Looking For Love. View Photos and Profiles Today.
www.SinglesNet.com

President Hugo Chavez
Will his "21st Century Socialism" succeed in Venezuela?
www.realtruth.org/Venezuelan-News

Fishing Ringtone
Send this ringtone to your phone right now!
RingRingMobile.com

Megan Morrissey

Media Analyst

Venezuela Information Office

Washington, D.C.

More articles

Copyright © 2007, Orlando Sentinel

Would you recommend this?

Rate it: ☆☆☆☆☆

Read 2 comments »

Type in your comments to post to the forum

Name (appears on your post)

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:01
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

New Voices



New Voices -- people in their 20s and students in

Part IV: Internet Information

Olivia Burlingame Goumbri

From: VIO News & Action [newsandaction@veninfo.org]
Sent: Tuesday, February 26, 2008 4:28 PM
To: olivia@veninfo.org
Subject: VIO News & Action-The Nation Highlights Venezuela (Lacks Depth), Conference on Venezuela Coming.



VIO Venezuela News and Action

Dear friends of Venezuela,

The Nation, one of the most influential magazines in the U.S. among progressives, has published in its latest edition a cover story on Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution by Daniel Wilkinson, entitled "Chávez's Fix." The piece highlights both the achievements and the flaws of the Revolution, and is based on interviews conducted in Venezuela's barrios as well as on academic analysis offered by experts such as Steve Ellner, Daniel Hellinger, Jennifer L. McCoy, David J. Myers, Margarita LÃ³pez Maya, and Gregory Wilpert.

Whatever your opinion of the article, we think you'll agree that it is well timed to raise awareness about the realities of the Venezuelan process. A three-day symposium on Venezuela will take place in Washington, DC from April 18-20, sponsored by the Venezuela Solidarity Network, an independent coalition formed in 2006 by activists, academics, and Venezuelans living in the U.S. Some of the experts mentioned in Wilkinson's article are scheduled as panelists at the symposium, which will offer audiences a remarkable opportunity to engage in a deeper discussion about Venezuela.

For a more nuanced analysis of Venezuela, we highly recommend that you attend this valuable independent gathering. For questions about the symposium, please contact the Venezuela Solidarity Network at 202.544.9355, or email them.

WHAT ELSE YOU CAN DO

We invite you to commend The Nation for raising such critical issues about Venezuela, but also ask that you hold them to the highest progressive and intellectual standards. While the article points out valid and thoughtful criticisms of Venezuela's current political situation, we expect The Nation to go deeper and present all the facts in an effort to continually elevate the debate amongst the left in our country.

Some of the arguments included in "Chávez's Fix" merit corrections.

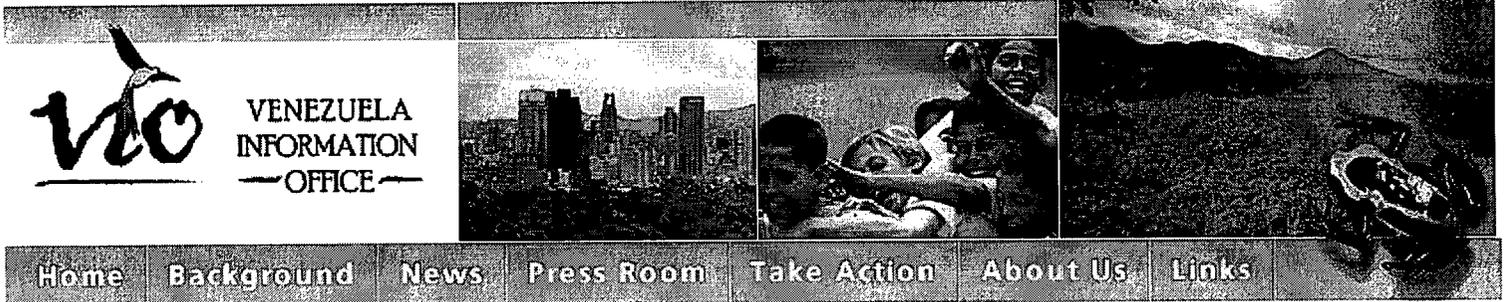
1. It is not true that constitutional reforms in 2007 would have barred due process and endangered human rights. Yet, this point is made three times in the article. A similar provision was quickly cut from the proposal when debates occurred in the National Assembly and among the populace, as occurred for every draft reform.
2. Confidence in democratic institutions in Venezuela is not on the decline, as the article suggests. Actually, polls by the respected firm Latinobarómetro suggest that faith in the democratic system in Venezuela - including the electoral council - is the highest in the region.
3. While the article points out valid problems such as political polarization, high crime rates, and food shortages, it leaves out the debate and subsequent measures announced to make these issues a central part of government policy in 2008. A case in point is the amnesty decree issued by President Chavez on New Year's Eve. In an effort to forge reconciliation with the opposition and move forward, he pardoned individuals implicated in the 2002 coup d'etat.
4. Similarly, while the article concludes that uncertainty abounds and Venezuela's future is bleak, this represents just one point of view. With local elections on the horizon and new policies being planned to address social problems, there are many reasons for optimism and it would certainly be interesting to hear about them.

Your letter to The Nation can be submitted [here](#).

[Click here to unsubscribe](#)

Megan Morrissey

From: Venezuela Information Office [newsandaction@veninfo.org]
Sent: Friday, February 08, 2008 3:19 PM
To: media@veninfo.org
Subject: VIO News & Action - VIO Launches Blog, HRW Defies Washington



VIO Venezuela News and Action

February 8, 2008

VIO LAUNCHES NEW CULTURAL BLOG

Today, the Venezuela Information Office is pleased to launch its new blog, VenWorld. VenWorld is your online source for cultural news from Venezuela. Look for colorful daily posts on diverse topics related to culture, ranging from large issues (like baseball) to little-known ones (like indigenous community radio). Venworld provides insights into the arts, environment, society, politics, and sports that will entertain you and help you understand the Venezuelan context better.

Whether you look to the Venezuela Information Office for important political updates or simply to gain a more accurate picture of Venezuela, it always helps to be familiar with culture and history. VenWorld will help you do just that!

Go straight to the blog and enjoy! Don't forget to bookmark the site, sign up to get RSS feeds, and pass the link along to others who care about Venezuela.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SAYS VENEZUELA IS NOT AUTOCRATIC

A little more than a week ago Human Rights Watch released its 2008 World Report, which describes Venezuela as a country which "enjoys vibrant public debate on political issues."

Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth told the press, "We did not include Venezuela in the list of closed countries because it is not." He also said that "there still is significant political competition," and pointed to President Chavez's recent acceptance of the defeat of a constitutional reform proposal. The watchdog group also noted that "human rights advocacy groups operate in Venezuela without legal restrictions."

These findings directly contradict U.S. government assertions on the matter, as well as previous condemnations by Human Rights Watch. According to the Miami Herald, the report aims to assess whether or not governments "use the veneer of democracy to mask autocratic rule."

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:01
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

Read the full report.

Olivia Burlingame Goumbri

From: Venezuela Information Office [newsandaction@veninfo.org]
Sent: Tuesday, February 05, 2008 5:13 PM
To: olivia@veninfo.org
Subject: VIO News & Action - Local Elections Approach, US Press Distorts the Issues



VIO Venezuela News & Action -- February 5, 2008

VENEZUELA GEARS UP FOR REGIONAL ELECTIONS

As Venezuela's gubernatorial and mayoral campaigns gear up ahead of local elections later this year, an exciting series of newsworthy events are due to unfold. With the opposition energized from its recent win in defeating constitutional reforms and with the President calling on his supporters to reflect and re-energize, heated battles for local public office appear to be just around the corner.

On January 23, eight opposition parties announced that they would unite in backing common candidates to run against pro-Chavez politicians in regional elections slated for November 2008. The candidates will run on ten common objectives including private property rights, government decentralization, and reducing poverty (an issue on which the current administration has made significant progress).

BASELESS CHARGES RESURFACE IN THE WASHINGTON POST

Once again, the Washington Post has published a column that serves only one purpose: to further disorient the reader on current events in Venezuela.

In "Chávez's Anti-Semitism," Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League writes that President Hugo Chavez is anti-Semitic and responsible for a "rising wave of anti-Semitism in Venezuela." As the record will attest, this is simply not true.

The Post column comes just weeks after a Miami Herald opinion piece made similarly inaccurate charges, going so far as to suggest that the Venezuelan government is considering kicking Jews out the country. This is not the case -- the publication they trace this idea to is a magazine published by the Ministry of Culture featuring independent academic essays on the conflict in the Middle East, which has nothing to do with government policy or the position of public officials.

Unfortunately, the Washington Post column is just as distorted. While it certainly talks the talk, when put through a thorough fact check, it hardly walks the walk.

To begin with, President Chavez has consistently advocated for the rights of marginalized and oppressed peoples, including Jewish communities. Chavez opposes all forms of racial and religious discrimination, and has made constitutional law regarding human rights in Venezuela among the strongest in the world.

Secondly, the "raid" mentioned in the column was not an act of discrimination, but one of many efforts to ensure peace and tranquility during the December referendum. Just days before, police responded to a tip leading them to seize weapons believed to have been part of a plot to violently disrupt the electoral process.

Thirdly, Chavez's criticism of Israeli policy does not equate to anti-Semitism, as the column suggests. Nor are Venezuela's diplomatic relations with Iran and Syria indicative of "a wave of anti-Semitism." Presidents in the United States have frequently aligned with other world leaders whose values they may not share, but never have they been charged with guilt by mere association.

The Washington Post column lacks facts, and instead relies on falsehoods and generalizations.. With such serious allegations at stake, actual proof should be demanded to back them up.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Contact Autumn Brewington, op-ed editor since January; Fred Hiatt, editorial page editor; and Jackson Diehl, deputy editorial page editor to demand the use of proof in opinion pieces and articles. You can also write a letter to the editor in response to this column at letters@washpost.com Remember your letter should be no more than 150 words. Include your name, phone, email and address.

You received this email as an opt-in subscriber to News & Action from the Venezuela Information Office. If you no longer wish to receive these emails, you may unsubscribe here:
<http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1087/unsubscribe.jsp>

Olivia Burlingame Goumbri

From: Venezuela Information Office [newsandaction@veninfo.org]
Sent: Friday, January 04, 2008 2:40 PM
To: olivia@veninfo.org
Subject: VIO News & Action-Peace at Home & Abroad in the New Year, Make the Story Known!

Dear Friends,

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has kicked off the New Year with a bang. From working for peace in Colombia to building bridges with the opposition, he has marked 2008 as a year of reconciliation and change. This has drawn mixed reaction from the international media, public officials, supporters and opposition alike.

EFFORTS AT HUMANITARIAN OPERATION IN COLOMBIA SLOW

Earlier this week, an international humanitarian delegation led by Venezuela that would have liberated three hostages being held by the FARC in Colombia, appeared to have been put on hold after the FARC accused the government of Colombia of conducting military operations in their territory.

On December 26, President Chavez announced that an agreement had been reached with the FARC who offered to hand over three hostages to the Venezuelan President. Last Thursday, family members of the hostages arrived in Venezuela to meet with Chavez and the following day helicopters branding the red cross banner flew into Colombia to the town of Villavicencio, where they were to wait for the go-ahead to carry a delegation of high level observers including Argentina's former president Nestor Kirchner and U.S. filmmaker Oliver Stone to witness the retrieval.

Today, the helicopters flew back to Venezuela amid allegations by the international media that the humanitarian operation was a failure. President Chavez and Organization of American States secretary general Jose Miguel Insulza disagree, qualifying the events as part of ongoing efforts to forge peace in Colombia. "I am not sure it can be considered failed." It is possible that "they suddenly hand over information about the hostages" stated Insulza. So far Insulza's response has not been reported on by any mainstream media outlets.

AMNESTY GRANTED TO COUP SUPPORTERS

In a move that can only be described as incredible, President Chavez on Monday signed a decree granting amnesty to persons involved in the unsuccessful 2002 coup d'etat against him. Live on state television, the Venezuelan president said that this was an attempt at "turning the page". The law would effectively codify civilians right to engage in acts of civil disobedience and would allow for the immediate release of accused and convicted criminals imprisoned for civil disturbances so long as they had previously submitted to authorities, he said.



The amnesty decree has been applauded by some members of the opposition while others feel it doesn't go far enough. The measure will not apply to all accused in the 2002 coup- those who fled or those who are being held for crimes against

humanity will not be pardoned. Read the [Reuters story](#) for more information.

CABINET CHANGES ANNOUNCED

Last night, President Hugo Chavez announced changes to his cabinet in a telephone interview broadcast on

national television. While most appointments still remain to be finalized, Chavez did say that Ramon Carrizales, the current housing minister, will replace Jorge Rodriguez as Vice President, who in turn will head up Venezuela's new socialist political party. Andres Izarra, currently the president of TeleSUR, will become the head of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications Minister Jesse Chacon will be replaced by the current president of Venezuela's state-run telephone company. During the interview, President Chavez explained that the changes were aimed at tackling corruption and that all sectors of society should feel included. "We are not extremists," he said. At least 13 changes are expected to be made to the cabinet.

VENEZUELA & THE U.S. PRESS

Despite more balanced perspectives now being offered by some public officials and members of the opposition on the latest events unfolding in Venezuela, the U.S. press seems committed to promoting just one side of the Venezuelan story or overlooking it entirely. This week alone, the top three largest circulating papers in the U.S. (USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times) ran no original stories on the amnesty decree. Instead, articles qualifying the Colombian operation as a failure along with stories characterizing Venezuela as a threat to U.S. energy interests abounded.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!

PLEASE WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL PAPER TODAY!

An alternative voice is needed to defend Venezuela's democracy and expose the graceful attempt at democracy and reconciliation that is being forged in Venezuela today. Letters to the editor and op-eds to your local newspaper can do two things: If yours is published, it will help educate readers who have only received part of the story; but even if your letter does not make it to print, the paper will hear from engaged, knowledgeable writers and you will help stem the most egregious problems in future articles.

Remember, while reporters and opinion writers are entitled to their perspectives, they should be held accountable for factual inaccuracies and should report on timely topics, not just those issues that receive their support.

Letters to the editor should be brief (usually 150 words or less) and can respond to any article or opinion piece you would like to comment on. It is not uncommon to write a letter in order to point out the story that has been overlooked. Letters must include your name, city/state, and contact information for verification. Letters that are personalized, fact-based, and polite in tone are much more likely to be published. Op-eds usually range from 600-800 words and should also include the information above.

Please contact newsandaction@veninfo.org with any questions. As always, don't forget to encourage your friends to sign up to our News and Action alerts at newsandaction@veninfo.org

Venezuela Information Office
www.veninfo.org

Olivia Burlingame Goumbri

From: Venezuela Information Office [vio@veninfo.org]
Sent: Monday, December 03, 2007 11:04 AM
To: olivia@veninfo.org
Subject: Venezuelans choose their destiny peacefully and under true democracy

Dear Friends,

In spite of the intense media manipulation and foreign intervention through U.S. institutions such as the USAID to create violence in Venezuela, yesterday's referendum on constitutional reforms demonstrated that Venezuelans choose their destiny peacefully and under true democratic institutions.

CNE SHOWS INDEPENDENCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT. VOTING WENT SMOOTHLY -

The 'No' vote won by less than one and a half percent in Venezuela's national referendum on constitutional reforms. Figures released by the National Electoral Council show that 51% of voters said 'No' to the proposed reforms, while 49% said 'Yes.' Voter turnout was 55%. See full figures in Spanish

The president of Venezuela's National Electoral Council, Tibisay Lucena, called this electoral process "the calmest we've had in the last 10 years," and said that it "shows the entire world that we are a democratic country."

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS CONFIRM TRANSPARENCY

International observers such as the NAACP and the National Lawyers Guild stated that the voting proceeded according to norms and praised the Venezuelan system for its enviable efficiency and transparency, according to Radio Nacional de Venezuela.

VENEZUELAN SHOW THAT THEIR NATION IS DEMOCRATIC

Without a doubt, yesterday's national referendum demonstrated that Venezuelans are actively involved in the political life of their country. As President Chavez said in a speech to announce the defeat of the reforms, "There is no dictatorship here." The Venezuelan people, not President Chavez, are the real bosses in their nation.

TAKE ACTION:

As always, the best way to help Venezuela is to be active in the U.S. Contact your member of Congress to demand "No U.S. intervention through USAID and NED in Venezuela." For more information, visit www.veninfo.org or contact the VIO at 202 347 8081, ext. 603 / newsandaction@veninfo.org

Megan Morrissey

From: Venezuela Information Office [vio@veninfo.org]
Sent: Sunday, December 02, 2007 12:07 PM
To: media@veninfo.org
Subject: Venezuela Votes Today, Puts Democracy in Motion

Dear Friends,

Venezuelans vote today in a national referendum on changes to the 1999 Constitution. As the voting unfolds, stay informed about what is going on by tuning in to Radio Venezuela en Vivo.

Beware of two main errors in U.S. media coverage of the referendum.

First, **inaccurate poll data is being used** to make the misleading claim that most Venezuelan voters oppose the reforms. The bad numbers were released on November 24th by the polling firm Datanalisis, which predicted a majority 'no' vote in the referendum. The head of Datanalisis - who lost credibility as an impartial observer in 2002 when he told the Los Angeles Times that President Chavez "should be killed" - invalidated those poll results in an interview with Reuters on November 29th by saying the opposite: that "The most probable [projection] is that there will be no surprise and Chavez will win 60 percent against 40 percent." That just doesn't add up. Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC explained that, "As a statistical matter, [the] remarks can be considered an admission that his previous poll was not valid."

TAKE ACTION: Did your local or regional newspaper use the Datanalisis poll? Write letters to the editor explaining that the numbers are not correct. For reliable public opinion data, click here.

Second, **U.S. newspapers are falsely claiming that election monitors are not present** in Venezuela for the referendum. The U.S. State Department has been aiding those rumors: spokesman Sean McCormack told the Chicago Tribune today that "There won't be observers on the ground, so the outside world won't really have much insight into the [election] procedures that are implemented." On the contrary, there are about 100 official electoral observers present throughout Venezuela to witness the voting. All were invited by Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE), which chose a balanced group by accepting an equal number of observers proposed by the pro-reform and anti-reform camps. Organizations present to ensure that the vote is free and fair include the NAACP, which is the oldest election monitoring group in the U.S.

TAKE ACTION: Let people know that Venezuela's referendum is democratic and being carried out according to democratic principles regarding free and fair elections. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper pointing out that election monitors are, as always, present.

The polls close at 4 pm today. Get preliminary results by visiting www.veninfo.org

-----Original Message-----

From: Venezuela Information Office [mailto:vio@veninfo.org]

Sent: Viernes, 30 de Noviembre de 2007 03:49 p.m.

Subject: This Sunday, Venezuelans will decide. Colombia Hostages Alive

Dear Friends,

Venezuela is continuously changing within true democratic principles.

Since President Chavez was elected in 1998, Venezuelans have exercised their right to vote 11 times, doing so in elections that have been closely observed by various international electoral monitoring institutions, including the Carter Center, the Organization of American States, the European Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Lawyers Guild.

THIS SUNDAY, VENEZUELANS WILL DECIDE

Once again, this Sunday December 2nd, Venezuelans all over the world will go to the polls to cast their vote on what might be the most progressive and renowned Constitutional Reform in recent world history. As in previous years, U.S. electoral observer missions will be present in Venezuela to monitor the national constitutional referendum.

HIGH VOTER TURNOUT PREDICTED FOR REFERENDUM

The recent public opinion data by the respected Venezuelan polling firm *Consultores 30.11*, suggests that 70% of Venezuelans plan to vote in Sunday's election. The pollster found that, among registered voters who are certain that they will vote, 60% will vote 'YES' to the reforms, while 40% will vote 'NO.' Taking into consideration undecided voters, the survey predicts that the reforms will pass by between 8 and 12 percentage points. View poll result: [English](#) or [Español](#)

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CONTRIBUTE IN THIS PROCESS?

- **Participate in local actions.** Our friends from the Venezuela Solidarity Network have organized a series of events across the U.S. for people to support the Bolivarian Process in Venezuela. For a list of those event please go to [Venezuela Solidarity Network](#)
- **Share the facts.** The biggest obstacle we have is the mainstream media. Do your part by sharing your knowledge and materials (such as VIO's [factsheets](#) and the recent poll above) with your friends, [local media](#) and [legislators](#). You can also respond to biased articles by writing a letter to the editor.

COLOMBIA HOSTAGES ALIVE, CHAVEZ TALKS BANNED

This morning, new video footage shows that hostages, including former Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three U.S. citizens, are indeed alive. The news comes Friday, a week after Colombian President Alvaro Uribe abruptly brought to an end the humanitarian mediation by President Chávez and Colombian Senator Piedad Córdoba, claiming that Chávez had disobeyed orders. The Guardian reports that "many families of the captives believe the move [by Uribe to stop talks] ended the best chance in years to secure their freedom." The deal could have freed 45 hostages and disarmed hundreds of rebels.

French President Sarkozy, who met with Chavez last week, responded to the unfortunate news by urging Uribe to reconsider and saying "We continue to think that President Chavez is the best chance for freeing [French citizen] Ingrid Betancourt and all the other hostages." Families of the hostages were less diplomatic, saying "It is clear that the Colombian president does not want to hear about a humanitarian accord."

According to the BBC, Uribe's halt to the accord was met by marked disappointment in Colombia, where half a century of conflict has created a nation desperate for peace. The Washington Post reported that families of 3 US citizens held by Colombian guerrillas lamented Uribe's decision. A Connecticut woman said, "Shame on him is all I can say. The eyes of the world are on him."

For your information, important details on today's finding published by Venezolana de Television:

Proof of Ingrid Betancourt and other FARC Hostages Alive Released

The Colombian government made clear that "this material is now in custody and subjected to the appropriate legal controls" but it was partially released with the authorization of the Attorney General's Office due to humanitarian reasons.

Bogotá, November 30, 2007 / The Colombian government informed on Friday morning that in a Colombian army operation in Bogota, three alleged FARC's members were captured and in their possession was found proof of life of a group of kidnapped victims, including Ingrid Betancourt.

A communiqué read in Casa de Nariño (Presidential Palace), by the Colombian Peace Commissioner, Luis Carlos Restrepo, lists the names of the people shown in the pictures and videos seized by the government.

The High Commissioner expressed that the date when the video was recorded is uncertain. However, it is likely that four of them were taped between October 23 and 24, 2007.

Brief clips of the videos also showed images of three U.S. military officers, Senator Luis Eladio Pérez and other military officers.

Letters were also found with the videos, some of them were addressed to hostages' relatives, President Hugo Chávez and FARC Commander, Pedro Antonio Marín, also known as "Manuel Marulanda".

The Colombian government made clear that "this material is now in custody and subjected to the appropriate legal controls" but it was partially released with the authorization of the Attorney General's Office due to humanitarian reasons.

Names of the people who are shown in the videos and photos, as informed by Casa de Nariño:

Ingrid Betancourt Pulecio. Video dated on October 24, 2007.

Colombian Army's First Deputy Sergeant, Erasmo Romero. Video dated on October 23, 2007.

Police's Lieutenant, Vianey Rodríguez Porras. Video dated on October 23, 2007.

Police's First Corporal, Julio César Buitrago Cuesta. Video dated on October 24, 2007.

Police's First Corporal, Jairo Durán Puerto. Video dated on October 24, 2007. The fifth videos' date is January 1, 2007. Nevertheless, the First Deputy Sargent José Ricardo Marulanda Valencia, claims in his greeting that the video was recorded on October 23, 2007.

• People shown in this video:

Mark Goncalves, U.S. contractor. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Señor Kein Stambler, U.S. contractor. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Señor Thomas Howes, U.S. contractor. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Luis Eladio Pérez. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Colombian Army's Captain, Juan Carlos Bermeo Covalada. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Colombian Army's First Corporal, José Miguel Arteaga. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Police's Deputy Quartermaster General, Armando Castellanos. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Colombian Army's Lieutenant, Raimundo Malagón Castellanos. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Colombian Army's First Corporal, William Pérez Medina. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Colombian Army's First Sargent, José Ricardo Marulanda Valencia. Video dated January 1, 2007.

Colombian Army's Second Sargent,, Amaon Flórez Pantoja. Video dated January 1, 2007.

• Seven letters were found among the seized elements:

From Thomas Howes to Mariana Howes. Sin fecha.

From Thomas Howes on his will. Dated on November 26, 2006.

From Mark Goncalves to Mono Jojoy. Dated on October 23, 2007.

From the Colombian Army's Lieutenant, Raimundo Malagón, to Efraín Malagón's family. Dated on October 23, 2007.

From the Colombian Army's Lieutenant, Raimundo Malagón, to Stella Malagón's family. Undated.

From the Colombian Army's Lieutenant, Raimundo Malagón, to President Hugo Chávez. Dated on October 23, 2007.

From Ingrid Betancourt to her mother. Dated on October 24, 2007.

2008 MAR 27 PM 2:01
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

Olivia Burlingame Gombri

From: Venezuela Information Office [newsandaction@veninfo.org]
Sent: Thursday, November 15, 2007 11:59 AM
To: olivia@veninfo.org
Subject: VIO News & Action-Student Protests, Wash Post and NY Times Inaccuracies Abound

VIO News & Action- November 15, 2007

Dear colleagues,

Considering the recent barrage of inaccurate news about Venezuela's constitutional reforms and the student protests that have accompanied them we felt it necessary to clear things up. We hope the below analysis will be useful in explaining the current political climate in Venezuela to friends or to the press.

STUDENT PROTESTS IN VENEZUELA

Recent news articles have reported on a series of opposition student protests in Venezuela in response to constitutional reforms slated to be voted on in a national referendum December 2. Most of the news coverage has included misleading claims about the students' demonstrations and the government's response to them. Primarily the media has failed to report on the cooperation between the government and the students and the various accommodations that have been made for them.



The largest protests, with an estimated attendance of 6,000 university students (of the 200,000 student in Caracas alone), have enjoyed the full protection of Venezuela's police forces. These protections comply with Article 68 of the 1999 Constitution, which protects the rights of all Venezuelans to peaceably assemble. And unlike during past governments, when student demonstrations were regularly repressed by police forces, students, including leaders linked to opposition political parties like Primero Justicia and Bandera Roja, have recently been granted high-level meeting with government officials and institutions to discuss their concerns:

Earlier this month on November 1 a group of students met with the directors of the National Electoral Council and presented a petition to delay the national referendum to the directors of Venezuela's electoral authority, the National Electoral Council (CNE).

On November 7 a group of 10 student representatives met with officials from the National Tribunal of Justice, and presented a petition calling for the delay of a national referendum scheduled for December 2.

On November 12 Venezuela's Minister of Interior and Justice, Pedro Carreño, met 20 university presidents and restated the government's respect of university autonomy and the right of students to peaceably assemble.

BIASED MEDIA COVERAGE CONTINUES

Much of the media coverage given to the student protests has been distorted and one-sided. Recently it has even begun to replicate the way in which the media drummed up support for the coup d'etat against President Chavez in 2002. During that time false news claims circulated that Chavez supporters had shot and attacked innocent civilians during a protest. Later, these allegations were proven false.

Strikingly similar today, is the way in which the media is trying to link violent acts during recent protests to the government and its supporters. A [Washington Post editorial](#) published today and a New York Times article over the weekend serve as cases in point. In it the Post takes university officials' opinions as fact and identifies masked gunmen as "government-sponsored paramilitary groups". Also, read the [New York Times article](#) .

In reality the following events occurred on November 7 as students returned to the campus of the Central University of Venezuela. Following a march to the headquarters of the National Tribunal of Justice, a group of opposition students stormed the School of Social Work - whose students had been known to have earlier advocated in favor of the constitutional reforms - and set the school building on fire. Police forces were alerted, but, in keeping with Venezuela's "Law of Universities", could not enter the campus for lack of approval by the University president. For this reason, campus employees responded and tried to prevent violent attacks against the Social Work students. This is when masked individuals equipped with guns appeared on motorcycles. Shortly after, opposition student leaders claimed on live television that they were being attacked by people aligned with the government (the masked motorcycle group). No evidence was ever offered to back up these claims and recent videos from bystanders and local media outlets have shown the violent acts perpetrated by opposition students on the School of Social Work.

International press agencies, except Reuters, later recognized that no evidence existed to link the individuals on the motorcycles to the government.

Another incident turned violent by members of the student opposition occurred after a meeting with the directors of the National Electoral Council on November 1. A group of student demonstrators attempted to chain themselves to the building while another charged through a police line. Six police officers were injured and one student demonstrator was found with possession of 20 liters of gasoline. After the incident, the president of the National Electoral Council, Tibisay Lucena stated: "We were surprised at our good faith effort when, at the conclusion of this meeting, a group of them tried, aggressively, to chain themselves to the stairs of the headquarters of National Electoral Council, thus violating the cordial and peaceful spirit that was present during the meeting. These acts constitute a meaningless and unjustifiable aggression to what has been a democratic practice of the electoral council."

Meanwhile, yesterday students and university presidents from all over the nation, including those from the Central University of Venezuela, filed a document with the Supreme Court in support of the constitutional reform process. Read the [Venezuelan news story](#) .

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

SEND A LETTER TO THE WASHINGTON POST or THE NEW YORK TIMES and make your voice heard!

Send your letter of no more than 200 words to: letters@washpost.com
Be sure to include your name, telephone number, and address.

or

Send your letter of no more than 150 words to: letters@nytimes.com
Be sure to include your name, telephone number, and address.

Olivia Burlingame Goumbri

From: Venezuela Information Office [newsandaction@veninfo.org]
Sent: Monday, October 15, 2007 12:40 PM
To: olivia@veninfo.org
Subject: VIO News & Action: Colombian Humanitarian Accord, Americans See Hope in Chavez, Reform Update

FAMILIES OF KIDNAPPED AMERICANS SEE HOPE WITH CHAVEZ'S ROLE IN COLOMBIAN CONFLICT

Although you may never have heard about it on the nightly news, there are three Americans being held by the FARC, a leftist guerrilla group in Colombia, that President Chavez is pushing to release. Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes and Keith Stansell, US military contractors who were working in Colombia, were kidnapped by the FARC in 2003. Read the Reuters [story](#).



They along with some other 45 high-profile hostages, including a former Colombian presidential candidate and French citizen Ingrid Betancourt, could be set free in a hostage for prisoner swap currently being negotiated by President Chavez with the FARC. In exchange, the Colombian government could set almost 500 guerrillas free. Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba, an opposition lawmaker who was designated by Uribe to facilitate the humanitarian accord, announced recently that two leaders of the FARC will meet with Chavez soon. Chávez was scheduled to meet October 8 in Caracas with FARC delegates, but the encounter has been pushed back to a later date.

All parties plan to continue working to move talks forward in the coming weeks. You can find an in-depth look at Venezuela's role in the hostage for prisoner swap and President Chavez's efforts as chief negotiator by reading the VIO [fact sheet](#).

RESOLUTION PASSED IN SUPPORT OF VENEZUELA'S MEDIATION EFFORTS

Last weekend, a resolution in support of Chavez's humanitarian mediation in Colombia was passed by the National Latino Congreso, at which delegates of more than 2,000 US Latino organizations were present. The resolution calls on Congress to support the mediation, and vows to "recognize this humanitarian effort led by Venezuela as the most important step in the peaceful resolution of so many decades of war." Read the [resolution](#).

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Send this resolution to your member of Congress and local elected officials and ask them to support it. The voices of the families of the kidnapped Americans should be enough. They have lent their support to Chavez as a mediator in this process. One relative recently said, "This is the highest our hopes have ever been." A list of your Congress members can be found below:

[Representatives](#)

[Senators](#)

You can call them by dialing the Capitol switchboard and asking to speak directly to your representative and senator at: 202-224-3121. Let them know that you support Venezuela's role in brokering a hostage for prisoner swap in Colombia.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROCESS MOVES FORWARD

The National Assembly has initiated its third and final round of debates on the constitutional reform proposal put forth by President Chavez in August of this year and 6 more proposed reforms were added for consideration including a proposal to expand gay rights and reduce the voting age from 18 to 16 years of age. Meanwhile last

week, the President selected a team to oversee the constitutional reform process being coined Campaign Zamora, in the hopes of stimulating voter turnout in a nation-wide referendum on the reforms, scheduled for early December 2007. One quarter of the reforms will address human rights issues, expanding on the provisions of the 1999 Constitution. Take a look at all the proposed constitutional reforms and an analysis of them.

Of a little more than 10% of the constitution that would be reformed, included are provisions to officially recognize Afro-Venezuelans, Indigenous rights, and some that would help foster continued land reform with its new guarantees on property law.

2008 MAR 27 PM 2: 01
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

Envelope-to: olivia@veninfo.org
Date: Fri, 14 Sep 2007 15:57:17 -0400 (EDT)
From: Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>
Reply-To: newsandaction@veninfo.org
To: olivia@veninfo.org
Subject: VIO News & Action- In-Depth Look at the Constitutional Reforms

In less than three months, Venezuelan voters will decide the fate of their democracy in a constitutional referendum where they will vote to accept or decline a constitutional reform proposal submitted last month by President Chavez. The stakes are high as many feel a "yes" vote would enable President Chavez to continue moving forward in constructing 21st century socialism in venezuela.

THE REFORM FORECAST: WHO'S IN FRONT

Reliable polls, including the most recent by the opposition associated polling firm Hinterlaces, indicates that a majority of Venezuelans will vote to accept the reformed constitution because they support the president. Thirty-one percent of voters surveyed said they would approve it, while 27 percent would reject it. Many said they would abstain or were undecided. Hinterlaces spoke with 900 registered voters for the poll. You can read the full story here:
<http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/news/09-10-07reu.html>

THE PROCESS AND THE RULE OF LAW

Constitutional reforms may be proposed by either the President of the Republic, the National Assembly, or 15% of registered voters organized through petitioning. Since the president submitted his reforms to the National Assembly on August 15, 2007 a slew of official and informal debates have ensued about it. According to the constitution, the reform proposals must be debated three times in the National Assembly, modified if needed, and then each reform must be approved by two-thirds in order to move on to the final stage: a national referendum slated for early December. Already two of the three debates have concluded, the last is expected sometime in October.

In the meantime legislators alongside civil society organizations and opposition political parties are voicing their suggestions and concerns in the hopes that their ideas will be included in the final proposal. The political parties Democratic Action (AD), Movement towards Socialism (MAS) and Justice First, voiced their concerns while speaking in front of the National Assembly earlier this week, including a suggestion to allow the electorate to vote on each suggested reform individually rather than all at once. Cilia Flores, President of the National Assembly (pictured here) stated that they would take their suggestions into consideration as well as proposals from other sectors of society such as lowering the voting age from 18 years to 16 years and removing any discrimination against homosexuality in the constitution. To read more about this process go to:
<http://venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=2416>

WHAT DO THE REFORMS ENTAIL?

The 2007 reforms affect 33 of the 350 articles comprising the 1999 Constitution, or slightly less than ten percent of the legislation. The major areas slated for change are: economic, political, social, and military. They do not however, significantly impact the political structure of the

country, as did the 1999 Constitution. Their most important aim, according to President Chavez, is to create a "new geometry of power" that increases citizen power and government accountability.

As the summer ends and the countdown to this historic vote begins, one-sided and inaccurate articles will likely increase, with primary focus given to the most controversial reform, continual presidential term limits. Interestingly, the US lived under this measure up through the FDR presidency. This fact is usually left out of news coverage along with all Venezuelans constitutional right to recall their president mid-term. To become better acquainted with the intricacies of all the major areas up for reform read the VIO fact sheet here:
<http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Constitutional%20Reform.htm>
As time continues it will be more and more important to respond to these biased articles with facts.

2008 MAR 27 PM 2: 01
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT