

For Six Month Period Ending Feb. 28, 2009  
(Insert date)

**I - REGISTRANT**

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

(c) Business Address(es) of Registrant  
2000 P St. NW # 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(es) Yes No (2) Citizenship Yes No (3) Occupation Yes No

- (b) If an organization: (1) Name Yes No (2) Ownership or control Yes No (3) Branch offices Yes No

(c) Explain fully all changes, if any, indicated in items (a) and (b) above.

Name changed from Venezuela information Office, LLC to Latin America Information Office, LLC.

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

3. If you have previously filed Exhibit C<sup>1</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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, National Security Division, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC 20530.)

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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
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(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
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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
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(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
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See attachment 5(c)

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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 principal<sup>2</sup> during this 6 month reporting period?

Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name and address of foreign principal

Date acquired

(Date of contract signed)

La Fundacion Siglo XXI, Edificio Araceli, Piso 1  
Departamento E, Zona Calacoto, La Paz, Bolivia.

December 12, 2008

9. In addition to those named in Items 7 and 8, if any, list foreign principals<sup>2</sup> 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 A<sup>3</sup> Yes  No   
Exhibit B<sup>4</sup> Yes  No

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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 103(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.)

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

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

### III - ACTIVITIES

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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).

- La Fundacion Siglo XXI: All activities were of a political nature and are described in response to item 12 of section III (see attachment).

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12. During this 6 month reporting period, have you on behalf of any foreign principal engaged in political activity\* 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 Logs Attached

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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.

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\* 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, or 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  No

If no, explain why.

If yes, set forth below in the required detail and separately for each foreign principal an account of such monies<sup>6</sup>:

Date	From whom	Purpose	Amount
10/22/2008	La Fundacion Siglo XXI	Operating Expenses	12,000.00
11/28/2008	Venezuelan Embassy	Operating Expenses	198,000.00
01/15/2009	La Fundacion Siglo XXI	Operating Expenses	33,333.33
			<u>\$243,333.33</u>
			Total

## (b) RECEIPTS - FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN

During this 6 month reporting period, have you received, as part of a fund raising campaign<sup>7</sup>, any money on behalf of any foreign principal named in items 7, 8, or 9 of this statement? Yes  No

If yes, have you filed an Exhibit D<sup>8</sup> 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 value<sup>9</sup> other than money from any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, or 9 of this statement, or from any other source, for or in the interests of any such foreign principal? Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name of foreign principal	Date received	Description of thing of value	Purpose
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<sup>6</sup> 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(c).)

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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, or 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 15 a.			

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Total

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

During this 6 month reporting period, have you disposed of anything of value<sup>10</sup> other than money in furtherance of or in connection with activities on behalf of any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, or 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
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**(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 value<sup>11</sup> 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
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<sup>10, 11</sup> 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<sup>12</sup>?  
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

- La Fundacion Siglo XXI

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 Bolviarian Republic of Venezuela

Amount: \$198,000.00

Period: 09/01/2008 to 02/28/2009

- La Fundacion Siglo XXI

Amount: \$45,333.33

Period: 09/01/2008 to 02/28/2009

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.

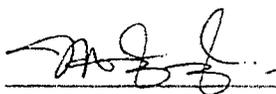
VI - EXECUTION

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 signature<sup>13</sup>)

03-26-2009.



ISA Colman.

<sup>13</sup> 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.





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 TRIPPLICATE

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: Latin America Information Office LLC**

Last Name	First Name and Other Names	Registration Date	Termination Date	Role
Gilmond	Isaura	03/18/2004		
Gombri	Olivia B.	11/22/2005		
Morrissey	Megan D.	03/21/2007		
Main	Alexander John	04/24/2007		
Coates	Jessica	09/02/2008		
Kadia	Tejas D.	09/02/2008		
Schuetz	Jennifer	09/02/2008		

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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: M. G. S.

Date: 03-26-2009

Title: President

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Latin America Information Office, LLC Reg. 5609 , Period Ending February 2009

Insert for page 2, Section I, Registrant,5 (c)

Name	Residence address	Citizenship	Position	Date assumed
Jessica Coates	4910 Blackfoot Rd. College Park, MD 20740	USA	Office Manager	09/01/2008
Tejas Kadia	1441 Harvard St 32, Washington, DC 20009	USA	Researcher	09/01/2008
Alex Main	1741 Lanier Pl NW Apt 3, Washington, DC 20009	USA	Policy Analyst	09/22/2008
Jennifer Schuett	1845 Vernon St, Lower Level , Washington, DC 20009	USA	Political Analyst	09/02/2008

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Latin America Information Office, LLC

Reg. #5609

Foreing Principal: Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Supplemental Statement - Financial Information - Insert for page 6

For Six Month Period Ending February 2009

Section IV , 15 (a) Disbursements

Expenses	Amount Paid
Operating Expenses	\$421,641.67
Travel & Transportation	\$57,767.28
Administrative Services	\$7,905.86
Office Suplies	\$8,509.31
Total Expenses	\$495,824.12

Complementary Information:

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

**Latin America Information Office, LLC**                      **Reg. #5609**

**Foreing Principal: La Fundacion Siglo XXI**

**Supplemmantal Statement - Financial Information - Insert for page 6**

**For Six Month Period Ending February 2009**

**Section IV , 15 (a) Disbursements**

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Amount Paid</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$22,479.00</b>
<b>Travel &amp; Transportation</b>	<b>\$18,233.29</b>
<b>Administrative Services</b>	<b>\$305.00</b>
<b>Office Suplies</b>	<b>\$1,642.93</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$42,660.22</b>

**Complementary Information:**

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

<b>FARA Reporting Log-VIO</b>			<b>Olivia Goumbri September 2008 to March 2009</b>			2009 MAR 27 AM 10: 43
<b>Date</b>	<b>Person Contacted</b>	<b>Position/Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject Discussed</b>	<b>Position Advocated</b>
3-Sep-08	Karen Dolan	Director	IPS	Email	US-Venezuela relations	meet to discuss ideas
3-Sep-08	Debra Booth	member	Afi-CIO	email	Venezuela	identify best time for visit by labor attache
5-Mar-09	C. Stein	letters editor	Washington Times	email	letter to the editor	publish letter on Venezuela
8-Sep-09	Karen Dolan	Director	IPS	in person	improving US-Ven relations	help identify possible sister cities
11-Sep-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	Venezuela Sends US Ambassador Home, Civil Coup in Bolivia	call congressmen to condemn violence in Bolivia and support democracy
11-Sep-08	D. Hazen	editor	AlterNet	email	op-ed	publish op-ed on Venezuela
16-Sep-08	VIO News and Action List serve			Email	leaving of Venezuelan Ambassador	continue working for better US-Venezuela relations
18-Sep-08	editor	editor	NACLA	email	op-ed	reprint op-ed
18-Sep-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	Human Rights Watch Report on Venezuela	send a letter to Human Rights Watch and voice your opinion on bias of report
19-Sep-08	Jan Strout	organizer	NOW	email	Venezuela delegation	organize a group to go on delegation
24-Sep-08	Dan Hellinger	professor	Webster University	email	Venezuelan expulsions	learn more about the context
9/24/2008	Sujatha Fernandez	professor	CUNY	email	Venezuela expulsions	learn more about the context
9/24/2008	Robert Naiman	program officer	JFP	email	Human Rights Watch	read articles sent
9/24/2008	Mark Weisbrot	co-director	CEPR	email	Human Rights Watch	read articles sent
9/24/2008	Dan Beeton	program officer	CEPR	email	Human Rights Watch	read articles sent
9/24/2008	Chuck Kauffman	VSN	organizer	email	Human Rights Watch	read articles sent
9/24/2008	Jill Hansen	VSN	organizer	email	Human Rights Watch	read articles sent
9/24/2008	Banbose Shango	VSN	organizer	email	Human Rights Watch	read articles sent
9/24/2008	Shirley Pate	HCV Project	organizer	email	Human Rights Watch	read articles sent
25-Sep-08	Tasha Coleman	international affairs	NAACP	email	upcoming visit of CNE	organize meeting for president of CNE
25-Sep-08	Victor Goode	attorney	NAACP	email	upcoming visit of CNE	organize meeting for president of CNE
25-Sep-08	Hillary Shelton	government affairs	NAACP	email	upcoming visit of CNE	organize meeting for president of CNE
25-Sep-08	Sarah Stephens	director	CDA	email	upcoming elections	organize delegation to observe
25-Sep-08	Dr. E. Faye Williams	NCBW	director	email	upcoming elections	organize delegation to observe
25-Sep-08	Olga Vives	NOW	vice president	email	upcoming elections	organize delegation to observe
25-Sep-08	Karen Lincoln	UNITY	president	email	Venezuela	organize delegation
26-Sep-08	Mavis Anderson	LAWG	program officer	email	Venezuela	use our information
3-Oct-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	US Report on Drugs	Read fact sheet on issue
7-Oct-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	H. Res. 1483	call member of Congress to oppose resolution

12-Oct-08	D'Ann Johnson	NLG	lawyer	email	Venezuela updates	come to dinner with officials
21-Oct-08	Tasha Coleman	international affairs	NAACP	emails	visit by CNE	send invite for President of CNE
21-Oct-09	Nicole Lee	executive director	TransAfrica Forum	email	upcoming Venezuela events	participate in them
21-Oct-08	Paulo Gusman	program officer	LAWG	email	Venezuela information	hold internal update on Venezuela with academic
21-Oct-08	Mavis Anderson	director	LAWG	email	Venezuela information	hold internal update on Venezuela with academic
24-Oct-08	Eliseo Medina	director	SEIU	email	Venezuela event at SEIU	share impressions of Venezuela at event
29-Oct-08	Dan Hellinger	academic	Webster University	email	upcoming Venezuela elections	talk at think tanks about elections
31-Oct-09	Jim Green	professor	Brown University	email	report on the Andes	distribute report widely
31-Oct-08	Daniel Brito	staffer	Congressman Grijalva	email	Brown report	pass around to colleagues
2-Nov-08	Christy Thorton	program officer	NACLA	email	new policies with Latin America	utilize Brown report on the Andes
4-Nov-08	Michael Shifter	vice president	IAD	email	Venezuela	hold event on Venezuela
7-Nov-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	New Policy toward LatAm	send Brown report to members of Congress
11-Nov-08	Jim Green	professor	Brown University	email	Andes report promotion	write an oped on your findings
18-Nov-08	Michael Shifter	vice president	IAD	email	Venezuela	invite independent analysts to write in newsletter
21-Nov-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	Poll before regional elections	respond to PBS frontline editors on Chavez film
24-Nov-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	Election Results	submit question to Wash Post on open Forum
24-Nov-08	David Conforto	lawyer	NLG	email	Venezuela regional elections	write oped
25-Nov-08	Dan Hellinger	professor	Webster University	email	NY Times article	respond with letter to editor
25-Nov-08	Steve Ellner	academic	Venezuela university	email	elections	write an oped
26-Nov-08	Dr. Faye Williams	president	NCBW	email	elections	write an oped about your trip
26-Nov-08	VIO News and Action List serve			email	significance of elections	read CNE data
26-Nov-08	Kat Vanden Huevel	editor	The Nation	email	Venezuela's elections	publish an oped
26-Nov-08	Steve Ellner	academic	Venezuela university	email	Wash Post article	write a letter to editor
2-Dec-08	Angela Sambrano	activist		email	Venezuela trip	write an oped
3-Dec-08	Josh Holland	editor	AlterNet	email	Venezuela elections	publish oped
3-Dec-08	Khalil Abduhla	editor	New America Media	email	Venezuela elections	publish oped
9-Dec-08	Nicole Lee	president	TransAfrica Forum	email	visit by Afro-Venezuelan	organize meeting with him
11-Dec-09	Judy Somberg	lawyer	NLG	email	elections	encourage participants to do report on elections
19-Dec-08	VIO News and Action list serve			email	Wash Post article	write letter to editor
5-Jan-09	Nnenna Ozobio	program officer	TransAfrica Forum	email	Venezuela	organize a briefing in Congress

7-Jan-09	Nnenna Ozobio	program officer	TransAfrica Forum	email	Venezuela	set meetings with members of Congress
8-Jan-09	Emira Woods	co-director	IPS	email	Venezuela election	participate as official electoral observer
5-Jan-09	VIO News and Action list serve			email	update on referendum	sign Venezuela Solidarity Network petition
19-Jan-09	attendees		ACORN office	in person	update on Venezuela	organize a delegation to Venezuela
21-Jan-09	Richard Korn	consultant		email	Venezuela	help organize delegation
22-Jan-09	Judy Somberg	lawyer	NLG	email	elections	write a letter to editor
26-Jan-09	VIO News and Action list serve			email	Citgo launch of heating oil	attend
27-Jan-09	Cynthia McClintock	professor	GWU	email	visit of Assemblymen	organize meeting with them
27-Jan-09	John Walsh	program officer	WOLA	email	visit of Assemblymen	organize a meeting with them
29-Jan-09	Joe Wilson	professor	Brooklyn College	email	visit of Assemblymen	organize a meeting with them
10-Feb-09	VIO News and Action list serve			email	Referendum updates & anti-semitism	read fact sheet and write to NY Daily News
2/12/20089	VIO News and Action list serve			email	anti-Venezuela resolution	call members not to support H.Res 161
15-Feb-09	VIO News and Action list serve			email	referendum	write to NY Times and NPR on articles
24-Feb-09	Nicole Lee	president	TransAfrica Forum	email	updates on Venezuela	attend dinner with Venezuelan official
24-Feb-09	Nnenna Ozobio	program officer	TransAfrica Forum	email	updates on Venezuela	attend dinner with Venezuelan official
24-Feb-09	James Early	board member	TransAfrica Forum	email	updates on Venezuela	attend dinner with Venezuelan official

<b>FARA Reporting Log-VIO</b>		<b>Tejas Kadia September 2008 to February 2009</b>				
<b>Date</b>	<b>Person Contacted</b>	<b>Position/Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject Discussed</b>	<b>Position Advocated</b>
21-Oct-09	Audience member	Student	Georgetown University	in person	Venezuela Information Office website and daily news round up on Venezuela	Referred to VIO website to be better informed on Venezuela
23-Oct-09	Audience member	N/A	Washington Office on Latin America	in person	Venezuela Information Office website	Referred to VIO website to be better informed on Venezuela
10-Nov-09	Audience member	N/A	Washington Office on Latin America	in person	US-Venezuela relations under Obama, VIO website	Referred to VIO website to be better informed on Venezuela
9-Dec-08	Audience member	Student	George Washington University	in person	Venezuela Information Office website	For analysis of news coverage on Venezuela and for informational fact sheets check out VIO website
6-Feb-09	Paulo Gusmao	Program Assistant	Latin America Working Group	Email	Policy Analysis on Southern Cone	Request for policy analysis.
11-Feb-09	<a href="mailto:letters@nytimes.com">letters@nytimes.com</a>	Editor	New York Times	Email	Simon Romero's "Venezuelans Campaign on Term Limits Amid Rising Tension."	Letter to Editor critical of Romero's reporting, and affirming the peaceful and democratic nature of Venezuela's referendum campaign.
12-Feb-09	Brian Tyree	Editor	Washington Times	Email	Thomson's op-ed, "Democratic or dictatorial destiny,"	Letter to Editor critical of Thomson's op-ed, and affirming the democratic process in Venezuela.
24-Feb-09	Audience member	Student	American University	in person	Balanced news coverage, questioning of Colombian officials FARC Laptop story	To be better informed on Venezuela, check out our website.

<b>FARA Reporting Log- Embassy of Venezuela</b>			<i>Alexander Main Sept 2008 to March 2009</i>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Person Contacted</b>	<b>Position/Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject Discussed</b>	<b>Position Advocated</b>
29-Sep-08	Olga Vives	Vice President	NOW	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	participation of NOW in delegation
30-Sep-08	Sarah Stephens	Executive Director	Democracy in the Americas	in person	delegation to Venezuela	Participation of Democracy in the Americas
30-Sep-08	Hillary Shelton	Director, Washington Bureau	NAACP	in person	delegation to Venezuela	Participation of NAACP
2-Oct-08	Frances Robles	Correspondent	Miami Herald	Email/Phone	Venezuelan elections	adopting balanced view on Venezuelan elections
5-Oct-08	Antonio Gonzalez	President	William C. Velasquez Institute	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	Participation of Latino leaders
8-Oct-08	Jeff Farrell	freelance correspondent	Christian Science Monitor	Email/Phone	article on Venezuela	interview recommended expert
6-Oct-08	Judy Somberg	Executive Vice President	National Lawyers Guild	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	Participation of National Lawyers Guild
8-Oct-08	Faye Williams	President	National Congress of Black Women	in person	delegation to Venezuela	Participation of National Congress of Black Women
13-Oct-08	Antonio Gonzalez	President	William C. Velasquez Institute	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	Participation of Latino leaders
15-Oct-08	Tasha Coleman	International Program Coordinator	NAACP	Email/Phone	possible visit of Venezuelan electoral official	meetings with NAACP leadership
16-Oct-08	Dave Turk	Staff Director	House of Representatives	in person	possible congressional delegation to Venezuela	meetings with contacts in Venezuela
17-Oct-08	Tasha Coleman	International Program Coordinator	NAACP	Email/Phone	possible visit of Venezuelan Electoral Official	meetings with NAACP leadership
23-Oct-08	David Holiday	Program Officer	Open Society Institute	in person	Venezuela relations with US	importance of improving relations
21-Oct-08	Natali Fani	Consultant	None	Email	delegation to Venezuela	contacts in women's and union organizations
22-Oct-09	Kerry McLean	member	National Lawyer's Guild	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	suggestion of agenda in Venezuela
22-Oct-09	Michael Ray	member	National Lawyer's Guild	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	suggestion of agenda in Venezuela

22-Oct-09	Larry Hildes	member	National Lawyer's Guild	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	suggestion of agenda in Venezuela
22-Oct-09	Karen Weill	member	National Lawyer's Guild	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	suggestion of agenda in Venezuela
22-Oct-09	Angela Zambrano	President	NALACC	Email	delegation to Venezuela	suggestion of agenda in Venezuela
23-Oct-09	Jose Calderon	Vice President	Hispanic Federation	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	suggestion of agenda in Venezuela
23-Oct-09	Chris Newman	Legal Director	National Day Laborer's Organizing Network	Email	delegation to Venezuela	suggestion of agenda in Venezuela
13-Nov-09	Neil Brown	Special Adviser, Senator Lugar	US Senate	in person	Venezuela relations with US	more nuanced view of bilateral relations
16-Nov-08	Ana Bickford, Rebecca Wharton	Producers	Bill Moyers	Email	information sources on Venezuela	more balanced view of Venezuela
3-Dec-08	Larry Birns	Executive Director	COHA	in person	Venezuela relations with US	identifying ways in which to improve bilateral relations
8-Dec-08	Carl Meacham	Foreign Affairs Adviser, Senator Lugar	US Senate	Email	Venezuela relations with US	more nuanced view of bilateral relations
10-Dec-08	Julia Sweig	Director for Latin American Studies	Council on Foreign Relations	in person	Venezuela relations with US	importance of improving relations
10-Dec-08	Janice O'Connell	Senior Advisor	Stonebridge International	in person	Venezuela relations with US	importance of improving relations
5-Jan-09	Antonio Gonzalez	President	William C. Velasquez Institute	Email	hearing on Venezuela elections	participation of Antonio Gonzalez
5-Jan-09	Angela Zambrano	President	NALACC	Email	Opinion Article	share electoral monitoring experience through newspaper publication
9-Jan-09	Carl Meacham	Foreign Affairs Adviser, Senator Lugar	US Senate	in person	Venezuela relations with US	more balanced view of Venezuela
15-Jan-09	Bill Delahunt	Representative	US House of Representatives	in person	Venezuela relations with US	identifying ways in which to improve bilateral relations
21-Jan-09	Daniel Brito	Legislative Assistant, Representative Grijalva	US House of Representatives	Email	hearing on Venezuela elections	help with booking room in House office building
29-Jan-09	Christy Thornton	Director and Publisher	NACLA	Email	Dinner in New York with Venezuelan Congressmen	participation in dinner
30-Jan-09	Fernando Coronil	Professor of Anthropology	University of Michigan	Email	Dinner in New York with Venezuelan Congressmen	participation in dinner
30-Jan-09	John Coatsworth	Dean, School of International and Public Affairs	Columbia University	Email	Dinner in New York with Venezuelan Congressmen	participation in dinner

30-Jan-09	Bart Jones	author/journalist	Newsday	Email	Dinner in New York with Venezuelan Congressmen	participation in dinner
30-Jan-09	Aldo Civico	Professor	Columbia University	Email	Dinner in New York with Venezuelan Congressmen	participation in dinner
2-Feb-09	Sean Sweeney	Director	Cornell Global Labor Institute	in person	Venezuela labor and trade issues	Future event with Cornell Labor Institute
2-Feb-09	Nora Rasman	Program Associate	TransAfrica Forum	Email	delegation to Venezuela	organization of trip agenda
2-Feb-09	Imani Countess	Senior Director of Public Affairs	TransAfrica Forum	Email	delegation to Venezuela	organization of trip agenda
4-Feb-09	Pablo Morales	editor	NACLA	Email	delegation to Venezuela	organization of trip agenda
6-Feb-09	Frances Robles	journalist	Miami Herald	in person	Venezuela relations with US	more nuanced view
6-Feb-09	Miguel Luna	Executive Director	Urban Semillas	Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	organization of trip agenda
6-Feb-09	Victor Griego			Email/Phone	delegation to Venezuela	organization of trip agenda
23-Feb-09	Julia Sweig	Director for Latin American Studies	Council on Foreign Relations	in person	Venezuela relations with US	identifying ways in which to improve bilateral relations
25-Feb-09	Nora Rasman; Imani Countess	Program Associate, Senior Director of Public Affairs	TransAfrica Forum	in person	future Hill briefing on Venezuelan elections	participation of TransAfrica Forum
26-Feb-09	Carl Meacham	Foreign Affairs Adviser, Senator Lugar	US Senate	in person	Venezuela relations with US	identifying ways in which to improve bilateral relations

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<b>Log Date</b>	<b>Megan Morrissey Person Contacted</b>	<b>VIO / LAIO Title</b>	<b>Sept 2008 - Feb 2009 Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject discussed</b>	<b>Position advocated</b>
3-Sep-08	Williams Camacaro	Organizer	Bolivarian Circle in New York	called	Left Forum	requested space in exhibit hall
11-Sep-08	Don Hazen	Editor	Alternet	called	Op-ed	publish an op-ed on
11-Sep-08	Judy Somberg	Lawyer	National Lawyers Guild City Council of Providence, RI	emailed	Op-ed	write an op-ed on Venezuela
11-Sep-08	Miguel Luna	Councilman	Alternet	emailed	Op-ed	write an op-ed on Venezuela
12-Sep-08	Josh	Editor	SOA Watch	called	Op-ed	publish an op-ed on
12-Sep-08	Lisa Sullivan	Activist	Congressman John Sarbanes	emailed	Interview	do an interview for AI
17-Sep-08	Delicia Reynolds	Legislative Counsel		emailed	Meeting	meet for lunch
18-Sep-08	Diane Hodges	Interview Coordinator	Al Jazeera in English	emailed	News roundup	sign up for news roundup
24-Sep-08	Marc Sullivan	Latin America Specialist	Congressional Research Service	emailed	Human rights	read documents on human rights
1-Oct-08	Carlos de la Torre	Visiting Researcher	Woodrow Wilson Center	emailed	Meeting	meet for lunch
1-Oct-08	Scott Thill	Journalist	Wired	emailed	News coverage	write articles on Venezuela
7-Oct-08	Dan Hellinger	Professor	Webster University	called	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor
7-Oct-08	Miguel Tinker Salas	Professor	Pomona College	called	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor
7-Oct-08	James Early	Cultural Director	Smithsonian Institution	called	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor correct numbers on social spending
14-Oct-08	Chris Hawley	Journalist	USA Today	emailed	News coverage	
14-Oct-08	Guillermo Moreno	Second Secretary	Venezuela UN Mission	emailed	News roundup	sign up for news roundup
20-Oct-08	Editors		Boston Globe	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
27-Oct-08	Editors		Washington Post	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
28-Oct-08	Lisa Macdonald	Activist	Australia-Ven Solidarity	emailed	Book on Venezuela	send review copy of a book
2-Nov-08	Editors		American Chronicle	emailed	News coverage	print a correction
5-Nov-08	Sujatha Fernandes	Professor	Queens College	emailed	Elections coverage	talk to journalists about
12-Nov-08	Fernando Coronil	Professor	CUNY	emailed	Elections coverage	talk to journalists about
12-Nov-08	Taruna Godric	Journalist	Real News Network	called	Interview	interview VIO Executive
12-Nov-08	Editors		AP New York Bureau	called	Contact info	provide contact information

12-Nov-08	Joel Heard	Journalist	Real News Network	emailed	Interview	interview VIO Executive
13-Nov-08	Editors		Oxford Analytica	called	Corrections	print a correction
13-Nov-08	Susan Adams	Journalist	Forbes Magazine	called	Corrections	print a correction
13-Nov-08	Carl Lavin	Editor	Forbes.com	called	Corrections	print a correction
18-Nov-08	Ben Tyree	Editor	Washington Times	called	Corrections	print a correction
18-Nov-08	Editors		Houston Chronicle	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor use VIO press release on elections
20-Nov-08	Various	Journalists		emailed	Elections coverage	use VIO press release on elections
25-Nov-08	Various	Journalists		emailed	Elections coverage	elections
26-Nov-08	Steve Ellner	Professor	Universidad del Oriente Natnl Congress of Black Women	emailed	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor
26-Nov-08	Faye Williams Larry and Karen	Chair		emailed	Op-ed	write an op-ed on Venezuela
2-Dec-08	Weill	Lawyers	National Lawyers Guild	emailed	Op-ed	write an op-ed on Venezuela
5-Dec-08	Lisa Sullivan	Activist	SOA Watch	emailed	BBC News forum	comment on Venezuela
5-Dec-08	George Ciciarrello	Ph.D. Candidate	Berkeley College	emailed	BBC News forum	comment on Venezuela
8-Dec-08	Editors		Washington Post	called	Corrections	print a correction
8-Dec-08	Tim Padgett	Journalist	Time Magazine	emailed	Corrections	print a correction
8-Dec-08	Juan Forero	Journalist	Washington Post	emailed	News coverage	improve coverage of
8-Dec-08	Charlie Hardy	Writer	Maryknoll Missioners	emailed	BBC News forum	comment on Venezuela
9-Dec-08	Khalil Abdullah	Editor	New American Media	emailed	Op-ed	publish a VIO op-ed
9-Dec-08	Editors		Seattle Times	called	Op-ed	publish an op-ed on suggested attendance at event
9-Dec-08	Raquel Garcia	Communications Manager	Earth Day Network	emailed	World Bank Event	event
10-Dec-08	Editors		Houston Chronicle Natnl Assn Latin American and Caribbean Communities	emailed	Letter to editor	publish a letter to the editor
11-Dec-08	Angela Sanbrano	President		emailed	Op-ed	write op-ed on Venezuela elections
22-Dec-08	Dan Hellinger	Professor	Webster University Center for American Progress	emailed	Interview	do an interview for LAIO
7-Jan-08	Stephanie Miller	Researcher		emailed	VIO resources	sign up for news roundup
8-Jan-09	Dan Hellinger	Professor	Webster University	emailed	Interview	speak to AP journalists
8-Jan-09	Mark Q. Sawyer	Professor	UCLA	emailed	News coverage	talk to journalists about
8-Jan-09	Nicole C. Wong	Journalist	Boston Globe	emailed	News coverage	write about Citgo heating oil
8-Jan-09	Tom Wallack	Journalist	Boston Globe	emailed	News coverage	write about Citgo heating oil
12-Jan-09	Paul Reynolds	Journalist	BBC News	emailed	News coverage	use LAIO resources

14-Jan-09 Maite Junco	Latino Editor	New York Daily News	called	Corrections	print a correction on heating
14-Jan-09 Ana Maria Toro	Journalist	New York Daily News	emailed	Corrections	print a correction on heating
14-Jan-09 John Dinges	Journalist	Global Post	emailed	News roundup	sign up for news roundup
14-Jan-09 Samy Esayag	Organzier	Harvard Venezuela Forum	emailed	Listserv	asked to add to listserv
21-Jan-09 Paul Farhi	Journalist	Washington Post	emailed	News coverage	attend Citgo heating oil
21-Jan-09 Editors		Washington Times	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
21-Jan-09 Editors		Chicago Tribune	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
22-Jan-09 Editors		Los Angeles Times	emailed	Letter to editor	LA Times letter re "Tensions
	Visiting				asked for review copy of
23-Jan-09 Carlos de la Torre	Researcher	Woodrow Wilson Center	emailed	Book on Ecuador	book
23-Jan-09 Enrique Rivera	Producer	NPR	emailed	Meeting	meet for lunch
23-Jan-09 Judy Somberg	Lawyer	National Lawyers Guild	called	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor
23-Jan-09 Editors		Washington Post	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
26-Jan-09 Various	Journalists		emailed	Citgo event	attend Citgo heating oil
27-Jan-09 Mark Q. Sawyer	Professor	UCLA, Political Science	emailed	News roundup	sign up for news roundup
27-Jan-09 Holly Lang	Editor	Pine Magazine	emailed	LAIO resources	repring LAIO interview
27-Jan-09 Dan Beeton	Media Analyst	Center for Economic and Policy Research	emailed	News coverage	print correction
29-Jan-09 Various	Bloggers		emailed	Citgo event	attend Citgo heating oil
29-Jan-09 Editors		St. Petersburg Times	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
29-Jan-09 Armando Gudino	Producer	KPFK Los Angeles	emailed	LAIO resources	visit new LAIO website
29-Jan-09 Jose Santiago	Journalist	WBAI 99.5 New York	emailed	Citgo event	report on Citgo heating oil
				Referendum	improve coverage of
3-Feb-09 Lester Pimentel	Journalist	Bloomberg	emailed	coverage	referendum
3-Feb-09 Xeni Gardner	Journalist	Boing Boing	emailed	News coverage	improve coverage of
9-Feb-09 Lindolfo Carballo	Radio host	WUML 91.5 FM Lowell	called	Interview	interview Boston Venezuela
	Venezuelan	Vzln Consul San Francisco			Consul
9-Feb-09 Martin Sanchez	Consul	Venezuelan Consul	called	Interview	provide contact information
	Venezuelan	Boston			
9-Feb-09 Omar Sierra	Consul	Reuters	called	Interview	do radio interview in Boston
11-Feb-09 Frank Daniel	Journalist	USA Today	emailed	News coverage	use VIO press release
12-Feb-09 Editors		Miami Herald	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
12-Feb-09 Editors		USA Today	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
12-Feb-09 Editors		Arizona Republic	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
12-Feb-09 Editors		Washington Times	emailed	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor

13-Feb-09 Various	Journalists		emailed	Opinion poll data Referendum	use VIO opinion poll data
15-Feb-09 Various	Journalists		emailed	observers Referendum	interview electoral observers
16-Feb-09 Sharif	Journalist	Democracy Now	emailed	observers	interview electoral observers
17-Feb-09 Editors		Los Angeles Times	wrote	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
17-Feb-09 Editors		Wall Street Journal	wrote	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
17-Feb-09 Editors		Dallas Morning News	wrote	Letter to editor	publish VIO letter to editor
18-Feb-09 T.M. Scruggs	Professor	University of Iowa	emailed	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor
18-Feb-09 Greg Grandin	Professor	NYU	emailed	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor
18-Feb-09 George Ciciarrello	Ph.D. Candidate	Berkeley College	emailed	Letter to editor	write a letter to the editor

<b>Reporting Log-Venezuela</b>			<b>Jennifer Schuett September 2008 to March 2009</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Person Contacted</b>	<b>Position/Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject Discussed</b>	<b>Position Advocated</b>
12-Sep-08	Mark Sullivan	Specialist in Latin American Affairs	Congressional Research Services	Email	Introduction	Personal Introduction and request for future contact
22-Sep-08	Joe Holtz	Founder	Park Slope Food Coop	Email	Introduction	Personal Introduction and request for future contact
25-Sep-08	Paulo Gusmao	Associate	WOLA	Email	McCain on Venezuela and Cuba	Opinion and analysis of U.S.-Cuba relations
15-Oct-08	Lilia Lopez	Program Officer	WOLA	In Person	Human Rights, US-Venezuela relations	Improved U.S.-Latin American policy
15-Oct-08	Emily Goldman	Human Rights Advocate	Independent	In Person	Human Rights, US-Venezuela relations	Describe experience with human rights advocacy in U.S.
24-Oct-08	Joe Holtz	Founder	Park Slope Food Coop	In Person	Cooperatives	use Park Slope as a model for Venezuela; present documentary on Park Slope
29-Oct-08	Emily Kawano	Director	Center for Popular Economics	Email	Solidarity Economy Conference	Venezuela participation in conference
5-Nov-08	Paulo Gusmao	Associate	WOLA	Email	Election of Obama	Share comunique from Venezuelan government
21-Nov-09	Sarah Stevens	Director	Center for Democracy in the Americas	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review embassy website for election results and analysis
21-Nov-09	Dr. E. Faye Williams	National Chair	National Congress of Black Women, Inc.	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review embassy website for election results and analysis
21-Nov-09	Wayne Smith	Senior Fellow	Center for International Policy	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis
21-Nov-09	Paulo Gusmao	Associate	WOLA	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis
21-Nov-09	Mark Sullivan	Specialist in Latin American Affairs	Congressional Research Services	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis
6-Jan-09	Emily Kawano	Director	Center for Popular Economics	Email	Solidarity Economy Conference	provide funding and logistics for Venezuelan participants
27-Feb-09	Joseph Brings Plenty	Chairman	Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	Email	Telemedicine, Cheyenne Tribe History	Schedule Meeting to discuss indigenous rights
18-Feb-09	Kimberly Easson	Associate	Fair Trade USA	Email	Venezuelan Fair Trade Coffee	Bring representative of Venezuelan fair trade to U.S.
4-Mar-09	Emily Kawano	Director	Center for Popular Economics	Email	Solidarity Economy Conference	Update on Conference Plans - include Venezuelan presenters

6-Jan-09	Brandon Webb	Legislative correspondent	U.S. House of Representatives	In Person	U.S. - Venezuela relations	Offering information and request future contact
6-Jan-09	Saul Hernandez	Legislative Assistant	U.S. House of Representatives	In Person	U.S. - Venezuela relations	Offering information and request future contact
6-Jan-09	Randi J. Meyers	Legislative Counsel	U.S. House of Representatives	In Person	U.S. - Venezuela relations	Offering information and request future contact
6-Jan-09	Jennifer Prather	Senior Legislative Assistant	U.S. House of Representatives	In Person	U.S. - Venezuela relations; term limits	Offering information and request future contact; Requested information on Referndum in Venezuela
6-Jan-09	Sean Bonyun	Communications Director	U.S. House of Representatives	Email	U.S. - Venezuela relations	Offering information and future contact
6-Jan-09	Gregory Berry	Legislative Counsel	U.S. House of Representatives	In Person/Em	U.S. - Venezuela relations	Offering information and future contact
6-Jan-09	Kirk Shirley	Staff Assistant	U.S. House of Representatives	In Person/Em	U.S. - Venezuela relations	Offering information and future contact
22-Jan-09	Joeph Brings Plenty	Chairman	Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	In Person	Cheyenne River Sioux interest in Venezuela, Venezuelan indigenous peoples	Introduction and request for future contact
22-Jan-09	Ian Erlich	President/CEO	Maniilaq Association	In Person	Cheyenne River Sioux interest in Venezuela, Venezuelan indigenous peoples	Introduction and request for future contact
22-Jan-09	Ryman G. LeBeau	Council Representative	Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	In Person	Cheyenne River Sioux interest in Venezuela, Venezuelan indigenous peoples	Introduction and request for future contact
29-Jan-09	Sarah Stevens	Director	Center for Democracy in the Americas	Email	Dinner with Venezuelan Congressmen	Invitation to Dinner
29-Jan-09	Dr. E. Faye Williams	National Chair	National Congress of Black Women, Inc.	Email	Dinner with Venezuelan Congressmen	Invitation to Dinner
29-Jan-09	Wayne Smith	Senior Fellow	Center for International Policy	Email	Dinner with Venezuelan Congressmen	Invitation to Dinner
29-Jan-09	Paulo Gusmao	Associate	WOLA	Email	Dinner with Venezuelan Congressmen	Invitation to Dinner
29-Jan-09	Mark Sullivan	Specialist in Latin American Affairs	Congressional Research Services	Email	Dinner with Venezuelan Congressmen	Invitation to Dinner
2-Feb-09	Mark Sullivan	Specialist in Latin American Affairs	Congressional Research Services	Phone	Meeting with Venezuelan Congressmen	Arrange Meeting with Venezuelan Congressman
6-Feb-09	Jennifer McCoy	Panelist	WOLA Event	Event	Referndum in Venezuela	Question voter participation rates in Venezuela
11-Feb-09	Sarah Stevens	Director	Center for Democracy in the Americas	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis

11-Feb-09	Dr. E. Faye Williams	National Chair	National Congress of Black Women, Inc.	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis
11-Feb-09	Wayne Smith	Senior Fellow	Center for International Policy	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis
11-Feb-09	Paulo Gusmao	Associate	WOLA	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis
11-Feb-09	Mark Sullivan	Specialist in Latin American Affairs	Congressional Research Services	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for election results and analysis
11-Feb-09	Emily Kawano	Director	Center for Popular Economics	Email	Solidarity Economy Conference	Organize a reception hosted by Venezuelan Embassy
16-Feb-09	Sarah Stevens	Director	Center for Democracy in the Americas	Email	Venezuelan Jewish Community	Review website for news and analysis
16-Feb-09	Dr. E. Faye Williams	National Chair	National Congress of Black Women, Inc.	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for news and analysis
16-Feb-09	Wayne Smith	Senior Fellow	Center for International Policy	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for news and analysis
16-Feb-09	Paulo Gusmao	Associate	WOLA	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for news and analysis
16-Feb-09	Mark Sullivan	Specialist in Latin American Affairs	Congressional Research Services	Email	Elections in Venezuela	Review website for news and analysis
25-Feb-09	Amalia Cordova	Latin American Program Manager	Smithsonian-NMAI	Email	Indigenous Film Festival	Introduction and request for future contact; Coordination of logistics
26-Feb-09	Amalia Cordova	Latin American Program Manager	Smithsonian-NMAI	Phone	Indigenous Film Festival	Coordination of logistics
27-Feb-09	Javier Corrales	Panelist	Inter-American Dialogue Event	Event	Popular participation in Latin America	Reconsider notion of "unconventional" popular participation

<b>FARA Reporting Log-VIO</b>			<b>Jessica Coates September 2008 to March 2009</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Person Contacted</b>	<b>Position/Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject Discussed</b>	<b>Position Advocated</b>
23-Jan-09	Julia Leggett	Policy Coordinator	ARC of North Carolina	email	Facebook page	Asked to become a fan of VIO facebook page
23-Jan-09	Helen Horowitz	Retired		email	Facebook page	Asked to become a fan of VIO facebook page
23-Jan-09	Jackie Neustel	Student	Meredith College	email	Facebook page	Asked to become a fan of VIO facebook page
23-Jan-09	Brooke Cormack	Youth Development Coordinator	Boys & Girls Club	email	Facebook page	Asked to become a fan of VIO facebook page

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**Megan Morrissey**

**Fundacion Siglo  
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**Sept 08- Feb 09**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Person contacted</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Topic discussed</b>	<b>Position advocated</b>
27-Oct-08	David Kane	Associate for Latin America	Maryknoll Missioners	attended	Event at AU	provide info about Maryknoll work
10-Dec-08	Various	Journalists		emailed	Fact sheet	read fact sheet on Bolivia drug report
11-Feb-09	Various		Busboys and Poets	emailed	Public event	attend book tour event
26-Feb-09	Sharan Harper	Radio host	WBAI 99.5	called	Interview	pitched interview with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Various		New School for Social Research	attended	Public event	sign up for weekly UN newsletter
27-Feb-09	Bob Schwartz	Producer	HDNET	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Melissa Draper	Associate Director	Center for Democracy in the Americas	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Mirian Masaquiza	Secretary General	United Nations	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Debora Hunte	Organizer	Local 1199	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Estela Vazquez	Associate Vice President	Local 1199	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	John Mundy	Researcher	Majora Carter Manhattan Neighborhood Network	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Jennifer Wager	Journalist	Network	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Christy Thornton	Director	NACLA	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Gabriela Reyes	Student	Columbia	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
27-Feb-09	Sally Dunne	Member	Loretto Group	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
2-Mar-09	Geraldine		Real News	called	Interview	pitched interview with Ambassador
9-Mar-09	Bob Schwartz	Producer	HDNET	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09	Melissa Draper	Associate Director	Center for Democracy in the Americas	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09	Mirian Masaquiza	Secretary General	United Nations	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09	Debora Hunte	Organizer	Local 1199	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador

9-Mar-09 Estela Vazquez	Associate Vice President	Local 1199	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09 John Mundy	Researcher	Majora Carter Manhattan Neighborhood Network	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09 Jennifer Wager	Journalist	NACLA	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09 Christy Thornton	Director	Columbia	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09 Gabriela Reyes	Student	Loretto Group	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09 Sally Dunne	Member	SEIU 32 BJ	emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
9-Mar-09 Saul Nieves	Lead Organizer		emailed	Group of friends	attend meeting with Ambassador
13-Mar-08 Various		UN United Methodist Office	emailed	Public event	attend event with Ambassador
17-Mar-09 Esmerelda Brown	Director		emailed	Public event	attend event with Ambassador

<b>FARA Reporting Log-Fundacion XX1</b>			<i>Olivia Goumbri September 2008 to February 2009</i>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Person Contacted</b>	<b>Position/Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject Discussed</b>	<b>Position Advocated</b>
22-Oct-08	Julia Buxton	professor	Bradford University	Email	Bolivia	read new article on Bolivia
10/23/2008	DB Massey	professor	Open University	Email	Bolivia	read new article on Bolivia
24-Oct-08	Sharif Abdulla	producer	Democracy Now	email	US-Bolivia relations	do a story on current events
24-Oct-08	Deborah James	director	CEPR	email	Bolivia updates	push for more transparency in Congress on US -Bolivia relations
24-Oct-08	Judy Somberg	lawyer	NLG	email	Bolivia referendum	observe the elections in January
28-Oct-08	Tasha Coleman	international affairs	NAACP	email	Bolivia referendum	observe the elections in January
28-Oct-08	Hillary Shelton	government affairs	NAACP	email	Bolivia referendum	observe the elections in January
28-Oct-09	Daniel Brito	staff member	Congressman Grijalva	email	Bolivia	meet to discuss upcoming referendum
12-Nov-08	Bob Schwartz	program officer	global health partners	email	university event on Bolivia	invite our contacts
17-Nov-08	Mavis Anderson	director	LAWG	email	AU event on Bolivia	attend
17-Nov-08	Lisa Hauugard	director	LAWG	email	AU event on Bolivia	attend
17-Nov-08	Daniel Brito	staffer	Congressman Grijalva		AU event on Bolivia	attend
17-Nov-08	Tasha Coleman	international affairs	NAACP	email	AU event on Bolivia	attend
17-Nov-08	Nicole Lee	president	TransAfrica Forum	email	AU event on Bolivia	attend
6-Jan-09	Antonio Gonzalez	executive director	SWVREP	email	upcoming referendum	visit and observe election
21-Jan-09	Mike Williams	director	AITC	email	upcoming referendum	write an oped on topic
23-Jan-08	Enrique Rivera	producer	NPR	email	upcoming referendum	do a story on it
10-Feb-09	C. Stein	editor	Washington Times	email	Bolivia article	publish letter to editor
11-Feb-09	Jack Hammond	professory	CUNY	email	Left Forum	organize panel on Bolivia
12-Feb-09	Greg Grandin	professor	NYU	email	Left Forum	sit on panel
12-Feb-09	Sinclair Thomson	professor	NYU	email	Left Forum	sit on panel
12-Feb-09	Forest Hylton	professor	CUNY	email	Left Forum	sit on panel
12-Feb-09	editor	editor	Miami Herald	email	article on Bolivia	publish letter to editor
19-Feb-09	Jennifer Wager	filmmaker	MNNC	email	Bolivia meeting at NACLA	attend

<b>FARA Reporting Log-Fundacion XX1</b>			<b>Alex Main September 2008 to February 2009</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Person Contacted</b>	<b>Position/Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Contacted</b>	<b>Subject Discussed</b>	<b>Position Advocated</b>
1-Dec-08	Roane Carey	editor	Nation Magazine	Email	Bolivia	participate in event on Bolivia
12/5/2008	Thomas Kruze	Program Officer	Program Officer	Email	Bolivia	invite academics to Bolivia event
5-Jan-09	Greg Grandin	professor	NYU	phone	US-Bolivia relations	consider writing a letter to the editor
January 12,	Deborah James	director	CEPR	email	Bolivia referendum	monitor polls leading up to election
29-Jan-09	Bob Schwartz	Program Officer	partners for health	email	USA Today article	write a letter to the editor
29-Jan-09	Linda	consultant	LCG Communications	email	USA Today article	write a letter to the editor
29-Jan-09	Melissa Draper	organizer	Democracy Center	email	USA Today article	write a letter to the editor
29-Jan-09	Thom Kruze	Program Officer	Program Officer	email	USA Today article	write a letter to the editor
1-Feb-09	Jennifer Wager	filmmaker	MMN	in person	new constitution	report on it
1-Feb-09	attendees at new Bolivian constitution event at NACLA			in person	Bolivia's new constitution and US-Bolivia relations	raise awareness about reality of Bolivia, organize friends of Bolivia group



**Latin America  
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# **Latin America Information Office**

**Materials Disseminated  
September 1, 2008-  
February 28, 2009**

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The Latin America Information Office, LLC (LAIO) serves as a resource for progressive social movements, policy makers, and governments who are searching for practical policy solutions to real-life problems: primarily poverty, inequality and exclusion. The LAIO receives funding from the Twenty-first Century Foundation of Bolivia and the government of Venezuela. More information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington DC.

# **Part I: Fact Sheets**



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## THE TRUTH SUFFERS IN HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT ON VENEZUELA

On September 18, 2008 Human Rights Watch released a report entitled "Venezuela: Rights Suffer Under Chávez." The report contains biases and inaccuracies, and wrongly purports that human rights guarantees are lacking or not properly enforced in Venezuela. In addition, while criticizing Venezuela's human rights in the political context, it fails to mention the many significant advancements made by the government on other essential human rights, such as access to education, healthcare, nutritious food, clean water, and housing.

**MYTH:** "Discrimination on political grounds has been a defining feature of the Chávez presidency."

**FACT:** Human Rights Watch deems the 2002 coup against the elected government "the most dramatic setback" for human rights in Venezuela in the last decade, but criticizes President Chavez's own public condemnations of the unconstitutional overthrow as examples of "political discrimination" against the opposition. On the contrary, President Chávez last year pardoned political opponents who backed a failed 2002 coup against his democratically elected government. "It's a matter of turning the page," Chávez said. "We want there to be a strong ideological and political debate -- but in peace."<sup>i</sup> In this spirit, the government has often welcomed input from the opposition, for example, inviting the leaders of student protests to address the National Assembly.

**MYTH:** The Chávez administration has an "open disregard for the principle of separation of powers – specifically an independent judiciary."

**FACT:** Human Rights Watch wrote in an earlier report that "When President Chávez became president in 1999, he inherited a judiciary that had been plagued for years by influence-peddling, political interference, and, above all, corruption...In terms of public credibility, the system was bankrupt." Under Chávez though, Human Rights Watch admitted that access to justice in Venezuela was improved by the expansion of the court system.<sup>ii</sup> Also, the World Bank found that "the [judicial] reform effort has made significant progress – the STJ [Supreme Court] is more modern and efficient."<sup>iii</sup> Testament to the strength of democratic institutions in Venezuela is the ability of the National Electoral Council to uphold decisions unfavorable to lawmakers, such as the "no" victory in the December 2007 referendum on constitutional reforms.

**MYTH:** “[Chávez] has significantly shifted the balance of the mass media in the government’s favor... by stacking the deck against critical opposition outlets.”

**FACT:** As was true at the time of the 2002 coup against Chávez, Venezuela’s media is dominated by opposition voices. The “anti-government” media mentioned by Human Rights Watch still maintains the largest share of the nation’s public airwaves, and their frequently extreme criticisms of the government have included calling for the overthrow of elected leaders (as in 2002). There are no major pro-government newspapers in Venezuela. The new government-funded television and radio outlets, such as TVEs – Venezuela’s first public broadcaster – and TeleSur – a regional network with support from multiple countries – have a much smaller reach than the private outlets. Furthermore, the government has never censored or “shut down” opposition media. The private channel RCTV faced a non-renewal of its broadcast license due to persistent legal violations including inciting political violence, but the station easily made the switch to cable.

**MYTH:** The Chávez government “has sought to remake the country’s labor movement in ways that violate basic principles of freedom of association.”

**FACT:** The Chavez government has actively promoted the formation of labor unions and bargaining by organized labor, but has not co-opted this sector. The National Workers' Union (UNT) was founded in April 2003 by workers supportive of government policies. In 2008, the government responded to an ongoing labor dispute between steel workers and the foreign-owned firm Sidor by intervening to negotiate a settlement, and when this was found to be impossible, the government reasserted state control over the Sidor plant in response to worker demands. The steel workers themselves were also allowed to purchase a share of the business themselves and thereby assert more control over the company.

**MYTH:** The Chávez government has pursued an “aggressively adversarial approach to local rights advocates and civil society organizations.”

**FACT:** The Chávez administration has encouraged local leaders to create community councils that let localities identify and address their own problems – from garbage collection to school construction. The concept comes from the belief that local groups know what is lacking and know what they want for their communities. Community councils democratize local government and give people the funding and capacity to make decisions for themselves. Also subject to local decision-making are many of the social missions that are designed to help reduce poverty in the most marginalized areas of the country. Health clinics, educational centers, subsidized food markets and other initiatives rely on local volunteers and are accountable to these communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Human Rights Watch report “Venezuela: Rights Suffer Under Chávez,” provides an incomplete and biased account of Venezuela’s human rights record during the last decade.

It overstates the issue of political discrimination, accusing the Chávez government of targeting opponents, when in fact it has pardoned supporters of the coup and promoted open dialogue. The report is also wrong on the separation of powers and the media. The branches of government provide strong checks and balances, and institutions have improved since Chávez was first

elected. No censorship of the media occurs, and the opposition still dominates the airwaves. In terms of civil society, labor organizations and community groups enjoy more support from this administration than ever before.

Venezuela has a strong record on human rights. Many of the important guarantees set out in the 1999 Constitution have indeed been enforced, particularly those relating to the fundamental needs of citizens, such as food, shelter, healthcare, access to education, employment, social security, and the right to participation in cultural life.

Human Rights Watch details none of the impressive progress made in these areas. For example, the UN Development Programme has found that Venezuela has already achieved some of the Millennium Development Goals, and is on track to complete the others by 2015. Notably, the country has seen a 54% drop in the number of households living in extreme poverty since 1998, and its overall poverty has fallen by 34%.<sup>iv</sup> Facts such as these provide a much more complete picture of the human rights situation in Venezuela.

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<sup>i</sup> "Chávez pardons accused coup backers" Ian James, Associated Press, December 31, 2007.

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-12-31-1482318110\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-12-31-1482318110_x.htm)

<sup>ii</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Rigging the Rule of Law: Judicial Independence Under Siege in Venezuela," June 2004,

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/venezuela0604/>

<sup>iii</sup> World Bank, Project Information Document, Report AB510, December 9, 2003, [http://www-](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDS_IBank_Servlet?pcont=details&eid=000104615_20040226144554)

[wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDS\\_IBank\\_Servlet?pcont=details&eid=000104615\\_20040226144554](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDS_IBank_Servlet?pcont=details&eid=000104615_20040226144554)

<sup>iv</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística <http://www.ine.gob.ve/pobreza/Llgrafico2sem.asp>



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## **What International Observers are Saying About Elections in Venezuela**

Venezuela's elections are among the most heavily scrutinized in the world. A national referendum on constitutional reforms held in December 2007 was observed by the NAACP and the National Lawyers Guild. Legislative elections in December 2005 were observed by delegations from the European Union and the Organization of American States (OAS). The 2004 recall referendum on the mandate of President Chávez was observed by a number of international bodies including the OAS and the Carter Center. Below are statements from these observers, in their own words, on how Venezuela's elections are conducted.

### **On the 2007 National Referendum**

"The NLG members found that the Chávez government, which has faced the scrutiny of a well-funded opposition and the hostile US press and government, has developed one of the most advanced electoral system in the region, if not the world. The voting process seemed simple to administer, yet thorough."<sup>1</sup>  
-- National Lawyers Guild

"NAACP observers met with citizens and voters prior to the election and in its aftermath and found that all people, regardless of background or political party affiliation, were seriously and very thoughtfully engaged in the electoral process. Civil society was very engaged in the electoral process as represented by the over 70 percent turnout of the electorate"<sup>2</sup>  
-- NAACP Director of International Affairs Crispian Kirk

"We would like to ... highlight the civic comportment of all of the citizenry on a day that was full of expectations and tension, which speaks of the democratic mood of Venezuelan society."<sup>3</sup>  
-- Ojo Electoral<sup>4</sup>

### **On Electronic Voting Machines**

"NAACP observers considered the voting machines exceptional because they made the electronic voting process as easy as simply selecting a candidate's picture and party logo.... The Venezuelan government has made great strides to help insure the legitimacy of its voting machines."<sup>5</sup>  
-- NAACP

"The Venezuelan voting system possesses a number of features that are in line with the most advanced international standards of e-voting. In certain aspects, such as the paper trail audit, the system developed in Venezuela is probably the most advanced system in the world to date."<sup>6</sup>  
--European Union Election Observation Mission

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"The security and transparency measures introduced in the automated voting process are in line with the most advanced international practice." Also, "The general conclusion of the observers was that the voting machines seemed very reliable."<sup>7</sup>

*-European Union Election Observation Mission*

### **On the 2005 Legislative Elections**

"We had a problem with the Venezuelan opposition, which assured us that they would not withdraw from the [electoral] process if certain conditions were met. These were met and despite this, they withdrew. This had an impact on the high abstention."<sup>8</sup>

*-OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza*

"[Venezuelan elections officials] technically administered the process well [and] demonstrated a clear willingness to meet the demands of the opposition parties to increase confidence in the process."<sup>9</sup>

*-European Union Election Observation Mission*

"It is of concern that due to the withdrawal of the opposition, an important portion of the citizenry is left without representation in the National Assembly... Every democracy requires an institutional opposition committed to the electoral process, so that it can loyally participate in the democratic system."<sup>10</sup>

### **On the 2004 Recall Referendum**

"The Carter Center concludes that the automated machines worked well and the voting results do reflect the will of the people."<sup>11</sup>

*-Carter Center Venezuela Referendum Observation Delegation*

"The unusually high turnout of 73 percent reflects the intense interest in this recall referendum. The Venezuelan people are to be commended for standing in line for hours without incidents, in this demonstration of civic participation and pride... We urge all Venezuelans to accept these results and look to the future."<sup>12</sup>

*-Carter Center Venezuela Referendum Observation Delegation*

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<sup>1</sup> National Lawyers Guild Finds Venezuelan Referendum Conducted Fairly by the Venezuelan Government," National Lawyers Guild Press Release, December 12, 2007. <http://www.nlgmass.org/Referendum%20in%20Venezuela.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "Delegation Returns, Finds Venezuelans Ready to Vote, Elections Process and Machines Easy to Use," NAACP Press Release, December 11, 2006. <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/NAACPpr.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Boletín sobre la observación electoral del Referendo por la Reforma Constitucional," Ojo Electoral, March 12, 2007. <http://www.ojoelectoral.org/noticias-detalle.php?noti=235>

<sup>4</sup> The EU Election Observation Mission said in its report: "the NGO Ojo Electoral, a civil association that has observed all the recent election processes in Venezuela, has stood out above the rest. ...[it] must be recognised as an important factor for the participation of all actors in the election process."

[http://www.eueomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE\\_UE\\_Venezuela\\_2006\\_final\\_eng.pdf](http://www.eueomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE_UE_Venezuela_2006_final_eng.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Final Report: Presidential Elections Venezuela 2006," European Union Election Observation Mission, 2006. [http://www.eueomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE\\_UE\\_Venezuela\\_2006\\_final\\_eng.pdf](http://www.eueomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE_UE_Venezuela_2006_final_eng.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> "Election Observation and Legitimacy of Venezuela's Parliamentary Elections," Greg Wilpert, Venezuelanalysis.com, December 19, 2005. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1533>

<sup>8</sup> "General Secretary Says OAS had a Problem with Opposition," Venezuelanalysis, December 26, 2005. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/1542>

<sup>9</sup> "Final Report: Presidential Elections Venezuela 2006," Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> "Preliminary OAS Observations on the Legislative Elections in Venezuela," Organization of American States Press Release, December 6, 2005. [http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press\\_releases/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=EOM-VE-04](http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press_releases/press_release.asp?sCodigo=EOM-VE-04)

<sup>11</sup> "Last Phase of the Venezuelan Recall Referendum" Carter Center Report, August 21, 2004. <http://www.embavenez-us.org/neworleans/index.php?pagina=news.php&nid=435>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## VENEZUELA'S LATEST LEGISLATION: THE 26 LAWS

In late 2006, lawmakers in Venezuela authorized President Chávez to issue decrees on certain strategic issues under an 18-month "enabling law."

On July 31, 2008, the final day of the 18-month period, the President issued 26 such laws. They were designed to reform public administration and improve various areas of the public sphere including social security, housing, agricultural production, the armed forces, banks, tourism, and consumer rights.



The 26 laws have been heavily scrutinized. They came under criticism from government opponents and opposition-controlled media outlets which argued that the laws resemble a set of constitutional reforms narrowly defeated by voters in a national referendum in late 2007.<sup>i</sup> The laws in fact are fundamentally different from those which were rejected by voters in the referendum, primarily because they leave the existing constitution intact. Justices of the Supreme Court of Venezuela confirmed that all of the laws decreed were indeed constitutional.<sup>ii</sup>

The opposition also claimed that the laws were not widely debated prior to their passage. However, the process of granting the President the power to temporarily issue decrees under an "enabling law" was only done after careful consultations with the public. It was then voted on and approved by the National Assembly, which is held accountable by voters.

The 26 laws were also debated at length prior to being passed. According to Elias Jaua, Minister of Agriculture and Land, the laws pertaining to agriculture, for example, "included more than a year of debate with specialists, functionaries, social groups, and discussions with cabinet ministers."<sup>iii</sup>

At any time, the laws can be altered or rescinded by the judiciary, the National Assembly, or through a national referendum called for by voters. The media, however, has incorrectly depicted the decrees as a "power grab" while failing to mention that the new legislation is incredibly progressive and aims to further democratize Venezuelan society. Some of the key

laws pertaining to social security, housing, agriculture, consumer rights and economic policy are discussed below.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY AND HOUSING**

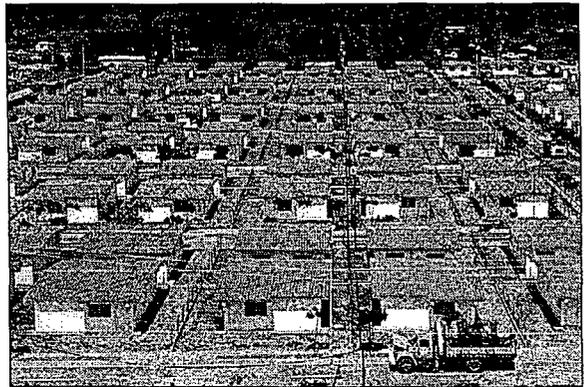
The “**Law of Partial Reform of the Law of Social Security**” was created to improve employer compliance in deducting 3% of employees’ salaries to fund a national social security system. Employers failing to comply with the law face sanctions, fines and interest on late payments. New provisions of the social security fund include the ability of workers to use their contributions toward house payments, and in the event of a death, the fund provides a funeral contribution.<sup>iv</sup>

In order to address the housing deficit in Venezuela and fulfill Article 82 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to housing, the National Housing Institute (INAVI) is being revamped under the “**Law of Restructuring of the National Institute of Housing.**” It creates a new system that reinforces housing as a part of social security and guarantees citizens access to dignified housing.<sup>v</sup>

INAVI will develop studies and projects for the Ministry of Housing and Habitat and propose incentives to promote new housing construction. Both public and private entities can participate in the housing projects, and each community in which a housing project is built has the right to participate in its construction by providing their labor and services.

The “**Law of Housing and Habitat Lending**” modifies the previous lending law in order to facilitate rapid housing growth. The changes include specific provisions in support of groups that have historically been discriminated against, such as the poor, the elderly, and minority communities.<sup>vi</sup>

Article 61 of the law specifies that up to 100% of the cost of housing will be covered with mortgage credits in order to make homeownership more affordable and accessible to all. Article 63 states that monthly housing payments cannot exceed 20% of a family’s total income. The poorest citizens will receive subsidies to meet their housing needs. The law also supports the rights of renters and the sanctioning of unlawful landlords.<sup>vii</sup>



## **AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY**

Venezuela still imports the majority of its food, despite efforts on the part of the Chávez administration to boost domestic production. There have been sporadic food shortages in the country, partly due to hoarding and speculation by some vendors. The need to continue increasing domestic food production has been reaffirmed by an alarming 83% rise in world food prices in the last three years.<sup>viii</sup>

The “**Organic Law of Agro-food Security and Sovereignty**” seeks to improve food security and foster more domestic food production as well as greater efficiency in food distribution, as mandated in Article 305 of the Constitution.<sup>ix</sup>

This law guarantees investment in food-related technology and transportation. The government will invest more resources for small and medium producers, and ensure the availability of agricultural supplies and inputs. Financing and credits will be awarded to primary producers, as well as distributors and other essential intermediaries in the food chain. The period allowed for the repayment of these credits is extended to 20 years. The government will also supervise the production, commercialization and distribution of food in order to protect consumers and ensure the growth of the nation's food system.

## **CONSUMER RIGHTS**

The “**Law for the Defense of People's Access to Goods and Services**” was issued to improve the legal protections enjoyed by consumers in Venezuela.<sup>x</sup> It prohibits surcharges for transactions made with credit cards and debit cards, and protects consumers against faulty products, price gouging, speculation, and market manipulation by vendors and wholesalers. The law strengthens the ability of consumers to file complaints against false or misleading advertising.

Article 91 of the law calls for comptroller committees of community councils to be formed to protect citizens from potential government waste, inefficiency, or corruption. More authority and power is given to these locally elected groups known as “community councils,” in order to further democratize government and ensure that governmental services are reaching communities efficiently.

## **ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION**

The “**Law for the Development of the Popular Economy**” was created to support a new socioeconomic model for the country that is based on solidarity-minded production.<sup>xi</sup> This notion of a “popular economy” aims to democratize development, and is based on projects organized by communities themselves. In addition, the creation and use of local currencies are encouraged in order to promote self-sufficiency and regional economic growth. Cooperatives can now also barter goods and services with each other, through “productive exchange units”.



The “**Law for the Promotion and Development of Small and Medium Industry and Units of Social Production**” was issued to promote inclusive development based on community needs and social justice. The law helps foster political, economic, and social stability by creating new forms of economic exchanges designed to satisfy collective needs.<sup>xii</sup>

It fosters the development of social production units (like cooperatives) and small and medium-sized businesses by providing training, financing, and technical assistance, as well as improved access to credit. Article 10 of the law provides these entities with full or partial exemption from national taxes.

## CONCLUSION

The 26 laws that President Chávez passed by decree make significant improvements in many areas including social security, housing, food security, consumers rights, and economic policy. Despite some claims to the contrary, the laws were debated at length by government officials, social groups, and experts prior to being finalized. They are progressive and aim to meet the needs and rights of citizens.

The laws on food security and agriculture will boost domestic food production, while improving infrastructure to increase access to safe and nutritious food. Housing laws are designed to spur new housing projects and recognize the right of all citizens to dignified housing. Consumer rights are strengthened through a legal framework and government accountability is being increased with the help of citizen comptrollers. The laws relating to economic policy support the transformation of the economy into a productive model which prioritizes human needs, strengthening collectives as well as small- and medium-sized businesses.

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<sup>i</sup> "New Decrees from Chávez Mirror Spurred Measures," Simon Romero, *New York Times*, August 5, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/06/world/americas/06venez.html?ref=world>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> "Chávez Signs 26 Law-Decrees on Final Day of Enabling Law Power," James Suggett, *Venezuelanalysis.com*, August 5, 2008. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/3691>

<sup>iv</sup> "Law of Partial Reform of the law of Social Security," Gobierno en Linea, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/LeyOrganicaSistemaSeguridadSocial.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> "Law of Restructuring of the National Institute of Housing," Gobierno en Linea, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/LeyReestructuracionInstitutoNacionalVivienda.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> "Law of Housing and Habitat Lending," Gobierno en Linea, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/LeydelRegimenPrestacionaldeViviendayHabitat.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> "World Bank tackles food emergency," BBC, April 14, 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7344892.stm>

<sup>ix</sup> "Organic Law of Agro-food Security and Sovereignty," Gobierno en Linea, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/LeydelRegimenPrestacionaldeViviendayHabitat.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> "Law for the Defense of People's Access to Goods and Services," Gobierno en Linea, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/LeydelRegimenPrestacionaldeViviendayHabitat.pdf>

<sup>xi</sup> "Law for the Development of the Popular Economy," Gobierno en Linea, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/LeyFomentoyDesarrollodelaEconomiaPopular.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> "Law for the Promotion and Development of Small and Medium Industry and Units of Social Production," Gobierno en Linea, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/LeyPromocionyDesarrolloPequenaMedianaIndustriaPropiedadSocial.pdf>



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## Venezuela's Social Missions: Improving the Lives of Millions

In the decade since President Hugo Chávez was first elected, Venezuela has experienced a remarkable 54% decrease in the proportion of households living in extreme poverty.<sup>1</sup> This progress was made possible by more than 30 government-funded "social missions" that improve living standards through local community participation. The goals of the missions are: improving access to quality education, nutritious food, health services, clean drinking water, and other basic infrastructures and services. The missions also promote environmental sustainability, rural development, indigenous peoples' rights, electoral reform, and socioeconomic transformation. Below you will find a detailed list of Venezuela's social missions and some important accomplishments.

<b>Key Accomplishments of the Bolivarian Social Missions</b>	
<b>Mission</b>	<b>Results</b>
Mission Robinson I	1.6 million Venezuelans became literate
Mission Robinson II	341,900 adults completed remedial primary schooling
Mission Ribas	450,500 adults completed remedial high school
Mission Mercal	11 million benefited from subsidized food markets
Mission Zamora	10.2 million acres redistributed for food production
Mission Barrio Adentro	Universal, comprehensive healthcare made available to all Venezuelans for the first time
Mission Miracle	1 million blind or visually impaired Latin Americans had their vision restored through free surgeries
Mission Che Guevara	670,000 citizens received job training and business skills, forming 10,000 cooperative businesses

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.

# The Missions

## Education

- Mission Robinson I & II – Teaches literacy and remedial basic education.
- Mission Ribas – Provides remedial high school courses.
- Mission Sucre – Greatly expands the country's higher education system to grant universal access to free university education.
- Mission Alma Mater – Builds new universities and learning spaces to accommodate the increasing number of students seeking higher education.
- Mission Ciencia – Creates university labs, offers graduate school scholarships and training in open source software.

## Culture

- Mission Cultura – Promotes cultural identity and community integration.
- Mission Música – Ensures access to music programs for all children.

## Environment

- Mission Revolución Energética – Distributes energy-saving fluorescent bulbs nationwide.
- Mission Piar – Develops environmentally-friendly mining policies and improves working conditions for miners.
- Mission Árbol – Recovers forests by planting trees.

## Food Security & Rural Development

- Mission Mercal – Creates subsidized food markets in low-income neighborhoods.
- Mission Zamora – Helps small-scale farmers and integrates them into Mission Mercal's distribution and the national economy.
- Mission Vuelta al Campo – Encourages poor and unemployed Venezuelans to learn farming and return to the countryside.
- Mission Guaicaipuro – Restores communal land titles and defends the rights of indigenous communities.

## Healthcare

- Mission Barrio Adentro I, II & III – Provides universal healthcare through an expanding network of health clinics, diagnostic facilities, rehabilitation centers, and hospitals. Additionally, existing hospitals are modernized and refurbished.
- Mission Barrio Adentro IV (Deportivo) – Promotes physical education and athletics in schools and communities.
- Mission Niños y Niñas del Barrio – Provides rehabilitation and support to at-risk youth who suffer from homelessness, exploitation, and other vulnerable situations.
- Mission Milagro – Provides free eye surgeries throughout Latin America to eradicate curable blindness.
- Mission Dr. José Gregorio Hernández – Nationwide census and diagnosis of disabilities and genetic diseases.
- Mission Sonrisa – Provides free comprehensive and rehabilitative dental care.

## Socioeconomic Transformation

- Mission Che Guevara – Offers technical education in areas such as agriculture, construction, and tourism, facilitating the formation of cooperatives.
- Mission Madres del Barrio – Helps reduce unintended pregnancies, lowers drug use among young people and provides aid in the form of monthly stipends to the poorest mothers.
- Mission 13 de Abril – Improves residential infrastructure and promotes the communal economy through social property.
- Mission Cristo – Aims to achieve zero poverty by 2021 through the effective synthesis and implementation of all the missions.

## Housing

- Mission Hábitat – Constructs new affordable housing communities that include social services, schools, and health clinics.
- Mission Villanueva – Replaces deteriorated homes with modern structures and builds new housing to meet increasing demand.

## **Education**

Due to the high level of poverty prior to the Bolivarian Revolution, many Venezuelans lacked access to educational institutions and were unable to complete schooling. To correct this problem, the government launched a series of educational missions. These missions are free, provide stipends to students, and promote community involvement.

**Mission Robinson I** was launched nationwide in July 2003 with the goal of eradicating illiteracy in Venezuela. The program was designed for people over the age of 15 that were unable to read and write. The results have been tremendous. Under Mission Robinson I, 1.6 million Venezuelans have learned to read and write, increasing the country's literacy rate to 96%.<sup>ii</sup> UNESCO special envoy María Luisa Jáuregui noted that "Venezuela is the first and only country to meet the commitments adopted by the region's governments in 2002 in Havana to drastically reduce illiteracy."<sup>iii</sup>

**Mission Robinson II** was instituted in order to provide elementary education for the newly-literate graduates of Mission Robinson I as well as other citizens who had not finished primary schooling. As of 2007, Mission Robinson II had graduated 341,900 students.<sup>iv</sup>

**Mission Ribas** educates adults who were unable to attend or complete high school. The remedial two-year program teaches Spanish, geography, history, mathematics, economics, foreign languages, and other electives. 450,500 students have graduated from this high school-level program as of 2007.<sup>v</sup>

## **Food Security and Rural Development**

When President Chávez began his first term in office, he inherited a food security crisis that was decades in the making. In 1999, half the population lived in poverty, and access to affordable food was a major problem. Prior governments had failed to implement effective land reforms or address the "Dutch disease" phenomenon that caused food and other imports to be cheaper than comparable domestic products. The artificial disparity is due to the influx of foreign currencies used to pay for Venezuelan oil. This situation made Venezuela the only net importer of agricultural products in Latin America.<sup>vi</sup>

Through **Mission Zamora**, over 10.2 million acres of arable land have been redistributed to small and medium-sized farming cooperatives in an effort to revitalize the country's agricultural economy and establish self-sufficiency in food production.<sup>vii</sup> The government also provides farmers with machinery, technical support, training, low-interest loans, and credits to ensure the success of the land reforms. Over the last ten years, corn production in Venezuela has more than doubled, and the country is on the path to achieving self-sufficiency in milk production within four years.<sup>viii</sup>

**Mission Mercal** was among the first of the social missions created. Its objective is to combat hunger and malnourishment through the development of a subsidized food distribution network. Small, medium, and large markets have been opened in poor and working class neighborhoods throughout the country. These markets sell high-quality produce, grains, meat, dairy, and other food items at discounts of up to 50%.<sup>ix</sup> The Mercal markets currently serve 11 million poor and middle class Venezuelans.<sup>x</sup> The success of Mission Mercal has contributed significantly to the dramatic drop in the rate of child malnourishment in Venezuela from its 1998 level of 21% to its current rate of 4%.<sup>xi</sup> Also, government-funded and community-run food pantries known as *Casas de Alimentación* feed close to a million of the neediest barrio residents everyday.<sup>xii</sup>

## Healthcare

In 1998, there were only 1,628 primary care physicians in all of Venezuela. Through the Barrio Adentro missions, with the help of Cuban and newly-trained Venezuelan doctors, there are now over 30,000 doctors dispersed throughout Venezuela's cities and towns.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Mission Barrio Adentro** was created in 2003 to provide free universal healthcare through a brand new network of over 1,600 health clinics, 600 diagnostic facilities, 600 rehabilitation centers, and 35 high tech medical centers. Barrio Adentro was launched in three stages: the first to deal with the lack of primary healthcare facilities, and then to improve advanced medical centers and hospitals. Barrio Adentro is overhauling the country's hospital network by providing new, state-of-the-art medical equipment to 42 existing hospitals, upgrading and expanding these facilities, and building new hospitals in regions which lacked sufficient facilities. Barrio Adentro has also made universal preventative healthcare possible in Venezuela for the first time in the nation's history. According to the Ministry of Health, 1,153 children's lives were saved in 2007 due to the Barrio Adentro mission.<sup>xiv</sup> As of April 2008, a total of over 80,000 lives have been saved in 5 years.<sup>xv</sup>

**Mission Milagro** is a humanitarian mission financed by Venezuela and conducted with the help of Cuban eye doctors. Its goal is to eradicate curable blindness in Venezuela and throughout Latin America. The program offers complimentary eye treatments such as cataract surgeries for the visually impaired, and has already helped close to one million blind or visually impaired people, who otherwise could not afford treatment.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Socioeconomic Transformation

Through **Mission Che Guevara**, participants are offered technical education in trades such as tourism, construction and agriculture, and learn how to run cooperative businesses. By August 2007, 670,000 people completed training and formed over 10,000 new cooperatives. Of those, 3,000 were in the agriculture sector, helping to increase the country's food production.<sup>xvii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Boletín de Indicadores No.3, Logros Sociales, Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Planificación y Desarrollo, May 2008, Venezuela's National Institute of Statistics.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> "Venezuela Declares Itself Illiteracy Free," Humberto Márquez, IPS News Agency, October 29, 2005.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/login.asp?redir=http://domino.ips.org/ips%5Ceng.nsf/vwWebMainView/A1D7D5E1462EE0C6C12570A900075525?OpenDocument>.

<sup>iv</sup> Boletín de Indicadores No.3. Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> "Land for People not for Profit in Venezuela," Gregory Wilpert, Venezuelanalysis, August 23, 2005.

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1310>

<sup>vii</sup> Alcances Misión Zamora, Instituto Nacional de Tierras, December 4, 2007.

<sup>viii</sup> "Food Production on the Rise," James Suggitt, Venezuelanalysis, July 22, 2008. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/3664>

<sup>ix</sup> "Mercal: Reducing Poverty and Creating National Food Sovereignty in Venezuela," Sarah Wagner, Venezuelanalysis, June 24, 2005. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1211>

<sup>x</sup> Aló Presidente, May 11, 2008

<sup>xi</sup> "Anuario del Sistema de Vigilancia Alimentaria y Nutricional, 2007," Instituto Nacional de Nutrición, June 2008.

<http://inn.gob.ve/pdf/sisvan/anuario2007.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela. [http://www.minci.gob.ve/reportajes/2/174229/las\\_casas\\_de.html](http://www.minci.gob.ve/reportajes/2/174229/las_casas_de.html)

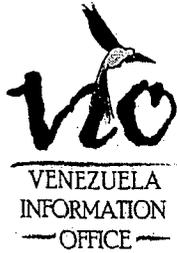
<sup>xiii</sup> Associated Press, "Chávez asegura que Venezuela tiene deuda con Cuba." October 1, 2007.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> "Social Justice in Venezuela: Fact Sheet" Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

<sup>xvi</sup> "2008 Year of Revision, Rectification, and Re-impulse of the Bolivarian Revolution" Hugo Chávez, Speech before the National Assembly, January 11, 2008.

<sup>xvii</sup> "Social Justice in Venezuela: Fact Sheet," Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.



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## **DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA: The 2008 Latinobarómetro Poll**

Latinobarómetro is a poll measuring attitudes toward democracy in Latin America that is conducted annually by the respected Chilean polling firm known by the same name. Its newest survey, released on November 14, 2008, contains many important findings about Venezuela.<sup>1</sup>

The numbers show a picture of a country in which democracy is strongly valued, confidence in democratic institutions is higher than in most of the region, and the rights of political participation are both enjoyed and taken seriously. These facts bring a level of detailed analysis to the political realities of Venezuela that is rarely available in the media.

### **DEMOCRACY**

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Latinobarómetro 2008 finds that Venezuela has the region's highest rate of support for democracy as the best system of government, and the second highest rate of satisfaction with the actual functioning of democracy. Satisfaction with democracy has shot up by 14 percentage points over a decade ago, when President Chávez was first elected. While Venezuela ranked two percentage points below the regional average on this issue in 1998, it is 12 points ahead of the regional average in 2008.

In the poll, Venezuelans were the most likely among all Latin Americans to view voting as the best way to affect political change. A full 80 percent held this view, compared to 55 percent in Chile. Venezuelans were by far the least likely to agree that it is impossible to influence political change, while Chileans were the most likely to agree. Meanwhile, though fifteen percent of Venezuelans said they had attended a protest, this country was the second-to-least likely to express the view that political change is best sought by protesting. This indicates a high level of confidence in official channels for political participation.

Accordingly, institutions are viewed as an essential to democracy. The survey found that Venezuelans were the second most likely in the region to agree that democracy cannot exist without political parties, and the third most likely to express confidence in political parties and to agree that political parties are "doing a good job." They were the third most likely to state that democracy cannot exist without congress. Venezuela is 8 percentage points above the regional average on this point, far ahead of countries like Chile (8<sup>th</sup>), Mexico (12<sup>th</sup>), and Brazil (15<sup>th</sup>). Venezuela's confidence in the congress is also high, ranked third in the region, far above Argentina (10<sup>th</sup>), Colombia (11<sup>th</sup>), and Costa Rica (12<sup>th</sup>).

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## **THE ECONOMY**

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Insights into the economy of Venezuela registered in the 2008 Latinobarómetro poll also challenge many of the dominant assumptions about the country that appear in the media.

For example, among Latin Americans, Venezuelans are the least likely to express concern about the effect of rising food prices on family wellbeing. They expressed second highest rate of confidence in the banks, and the third highest rate of confidence in private companies. Venezuelans stood out in the region for being the least likely to agree that tax evasion is morally justifiable. The expectation that economic conditions would improve – both for individuals and for the country as a whole – within the next year was measured as fourth highest in the region. According to the poll, concerns about the economy did not trump political ones in Venezuela; respondents there were the least likely in the region to say that they would support an authoritarian government if it solved economic problems.

One of the most important findings of Latinobarómetro is that Venezuela leads the region in the belief that democracy has helped to diminish social inequalities, narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. Accordingly, fewer people in Venezuela than any other country believe that inequalities have merely stayed the same under democratic governance.

## **WHAT IT ALL MEANS**

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As one of the longest-standing democracies in the region, Venezuela has undergone significant political shifts. In the last decade, successive electoral victories for President Chávez have put the country on a new course that has seen rising rates of preference for democracy as a system of government as well as higher satisfaction with how democracy actually functions. Confidence in the institutions essential to democracy – such as political parties, congress, and the electoral system – is also comparatively quite high.

Perhaps part of this satisfaction comes from the fact that Venezuelans, more than citizens in any other country in Latin America, believe that democracy has served to diminish social inequalities. This is no small achievement in the region of the world with the widest gap between the rich and the poor.

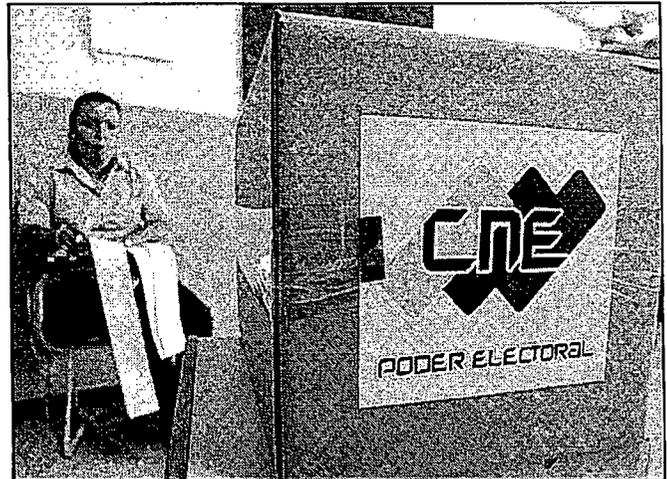
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<sup>1</sup> Informe Latinobarómetro 2008. November 14, 2004.  
[http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME\\_LATINOBAROMETRO\\_2008.pdf](http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME_LATINOBAROMETRO_2008.pdf)

## Venezuela's 2008 Regional Elections

On November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008, millions of Venezuelans will go to the polls to elect state and municipal authorities. This will be the 11<sup>th</sup> national electoral process to be held in Venezuela since President Hugo Chávez was first elected in December 1998, and as with previous elections, they are expected to come under much scrutiny both nationally and internationally.

A total of 603 officials will be elected on November 23<sup>rd</sup>: 22 state governors, 328 mayors, 233 state legislative council members, 13 council members for the Caracas Metropolitan area, and 7 members of the Alto Apure District Council. While political parties present single candidates for the election of mayors and governors, for the election of the various council members they present both single candidates and lists of candidates (60% of these are single candidates and 40% are from parties' lists of candidates).<sup>1</sup>



In Venezuelan elections, as in elections in a number of other Latin American countries, candidates that are on party lists are elected by proportional representation. This means that if, for instance, a party is asked to present a list of 10 candidates for 10 positions on a regional legislative council and the list wins 60% of the vote then the 6 first candidates on the list will have positions on the Council.

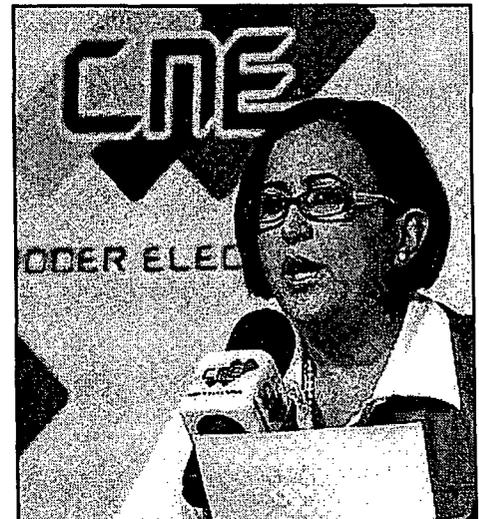
Although not as politically decisive as Venezuela's last two elections (the 2006 presidential elections and the 2007 Constitutional Referendum), these elections are expected to draw significant voter turnout. One reason for this is that the political opposition to the Chávez government is making a significant effort to mobilize its supporters by presenting these elections as a key battle in their struggle to remove President Chávez from office. In contrast, during the run-up to the previous regional elections in 2004, much of the opposition called on their supporters to abstain in an effort to discredit the Venezuelan electoral system, which they claimed was "fraudulent" after their defeat in the August 2004 referendum on the mandate of President Chávez. These claims became increasingly unsustainable after electoral observation missions from the European Union, the OAS and the Carter Center repeatedly expressed satisfaction with the transparency, fairness, and inclusive nature of Venezuela's electoral system.<sup>2</sup>

Another reason that voter turnout is expected to be high in the coming regional elections is that the country's electoral system has undergone significant improvements since the last regional race was held in 2004. It is worthwhile to examine some of these improvements more closely, as they have helped increase voter participation and provide a political landscape that is much more representative of society as a whole.

## **ENSURING GENDER BALANCE IN ELECTIONS**

As in most countries around the world, women have historically been underrepresented in Venezuelan politics. In 1998, the Venezuelan legislature passed a Law of Political Participation requiring all political parties to have an equal amount of women and men on party candidate lists. The measure was blocked however by a Venezuelan court the next year. Nevertheless, as progressive forces began to play an increasingly important political role after the approval of the 1999 Constitution, more and more women began to be elected to office. Thus, while in 2000 only 10.9% of the country's elected positions were in the hands of women, by 2005 the proportion of women had increased to 26.9%. However, many felt that this still was not enough. Over the following years a broad coalition of women of all political persuasions worked together to lobby in defense of the principle of gender parity in elections.

Tibisay Lucena, the first woman appointed to the presidency of Venezuela's electoral authority – the National Electoral Council, or CNE – has played an instrumental role in this struggle. She advocated for the establishment of candidate selection norms that require political parties to present single candidates and lists of candidates for all state and metropolitan council member elections, in which the principle of gender parity is applied – in other words, there must be an equal amount of male and female candidates. Additionally, when lists of various candidates are submitted by each party, they must have approximately 50% female candidates, whose names are alternated with those of the male candidates in the list. This system – called *alternabilidad* in Spanish – prevents parties from relegating female candidates to the end of lists, a practice which can greatly diminish their chances of being elected under the proportional voting system.



These principles are being applied for the first time ever in Venezuela's upcoming regional elections. Thus, the CNE has calculated that in the current elections the gender breakdown of candidates in the state, metropolitan, and district councils is 49.75% women and 50.25% men, as opposed to 18% women and 82% men in the previous regional elections in 2004.

## **ENHANCING VOTER PARTICIPATION**

Over the last few years, voter participation in Venezuelan elections has increased significantly, and in large part thanks to measures adopted by the CNE.<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand, it has carried out extensive voter registration campaigns that contributed to a 64% increase in the number of registered voters between 1998 and 2007. Parallel to this effort, the CNE has made voting much more accessible to millions of Venezuelans by adding new voting stations in poor neighborhoods and rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

According to CNE statistics, from 2003 to 2008, the number of voting stations in the country increased by 32.6% (from 8853 to 11,455 stations).

It should be noted that these advances have benefited all Venezuelans by increasing democratic participation. In particular, though, they have helped to empower the less privileged citizens in poor areas and Afro-Venezuelan and Indigenous communities that have traditionally been left on the sidelines of Venezuelan politics.

## **GUARANTEEING FAIRNESS AND TRANSPARENCY**

The CNE has also greatly modernized Venezuela's elections infrastructure by putting into place a fully computerized voting system that guarantees voter privacy and is completely auditable by all parties involved in the electoral process. Unlike many electronic voting systems, Venezuela's voting machines produce paper receipts confirming each vote cast. These receipts are stored in secure boxes and can be used as a check against the electronic election results.<sup>5</sup>

In 1998, only 58% of the Venezuela's voting system was electronic. Today, 99.5% of voting centers are fully computerized.

As an additional guarantee, and in order to bolster confidence in the voting system, the CNE has invited independent observers to monitor each step of the electoral process. Venezuela's elections in 2004, 2005 and 2006 were observed by missions from the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union and the Carter Center.

In the 2008 elections on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, as was the case during the 2007 constitutional referendum, the highly respected non-partisan electoral observation group *Ojo Electoral* ("Electoral Eye") will have observers present throughout the country. Additionally, the CNE has invited electoral observers from the electoral authorities of various Latin American nations as well as from a number of foreign organizations from the US, Europe and Latin America. According to the Caracas newspaper *El Universal*, the CNE expects that some 130 foreign observers will be present throughout the country to witness the voting on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.cne.gov.ve/elecciones/regionales2008/documentos/Cuadro\\_General\\_de\\_cargos\\_2008.pdf](http://www.cne.gov.ve/elecciones/regionales2008/documentos/Cuadro_General_de_cargos_2008.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> "Final Report: Presidential Elections Venezuela 2006," European Union Election Observation Mission, 2006. [http://www.eueomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE\\_UE\\_Venezuela\\_2006\\_final\\_eng.pdf](http://www.eueomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE_UE_Venezuela_2006_final_eng.pdf)

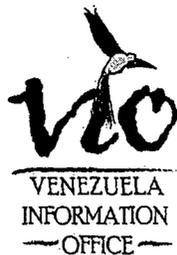
<sup>3</sup> Venezuelan Missions web page, <http://www.misionvenezuela.gov.ve/11Identidad/11Derechoexistir.htm> La Misión

<sup>4</sup> "Poder electoral democratiza distribución de centros de votación en todo el país," CNE Press Release, February 24, 2006. <http://www.cne.gob.ve/noticiaDetallada.php?id=3622>

<sup>5</sup> Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Hearing on Venezuela, June 24, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> "About 130 foreign observers in local elections," *El Universal*, November 12, 2008.

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/11/12/en\\_pol\\_esp\\_about-130-foreign-ob\\_12A2124325.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/11/12/en_pol_esp_about-130-foreign-ob_12A2124325.shtml)



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## VENEZUELA'S 2008 REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Regional elections held in Venezuela on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 have been portrayed in the U.S. media as a defeat for the government of President Hugo Chávez, when in fact the results strongly favor his party, the PSUV. The vast majority of state governorships and mayoralties, including those in many strategic parts of the country such as the Orinoco Oil Belt, remain under pro-government leadership.

The majority of Venezuelan citizens voted for candidates aligned with the Chávez government. Due to this broad popular support, the PSUV and its allies won 77 percent of governorships and 80 percent of mayoralties. Even in Caracas, where the overarching metropolitan mayoralty went to the opposition, residents of the city's most populous district of Libertador elected a PSUV candidate as their local representative.

Voter turnout in the regional elections was a record-setting 65 percent. The electoral process was the 11th to occur in Venezuela in about a decade, and was deemed "peaceful and exemplary" by OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza. He commented that the process was a powerful expression of the maturity of the country's democratic institutions as well as the trust that Venezuelans have in them. The National Electoral Council again proved its reputation for efficient and accurate electoral oversight by posting official results online less than 24 hours after the polls closed.

U.S. media coverage - including editorials in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* - has ignored the facts enumerated below, points which are essential to understanding contemporary political realities in Venezuela.

### **Most Governors and Mayors Support the Chávez Government**

The electoral map of Venezuela shows that pro-government PSUV candidates gained the majority of offices throughout the country. They won 17 out of 22 governorships, or 77 percent of the total. This is more than was claimed by PSUV governors and allies before the 2008 regional elections, at which point they held 15 states out of 22. PSUV candidates and allies also won mayoral posts in 80 percent of municipalities throughout the nation. Meanwhile, in at least four out of the five states where opposition governors were elected, the majority of mayoralties went to the PSUV (Zulia is still to be decided). This is true in Carabobo, where an opposition governor won, but at least 11 out of 14 of the new municipal mayors are members of the PSUV, including that of Puerto Cabello, a major port city that is important to the oil industry. (Source: National Electoral Council, Embassy of Venezuela)

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### **Most Venezuelans Live Under Pro-Chávez Local Leaders**

As has been true for nearly a decade, the majority of Venezuela's population will continue to live in states with pro-Chávez governors. This is currently true for 57 percent of the country's population, while a smaller amount - 43 percent - have opposition governors. Some municipalities shifted to PSUV leadership by choosing a progressive leader for the first time during the tenure of the Chávez administration, including Valencia, an important industrial and manufacturing city in the coastal state of Carabobo. (Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Diario El Carabobeño)

### **The PSUV Achieved Victory in Strategic Areas of the Country**

All states in Venezuela with strategic natural resources and industries elected PSUV candidates for governor, with the exception of Zulia in the West. This means that pro-government leadership prevailed in the oil-rich states of Anzoátegui, Barinas, Bolívar, Monagas, and Delta Amacuro, some of which encompass the lucrative Orinoco Oil Belt. The state of Bolívar, in particular, also hosts the country's other important basic industries: hydroelectricity, aluminum, steel, iron, and petrochemicals. A majority of the mayoral races in these states also went to PSUV candidates. The PSUV won mayoral races in 15 out of 21 municipalities in Anzoátegui, at least seven out of 11 in Bolívar, at least eight of 12 in Barinas, at least 12 of 13 in Monagas, and three out of four in Delta Amacuro. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Pro-Government Candidates Won by Wide Margins**

In races for state governors, the opposition's five victories were claimed by far smaller margins than those earned by the PSUV, which clearly dominated in the remaining 17 states. This is a key difference. Opposition candidates won by margins of just 10 percentage points or less in four of those states (as low as 1.3% in Tachira and 3% in Carabobo), and won by 15 percentage points in the fifth state (Nueva Esparta). In contrast, the 17 pro-government victories were more decisive overall. Candidates supporting the government won by roughly 50 percentage points in two states, 30 percentage points in five states, 20 percentage points in four states, and 5 to 10 percent in six more states. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Residents of the Largest Caracas Municipality Voted for the PSUV**

Although the mayor for metropolitan Caracas went to the opposition, Libertador, the city's most heavily populated district - home to 1.7 million residents - elected the PSUV's municipal mayoral candidate Jorge Rodríguez. Libertador is by far the largest of the five urban districts in Caracas. The PSUV won this election by a wide margin of 12 percent, earning 106,487 more votes than the opposition's candidate. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Even in Opposition-Controlled States, Key Municipalities Went to the PSUV**

The assertion that nearly half the country will be under the leadership of the opposition is incorrect. In states where the governorships went to the opposition, a large number of the mayoral seats went to PSUV candidates or their allies. The opposition won the governorship in Carabobo, Tachira, Nueva Esparta, Zulia, and Miranda. In the state of Carabobo, the opposition only managed to win two of the mayoral races, while the PSUV won 11 mayoral races. In the state of Nueva Esparta, 6 of the 11 mayoral races went to the PSUV. In Tachira, the PSUV won at least 15 of 29 mayoral races. In Miranda, they won at least 14 of 21 races. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Venezuela's Electoral Authority Handled Record Voter Turnout**

The regional elections saw a record-setting 65.5 percent voter turnout. Of the 16.8 million registered voters in Venezuela, roughly 11 million went to the polls. This is a record for the country, and likely among the highest rates of voter turnout in local elections anywhere in the hemisphere. Despite this, the National Electoral Council (CNE) managed the influx at the polls and made results of the voting available online through its website just hours after all of the 11,297 polling stations closed. This was made possible by the electronic voting machines used in Venezuela, which have been praised as among the most advanced and accurate in the world. The CNE presents results broken down by candidate for each state and municipality in an easily accessible format. (Source: [Embassy of Venezuela](#), [National Electoral Council](#))

Unfortunately, despite the extensive records available on the CNE website, many media outlets in the U.S. have failed to report accurately on the results of the regional elections. One example is the claim made in a *Wall Street Journal* article and a *New York Times* editorial on November 25th that more than half of Venezuela is under opposition control, which, according to the official statistics presented here, is inaccurate and misleading.



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## VENEZUELA'S 2008 REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Regional elections held in Venezuela on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 have been portrayed in the U.S. media as a defeat for the government of President Hugo Chávez, when in fact the results strongly favor his party, the PSUV. The vast majority of state governorships and mayoralties, including those in many strategic parts of the country such as the Orinoco Oil Belt, remain under pro-government leadership.

The majority of Venezuelan citizens voted for candidates aligned with the Chávez government. Due to this broad popular support, the PSUV and its allies won 77 percent of governorships and 80 percent of mayoralties. Even in Caracas, where the overarching metropolitan mayoralty went to the opposition, residents of the city's most populous district of Libertador elected a PSUV candidate as their local representative.

Voter turnout in the regional elections was a record-setting 65 percent. The electoral process was the 11th to occur in Venezuela in about a decade, and was deemed "peaceful and exemplary" by OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza. He commented that the process was a powerful expression of the maturity of the country's democratic institutions as well as the trust that Venezuelans have in them. The National Electoral Council again proved its reputation for efficient and accurate electoral oversight by posting official results online less than 24 hours after the polls closed.

U.S. media coverage - including editorials in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* - has ignored the facts enumerated below, points which are essential to understanding contemporary political realities in Venezuela.

### **Most Governors and Mayors Support the Chávez Government**

The electoral map of Venezuela shows that pro-government PSUV candidates gained the majority of offices throughout the country. They won 17 out of 22 governorships, or 77 percent of the total. This is more than was claimed by PSUV governors and allies before the 2008 regional elections, at which point they held 15 states out of 22. PSUV candidates and allies also won mayoral posts in 80 percent of municipalities throughout the nation. Meanwhile, in at least four out of the five states where opposition governors were elected, the majority of mayoralties went to the PSUV (Zulia is still to be decided). This is true in Carabobo, where an opposition governor won, but at least 11 out of 14 of the new municipal mayors are members of the PSUV, including that of Puerto Cabello, a major port city that is important to the oil industry. (Source: [National Electoral Council](#), [Embassy of Venezuela](#))

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### **Most Venezuelans Live Under Pro-Chávez Local Leaders**

As has been true for nearly a decade, the majority of Venezuela's population will continue to live in states with pro-Chávez governors. This is currently true for 57 percent of the country's population, while a smaller amount - 43 percent - have opposition governors. Some municipalities shifted to PSUV leadership by choosing a progressive leader for the first time during the tenure of the Chávez administration, including Valencia, an important industrial and manufacturing city in the coastal state of Carabobo. (Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Diario El Carabobeño)

### **The PSUV Achieved Victory in Strategic Areas of the Country**

All states in Venezuela with strategic natural resources and industries elected PSUV candidates for governor, with the exception of Zulia in the West. This means that pro-government leadership prevailed in the oil-rich states of Anzoátegui, Barinas, Bolívar, Monagas, and Delta Amacuro, some of which encompass the lucrative Orinoco Oil Belt. The state of Bolívar, in particular, also hosts the country's other important basic industries: hydroelectricity, aluminum, steel, iron, and petrochemicals. A majority of the mayoral races in these states also went to PSUV candidates. The PSUV won mayoral races in 15 out of 21 municipalities in Anzoátegui, at least seven out of 11 in Bolívar, at least eight of 12 in Barinas, at least 12 of 13 in Monagas, and three out of four in Delta Amacuro. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Pro-Government Candidates Won by Wide Margins**

In races for state governors, the opposition's five victories were claimed by far smaller margins than those earned by the PSUV, which clearly dominated in the remaining 17 states. This is a key difference. Opposition candidates won by margins of just 10 percentage points or less in four of those states (as low as 1.3% in Tachira and 3% in Carabobo), and won by 15 percentage points in the fifth state (Nueva Esparta). In contrast, the 17 pro-government victories were more decisive overall. Candidates supporting the government won by roughly 50 percentage points in two states, 30 percentage points in five states, 20 percentage points in four states, and 5 to 10 percent in six more states. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Residents of the Largest Caracas Municipality Voted for the PSUV**

Although the mayor for metropolitan Caracas went to the opposition, Libertador, the city's most heavily populated district - home to 1.7 million residents - elected the PSUV's municipal mayoral candidate Jorge Rodríguez. Libertador is by far the largest of the five urban districts in Caracas. The PSUV won this election by a wide margin of 12 percent, earning 106,487 more votes than the opposition's candidate. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Even in Opposition-Controlled States, Key Municipalities Went to the PSUV**

The assertion that nearly half the country will be under the leadership of the opposition is incorrect. In states where the governorships went to the opposition, a large number of the mayoral seats went to PSUV candidates or their allies. The opposition won the governorship in Carabobo, Tachira, Nueva Esparta, Zulia, and Miranda. In the state of Carabobo, the opposition only managed to win two of the mayoral races, while the PSUV won 11 mayoral races. In the state of Nueva Esparta, 6 of the 11 mayoral races went to the PSUV. In Tachira, the PSUV won at least 15 of 29 mayoral races. In Miranda, they won at least 14 of 21 races. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Venezuela's Electoral Authority Handled Record Voter Turnout**

The regional elections saw a record-setting 65.5 percent voter turnout. Of the 16.8 million registered voters in Venezuela, roughly 11 million went to the polls. This is a record for the country, and likely among the highest rates of voter turnout in local elections anywhere in the hemisphere. Despite this, the National Electoral Council (CNE) managed the influx at the polls and made results of the voting available online through its website just hours after all of the 11,297 polling stations closed. This was made possible by the electronic voting machines used in Venezuela, which have been praised as among the most advanced and accurate in the world. The CNE presents results broken down by candidate for each state and municipality in an easily accessible format. (Source: Embassy of Venezuela, National Electoral Council)

Unfortunately, despite the extensive records available on the CNE website, many media outlets in the U.S. have failed to report accurately on the results of the regional elections. One example is the claim made in a *Wall Street Journal* article and a *New York Times* editorial on November 25th that more than half of Venezuela is under opposition control, which, according to the official statistics presented here, is inaccurate and misleading.



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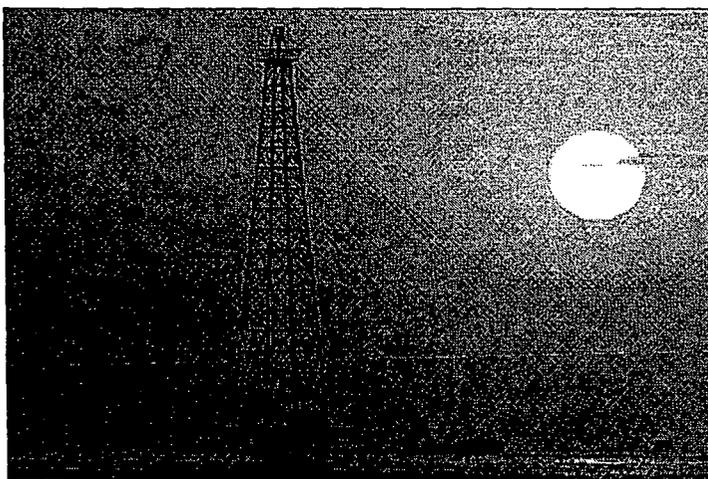
## THE IMPACT OF OIL PRICES ON THE VENEZUELAN ECONOMY: 2008-2009

As an oil-exporting country for almost 100 years, Venezuela is very much affected by the volatility of oil prices. It is for this reason that, in 1959, then Minister of Energy Juan Pablo Perez Alfonso approached the countries of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait to suggest the creation of a mechanism to stabilize oil prices and consequently the management of government revenues. By studying the oil market closely, OPEC members determine if it is well supplied or if additional production is required, while also attempting to avoid unnecessary market floods. In this way, producers and owners of the resource can be assured a fair return on their investment while offering fair prices to consumers.

OPEC managed to maintain the stability of oil prices during 2006 and the first half of 2007, when oil averaged between \$62 and \$66 per barrel. However, it lost the ability to keep prices steady in July 2007. This date coincides with the emergence of the first indicators of the U.S. financial crisis. Financial speculators were increasingly turning to the main commodities markets including oil, and this caused the price of crude to jump sharply in the second half of 2007 to \$83 per barrel. Even as all indicators showed that the oil market was well supplied, prices continued to increase throughout early 2008, providing evidence of a speculative bubble in which increased oil prices were a response to oil futures markets instead of actual demand. Venezuela has consequently advocated for lowered production by OPEC in order to regain a certain balance in the oil market.<sup>1</sup>

The sharp decrease in oil prices in early November 2008 was predicted by Venezuela, with the understanding that the speculative bubble would eventually burst and bring oil prices toward a more realistic rate for producers and consumers. Oil prices are still in the process of stabilizing as of this writing (mid November 2008).

Venezuela, however, has significant experience in dealing with the fluctuations in the oil market. Considering that approximately 45% of national revenues come from the oil industry, the country has become adept at setting projected oil prices in a manner that limits the impact of fluctuations on the national budget.



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When the 2008 budget was calculated, the average price of Venezuelan crude was approximately \$55 per barrel. Officials therefore decided to estimate average annual prices of \$35 per barrel. After the year 2008 closed with average prices of \$97.86 per barrel the decision was made to base the 2009 budget on the relatively conservative rate of \$60 per barrel.<sup>2</sup>

Windfall oil revenues obtained by the government of Venezuela in 2008 were invested in the social and economic development of the country. This was done through approvals granted during the year. In 2009, though, the national budget accounts for more of these investments ahead of time, therefore boosting official spending and thus allowing for greater transparency.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the government's expected income from oil in 2008 had already surpassed predictions for the year by October, putting total revenues at over 100% of projections. This will give Venezuela a strong cushion should prices drop further during 2009.

Oxford Analytica recently confirmed this view in its report on the outlook for Venezuela: "the evidence does not seem to indicate that Venezuela's economy is under immediate threat from declining oil prices. Moreover, the government seems likely to be able to continue its high levels of social spending in 2009."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "OPEC Agrees to Cut Production Quotas as Price Slumps," Maher Chmatyelli and Margot Habiby, Bloomberg, October 24, 2008. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601102&sid=an0jepVxWzQU&refer=uk>

<sup>2</sup> "Venezuela budgets \$60/barrel oil next year – report," Thomson Financial News, October 15, 2008. <http://www.forbes.com/afxnewslimited/feeds/afx/2008/10/15/afx5557544.html>

<sup>3</sup> "Venezuela's 2009 Budget Plans Increased Social Spending and Stable Growth," James Suggett, Venezuelanalysis, October 24, 2008. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/3896>

<sup>4</sup> "Venezuela: Short-term economic collapse improbable," Oxford Analytica, November 12, 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/11/12/business/12oxan-VENBUD.php>



## Referendum on an Amendment to the Venezuelan Constitution

On February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 a referendum will be held in which Venezuelans will vote on whether or not to modify 5 articles of the national Constitution that would allow elected officials to run for reelection more than once. In its present form, the 1999 Constitution of Venezuela does not allow elected officials to serve more than two consecutive terms in office.

The specific question which will be voted on is as follows:

*"Do you approve of amending articles 160, 162, 174, 192, and 230 of the Constitution of the Republic, as proposed by the National Assembly, which would expand the political rights of the people with the aim of allowing any citizen who holds a publicly elected office to be nominated as a candidate for the same office, for the constitutionally established term, exclusively depending on their election via popular vote?"*

### Comparison of the Current Articles and the Modifications Proposed in the Amendment

Actual Language	Language Proposed in the Amendment
Art. 160: The governor will be elected for a period of 4 years by the majority of voters. The governor can be reelected immediately after and for only one more term.	Art. 160: The governor will be elected for a period of 4 years by the majority of voters. The governor can be reelected.
Art. 162: State legislators will be elected and reelected for 2 consecutive terms maximum.	Art. 162: State legislators will be elected and reelected.
Art. 174: Mayors will be elected for a term of 4 years by the majority of voters and can be reelected immediately after and for only one more term.	Art. 174: Mayors will be elected for a term of 4 years by the majority of voters and can be reelected.
Art. 192: Legislators of the National Assembly will serve 5 years in exercise of their duties, and can be reelected immediately after and for only one more term.	Art. 192: Legislators of the National Assembly will serve 5 years in exercise of their duties, and can be reelected.

Art. 230: The term of the president of the Republic is 6 years and can be reelected immediately after and for only one more term.

Art. 230: The term of the president of the Republic is 6 years and can be reelected.

Approval of the amendment would signify that the president, governors, mayors, legislators, and any other elected officials, would be able to run for office indefinitely, and that their reelection would depend exclusively on the approval of voters.

### **Heated Debate Around the Referendum**

Opponents of the constitutional amendment argue that a similar reform was proposed in 2007, and was rejected by voters. In fact, though, the previous constitutional reform proposal involved a much broader spectrum of modifications to the Constitution. It would have affected 69 of the 350 articles comprising the 1999 Constitution, or slightly less than 20 percent of the legislation. Though there was a proposal to remove the restrictions on running for presidential reelection, it was merely one among many proposed modifications. This package of reforms was narrowly defeated by 51% to 49% in December 2007. The referendum which will be held on February 15<sup>th</sup> focuses solely on the question of term limits, and if approved, would remove the term limits imposed on all elected officials, not just the president.

As outlined in the 1999 Constitution, reforms may be proposed by either the President of the Republic, the National Assembly, or 15% of registered voters organized through petitioning. In this instance, the National Assembly proposed the amendment that will be held to a vote. 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. Any changes approved must then be voted on by citizens in a national referendum held no more than 30 days later.

Critics say that a vote on removing term limits is anti-democratic. Proponents of the measure meanwhile argue that the amendment itself, if approved, will have uncontested democratic legitimacy given that it will have the support of the majority of Venezuelan voters. They point out that any reforms to the Constitution can only be ratified if supported by a majority of the voting population. In addition, they argue that removing term limits provides more accountability in a democratic system of governance because elected officials would have more incentive to deliver results in a second term of office than they do currently. Regardless of the result, officials will continue to be tested during regular elections, and citizens will maintain the right to revoke their mandate in the middle of a term through petitioning. This measure of accountability, codified in the 1999 Constitution, provides the voting public with a unique revocatory referendum procedure that is characteristic of Venezuela's system of "participatory democracy" and enables the electorate to cut short the term of any elected official.

## **What the Polls Say**

Many recent public opinion polls regarding the February 15<sup>th</sup> referendum indicate that the proposed constitutional amendment has majority support. In a survey conducted by the Venezuelan Institute for Data Analysis (IVAD) from January 13<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup>, 47.5 percent of respondents indicated support for the amendment, while 40.4 percent were opposed. Another 12.1 percent said they were either not sure or would not vote. The IVAD was conducted with a pool of 1,200 Venezuelan adults, and had a margin of error of 2.4 percent.

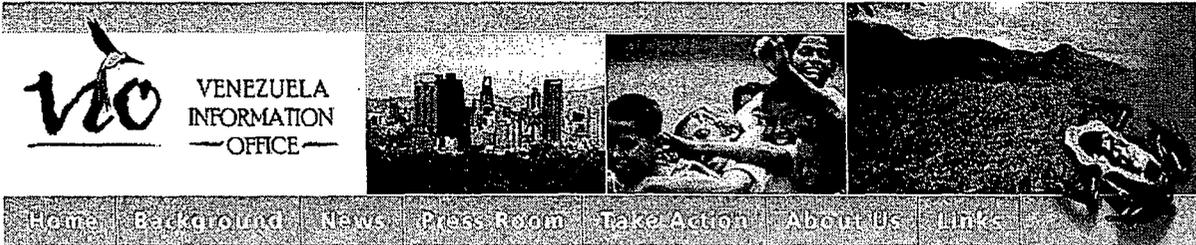
Another poll by the Social Investigations Group (GIS), which surveyed 2,500 Venezuelans in mid-January, found that 55 percent of respondents supported the amendment while 40 percent did not.

Datanálisis, a polling firm which is widely seen as sympathetic to the political opposition in Venezuela, has reported that in their survey of 1,300 Venezuelans, 51.4 percent indicated support for the amendment, while 48.1 percent were opposed.

## **Conclusion**

While polls suggest that the administration of President Hugo Chávez and other proponents of the upcoming constitutional amendment will not claim a landslide victory, they do suggest that the amendment will pass. The results of the 2007 referendum on a package of constitutional reforms, which the Chávez administration lost by a margin of less than two percent, were recognized and respected by the president and his supporters. In an interview with CNN En Español on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, Chávez again indicated his readiness to accept any electoral result, saying "if we lose, we lose." Many hope that the opposition and government supporters alike will follow suit and that the voting will take place in an atmosphere of peace and calm.

## **Part II: Press Releases**



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### Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 5, 2008

Contact: Olivia Gombri, Venezuela Information Office, 301-613-4767

#### Democracy in Venezuela Safe Under New Laws, VIO Says

The Venezuela Information Office (VIO) asserts that a set of 26 new laws passed by presidential decree one month ago on August 5th, 2008, do not undermine the strong democratic institutions and norms of Venezuela, and are in accordance with the constitution approved by voters in a national referendum in 1999.

"The new laws simply enhance many of the values for which the Chávez administration stands and for which people have repeatedly elected it, such as citizen involvement in government, human rights, security and national sovereignty, and a fair economy," said Olivia Gombri, Executive Director of the VIO.

The laws have sparked debate in Venezuela, where some have questioned their constitutionality by petitioning to bring them before the Organization of American States (OAS). However, OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza has frequently affirmed that democracy is "in full force" in Venezuela, and has pointed out that the role of the OAS is not to sanction countries.

The 26 new laws differ significantly from the proposal put to voters last year. They are technical in nature, and aim to increase government efficiency in the areas of food supply, consumer rights and credit, collective enterprise, and national security, among others.

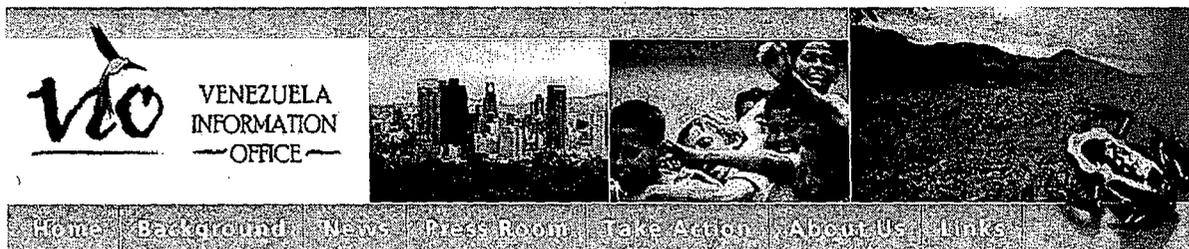
Debates about the laws passed on August 5th demonstrate that Venezuela's political life is a vibrant one, full of open public debate in the media and in civil society. This vibrancy has been demonstrated repeatedly in elections under President Chávez, when up to 75 percent of citizens have turned out to vote. The constitution also allows voters to petition to hold a recall referendum on the current president at any time, a process that was carried out successfully in 2004.

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### Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 18, 2008

Contact: Olivia Gombri, Venezuela Information Office, 301-613-4767

#### The Truth Suffers in Human Rights Watch Report on Venezuela

The Venezuela Information Office condemns the new Human Rights Watch report on Venezuela released today as a biased and politicized attack that should be regarded with suspicion in the context of the recent deterioration in diplomatic relations between Venezuela and the Bush administration.

Human Rights Watch wrongly claims that the democratic government of President Chavez "flout[s] human rights principles," ignoring its tremendous progress on extending the most fundamental of human rights to all citizens, such as food, education, and health. In the region as a whole, Venezuela compares favorably with other countries on human rights issues.

"The report is limited in its analysis of the Venezuelan situation, and runs contrary to the findings of other organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, that have highlighted the extension of universal human rights under Chavez. It reads like the talking points of Venezuela's discredited opposition," said Olivia Gombri, Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office in Washington.

Human Rights Watch focuses on the issues of political discrimination, the separation of powers, and the media in Venezuela, but misrepresents the realities of all three, taking what are at best isolated incidents and portraying them as common occurrences. Rather than a fact-based analysis, the report promotes a discourse on Venezuela similar to that deployed by the Bush administration and should not be taken seriously. For a full analysis, [click here](#).

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### Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 20, 2008

Contact: Olivia Gombri, Venezuela Information Office, 301-613-4767

#### Venezuela Information Office Statement on McCain Palin TV Ad

The Venezuela Information Office condemns a recent television advertisement released by the McCain-Palin campaign as a desperate attempt at fear-mongering through the demonization of Venezuela and its democratically elected President, Hugo Chávez.

The images and words of President Chávez were taken out of context and used as a baseless attack against Venezuela and its legitimate foreign policy positions, which are themselves the result of continued antagonism by the Bush Administration. President Chávez has repeatedly stated that he desires dialogue with the U.S. and will renew relations with the next administration, whomever is elected, as long as mutual respect exists.

Venezuela remains a stable source of energy for the American people, and trade relations have not been affected by the deterioration in diplomatic relations with the Bush administration. Chávez has guaranteed that Venezuela will remain a steady business partner for the US, and that it is only the US that can change this relationship.

It is offensive to the people of both nations that this campaign advertisement, in an attempt to garner votes, would reduce our bilateral relations to a few sound bites that wrongfully stir anxiety and ignore the complexities of the situation.

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Monday, September 22, 2008

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## VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE STATEMENT ON MCCAIN-PALIN TV AD

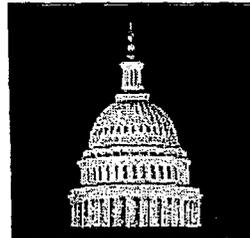
*Political Desk*  
September 20, 2008

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According to VIO, the images and words of President Chávez were taken out of context and used as a baseless attack against Venezuela and its legitimate foreign policy positions, which are themselves the result of continued antagonism by the Bush Administration. President Chávez has repeatedly stated that he desires dialogue with the U.S. and will renew relations with the next administration, whomever is elected, as long as mutual respect exists.

Venezuela remains a stable source of energy for the American people, and trade relations have not been affected by the deterioration in diplomatic relations with the Bush administration. Chávez has guaranteed that Venezuela will remain a steady business

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partner for the US, and that it is only the US that can change this relationship.

VIO added, "It is offensive to the people of both nations that this campaign advertisement, in an attempt to garner votes, would reduce our bilateral relations to a few sound bites that wrongfully stir anxiety and ignore the complexities of the situation."

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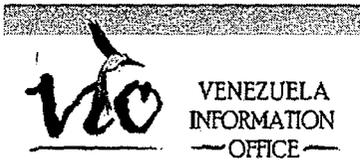
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### Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
November 20, 2008

Contact: Olivia Gombri, Venezuela Information Office, 202-347-8081

### New Poll Shows PSUV Will Win Most States in Regional Elections

A poll released on Tuesday, November 18th, 2008 by the Venezuelan firm Consultores 30.11 projects that a majority of state governorships will be won by candidates of the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) in regional elections this Sunday. In three states, however, a very tight race is expected to ensue.

The poll finds that indicators suggest voting trends in the November 23rd elections resemble those present in the previous presidential election in December 2006, in which President Chávez won with 62.84% support.

States are put into three categories; those with a low probability of change in voter behavior that are "strongly consolidated" in favor of an opposition or PSUV candidate, states that are fairly "consolidated," and others that will see "very close" electoral races.

Eleven states are considered "strongly consolidated," and of these, ten are expected to be won by pro-government PSUV candidates. Ten states are considered "consolidated," and all in this category are likely to be won by PSUV candidates – only two of them, Cojedes and Delta Amacuro – appear slightly more likely to break with past voting trends.

The most interesting states to watch this election will be Sucre, Carabobo, and Zulia. Consultores 30.11 predicts that this is where "very close" races will play out on election day. The poll finds that significant shifts during campaigning make the outcome of voting in these three states the most difficult to assess. As of the time of this poll, Sucre appeared to be the most likely to elect a pro-government candidate.

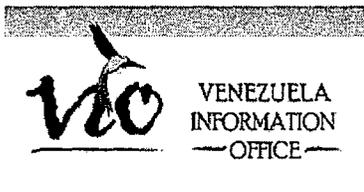
View the full poll results here: [click here.](#)

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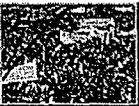
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 21, 2008

Contact: Megan Morrissey, Venezuela Information Office, 202-347-8081 ext. 602
media@veninfo.org

U.S. Electoral Observers in Venezuela to Speak

Independent observers from prominent U.S. organizations will be available beginning on the evening of Sunday, November 23rd to offer firsthand accounts of voting during regional elections in Venezuela. These observers were invited to serve as official monitors by the National Electoral Council (CNE).

The following individuals, all of whom are prepared to evaluate the validity of the results of the regional elections, are available for interviews over the phone or in person beginning Sunday.

Antonio Gonzalez, William C. Velasquez Institute

Since 1994, Antonio Gonzalez has served as president of the Southwest Voter Registration Project, the largest and oldest non-partisan Latino voter participation organization in the country. He is a commentator on the Tavis Smiley Show and hosts a radio show on Pacifica's KPFK in Los Angeles.

Angela Zambrano, National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities

Ms. Zambrano has over 20 years of experience directing NGOs that serve Latino communities. She heads the National Alliance of Latin American Communities, a network of 75 community groups that encourages civic participation. She is also on the board of the National Council of La Raza.

Chris Newman, National Day Laborers Organizing Network

Mr. Newman is the General Counsel to 41 workers centers throughout the U.S. He is a member of the advisory board to the Los Angeles Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, and was selected for a "New Voices" Fellowship with the Academy for Educational Development.

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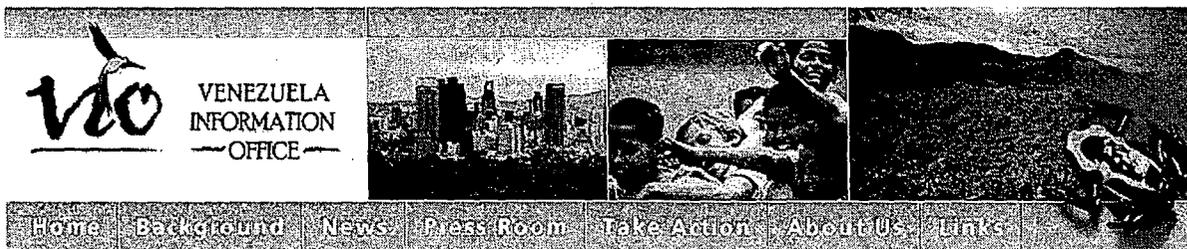
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### Press Release

November 26, 2008

Contact: Megan Morrissey, 202-347-8081 ext. 602 [media@veninfo.org](mailto:media@veninfo.org)

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Voter turnout in the regional elections was a record-setting 65 percent. The electoral process was the 11th to occur in Venezuela in about a decade, and was deemed "peaceful and exemplary" by OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza. He commented that the process was a powerful expression of the maturity of the country's democratic institutions as well as the trust that Venezuelans have in them. The National Electoral Council again proved its reputation for efficient and accurate electoral oversight by posting official results online less than 24 hours after the polls closed.

U.S. media coverage - including editorials in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* - has ignored important facts which are essential to understanding contemporary political realities in Venezuela.

A complete analysis is available [here](#).

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# Statement on Venezuela Elections

By Venezuela Information Office

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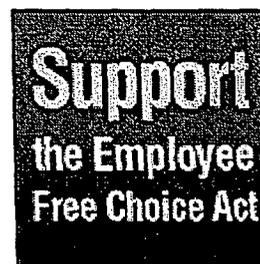
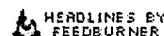
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### **Even in Opposition-Controlled States, Key Municipalities Went to the PSUV**

The assertion that nearly half the country will be under the leadership of the opposition is incorrect. In states where the governorships went to the opposition, a large number of the mayoral seats went to PSUV candidates or their allies. The opposition won the governorship in Carabobo, Tachira, Nueva Esparta, Zulia, and Miranda. In the state of Carabobo, the opposition only managed to win two of the mayoral races, while the PSUV won 11 mayoral races. In the state of Nueva Esparta, 6 of the 11 mayoral races went to the PSUV. In Tachira, the PSUV won at least 15 of 29 mayoral races. In Miranda, they won at least 14 of 21 races. (Source: National Electoral Council)

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Unfortunately, despite the extensive records available on the CNE website, many media outlets in the US have failed to report accurately on the results of the regional elections. One example is the claim made in a Wall Street Journal article and a New York Times editorial on November 25th that more than half of Venezuela is under opposition control, which, according to the official statistics presented here, is simply not true.

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## Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

### VIO Statement on Regional Elections in Venezuela

By Editorial  
Nov 26, 2008, 22:28



Regional elections held in Venezuela on November 23rd have been portrayed in the U.S. media as a defeat for to the government of President Hugo Chávez, when in fact the results strongly favor his party, the PSUV. The vast majority of state governorships and mayoralties, including those in many strategic parts of the country such as the Orinoco Oil Belt, remain under pro-government leadership.

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## *Poll Suggests Venezuela Referendum to Pass*

Latin America Information Office  
February 13, 2009

Washington, D.C. - A public opinion poll released today by Consultores 30.11 suggests that voter turnout will be very high in a national referendum in Venezuela on Sunday, February 15th, and that the proposed amendment to end term limits for all elected officials will pass by a margin of nearly five percent.

According to the poll, there is a clear tendency among voters to favor the amendment. The ballot asks whether or not to alter five articles of the constitution to allow the president, mayors, governors, and other leaders to compete in elections as many times as they choose. Among respondents in the Consultores 30.11 poll, 46.1 percent intended to vote "yes" to that question, while a slightly smaller 41.4 intended to vote "no." This corresponds closely with expectations about the result. When asked which side they expected to win, 49 percent of respondents chose "yes," while 38 percent chose "no."

Voters who favor the "yes" option also seem more likely to turn out at the polls on Sunday. Overall, 65.8 percent of all respondents said they would definitely vote. However, within the "yes" camp, that rises to 70 percent, while for the "no" camp it falls to 63.2 percent. The majority of those who said they would likely not vote were associated with the "no" camp. Depending on the rate of abstention, this could give the "yes" a margin of victory of up to perhaps ten percent. The most important factor will of course be mobilization on either side.

Additional survey data provides insight into why the "yes" vote appears more likely to prevail at the polls. Of the survey group as a whole, 46.8 percent – nearly the same amount that said they intended to vote "yes" in the referendum – replied that their personal situation was better today than two years before. The far smaller percentages that called their situations "the same" or "worse" were more closely associated with the "no" vote. Asked about their expectations for the future, 59.1 percent said their personal situation would be "better" or "the same" over the next two or three years. 61 percent deemed the direction of the country "good" or "fine."

Other important findings also indicate that public opinion is quite divided. The two strongest trends with regard to party affiliation were "none" (at 42.1 percent) and United Socialist Party of Venezuela, or PSUV (33.4 percent). On the issue of socialism, 45.6 percent agreed with constructing such a model, while 43.1 percent did not.

Far clearer is the data's indication that positive appraisals of President Chávez predominate among voters, standing at 48.2 percent, versus 28.6 percent negative. Another 23.1 percent called Chavez's performance "regular."

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The Latin America Information Office, LLC (LAIO) serves as a resource for progressive social movements, policy makers, and governments who are searching for practical policy solutions to real-life problems: primarily poverty, inequality and exclusion. The LAIO receives funding from the Twenty-first Century Foundation of Bolivia and the government of Venezuela. More information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington DC.

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## Hugo Chávez keeps the heat on — in The Bronx

BY ANA MARÍA TORO

Updated Thursday, January 15th 2009, 2:22 PM

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### Today's



When news broke recently that the Venezuelan government was scrapping a program that gives discount heating oil to poor New York City residents, Manuel González started worrying immediately.

"We would have to go back to how it was before, suffering in the winter," says González, 64, a laundry room worker from the Dominican Republic, whose building in Hunts Point, the Bronx, has participated in the program for three years.

"I would have had to buy a portable heater. It would have been more electricity use, more money," he adds.

But the doomsday scenario didn't arrive.

Although Citizens Energy, the Boston-based non-profit that handles applications for the program, said on Jan. 5 that the U.S.-based Venezuelan oil company Citgo had stopped the shipments of free fuel that support the program, two days later Citgo said that was not the case.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said Saturday that the program was never halted. Megan Morrissey of the D.C.-based Venezuela Information Office explained that "a slight delay in approving the shipment" led some to believe the program was suspended.

With winter in full swing, beneficiaries of the program were relieved to know it would continue.

"We appreciate what [Chávez] is doing, helping us out from another country," says Jerry Morales, a 41-year-old meat market worker and single father.

Morales adds that taking away the program in the middle of a recession would have been disastrous. "Rents and maintenance would go up," he says. "Everyone would be affected. People depend on [it]."

The program came about after Chávez visited the Bronx in 2005 and offered to sell discounted heating oil to poor families in the area.

Congressman José Serrano (D-South Bronx) took him up on his offer and months later helped broker a deal to provide Bronx residents discounted oil through Citgo.

"Something needed to be done," says Serrano. "Congress and the Senate asked



Lombard for News

Manuel González receives discounted oil from the Venezuelan government.



## Best Of NY



# I graduated in...

York.

The help came at a crucial time, right after hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused the closing of refineries around the Gulf of Mexico, leading to lower production and higher oil prices.

The program now donates 100 million gallons of oil to 224,000 needy families in 23 states.

Brian O'Connor of Citizens Energy says that this winter they have received a lot more calls than usual for help.

Oil prices may be lower, he explains, but a lot more people are unemployed and struggling to make ends meet.

"In the case of New York, most of the benefit goes to big apartment buildings that heat with oil," says O'Connor.

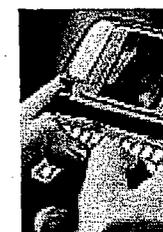
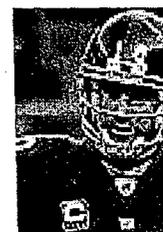
The buildings pass the savings on to tenants in the form of rent rebates that generally come to around \$180 per season.

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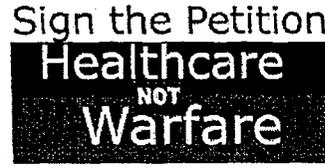
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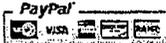
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Media Response to Venezuelan Elections

by Stephen Lendman Page 1 of 5 page(s)

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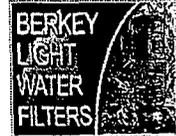


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The Media Response to Venezuelan Elections - by Stephen Lendman

On November 23, Venezuela held regional and local elections for governors, mayors and other municipal offices. Over 5000 candidates contested in 603 races for 22 state governors, 328 mayors, 233 state legislative council members, 13 Caracas Metropolitan area council members, and seven others for the Alto Apure District Council.

As mandated under Article 56 of the Bolivarian Constitution: "All persons have the right to be registered (to vote) free of charge with the Civil Registry Office after birth, and to obtain public documents constituting evidence of the biological identity, in accordance with the law."

It's a constitutional mandate to let all Venezuelans vote. Once registered, none are purged from the rolls, obstructed, or prevented from having their vote count like so often happens in America. In Venezuela, democracy works.

In 2003, Hugo Chavez undertook a major successful initiative called Mision Identidad (Mission Identity) to implement the law. Prior to it in 2000, 11 million Venezuelans were registered to vote. By September 2006, it was 16 million, and now it's 16.8 million in a country of 27 million people.

How the Process Works

The electoral process is administered by the National Electoral Council (CNE). Unlike America's privatized system, it's an independent body, separate from the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of government or any private corporate interests. It's comprised of 11 members of the National Assembly and 10 representatives of civil society, none of whom are appointed by the President. Elections are conducted using Smartmatic touchscreen electronic voting machines with verifiable paper ballot receipts. Voters can thus check to confirm their votes and their accuracy. The CNE then saves them as a permanent record to be used in case a recount is needed. It also requires voters to leave an electronic thumbprint to assure no one votes more than once.

The machines work as intended; and, after the 2006 election, the Carter Center said: based on its observations, Venezuela's "automated machines worked well and the voting results do reflect the will of the people." Further earlier independent studies verified the same thing, including ones carried out by vote-process experts at the University of California Berkeley, Johns Hopkins, Stanford and elsewhere.

In design, great care was taken to eliminate the possibility of tampering. It required a special technology that split the security codes into four parts. As a result, numerous voting security reports endorse the process they say makes Venezuelan machines the most advanced and accurate in the world.

On November 23, CNE president Tibisay Lucena said voters turned out in unprecedented numbers at 65.45%, the largest ever total for a regional election. The people spoke and registered a resounding, but not one-sided, victory for Hugo Chavez's United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) candidates - and sent a message. They affirmed the success of Bolivarianism and want it continued.

As the Venezuela Information Office reported, PSUV candidates won 77% of governorships (17 of 22), 81% of mayoral offices, 77% of all contests, and 58% of the popular vote - an impressive result by any standard anywhere in an election that 134 independent observers from 54 countries (from America, Europe, Asia, Africa and the 34-member country Organization of American States - OAS) judged open, free, fair, and

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efficient like all others under Chavez. OAS secretary general Jose Miguel Insulza called this one "peaceful and exemplary" and described it as a powerful expression of democratic maturity and the trust Venezuelans have in it under Chavez.

Other observer comments were as follows:

-- Colombia's CNE representative, Joaquin Vives, called Venezuela's electoral process "a pioneer in the world (and added) Many things dazzled us" about it, such as voters "great desire to construct democracy in Venezuela;"

-- Greek legislator Sofia Sakorafa called the process "one that expresses the will of the people and is characterized by a commitment to social and political inclusion;"

-- Costa Rica's Maria Elena Salazar said the election was "beautiful, participative, of which all Latin Americans should be proud;" and

-- Anthony Gonzales from America admired well-equipped and secured voting centers and that the election was held on a weekend to make it easier for working people.

Long-time Latin American expert James Petras commented on the significance of the victory:

-- few European, North or South American parties have as high a level of support as the PSUV; certainly none in the United States in particular where growing numbers of voters have little faith in a deeply corrupted process;

-- the PSUV is popular "in the context of several radical economic measures, including the nationalization of major cement, steel, financial and other private capitalist monopolies;" even so, business in Venezuela remains strong (though slowing) at a time of a global economic crisis;

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**Pat Salisbury** **Venezuela**

Have you ever visited Venezuela? I am an American who is a resident of Venezuela and exercise my right to vote here. I usually ignore your articles as they seem to be a summary of articles written elsewhere and offer nothing new and contain many errors. Here are a few for this article.

When you vote you often wait in a long line but enjoy the company of others no matter what their political view maybe. You are first I.D. by your electronic thumbprints. Then as you enter your voting table you sign your name and leave a permanent thumbprint on the register. To prevent double voting your little pinkie is dipped in ink. You then join your friends and possibly have a BBQ, watch the results on TV. The next day you proudly display your little pinkie.

Many of the PSUV candidates who won did so because they strongly opposed the referendum the President and congress proposed last year. So there is a pull to the right in the PSUV.

PSUV and Oil have nothing in common expect most workers in PDVSA are PSUV members.

Ledezma's comment "Time for Change" does not equate with the end of Bolivarianism.

Then you strayed from your article title into land you do not know.

Most firms are not heavily in debt here.

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# Venezuela criticizes McCain ad targeting Chavez

The Associated Press

Published: September 20, 2008

CARACAS, Venezuela: Venezuela is taking issue with a John McCain campaign ad focusing on President Hugo Chavez.

The Spanish-language TV spot is running in Florida. It features Chavez cursing the U.S. during a recent speech when he expelled its ambassador. His expletives are bleeped out.

The ad notes that Democrat Barack Obama has expressed willingness to meet with Chavez, and asks: "Do you think we should talk with Chavez?"

The Venezuela Information Office condemned the ad Friday as an "attempt at fear-mongering" that demonizes Venezuela and Chavez. The U.S.-based office, which is funded by Chavez's government, said his words "were taken out of context and used as a baseless attack."

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Doug Mills/The New York Times

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## Human Rights Watch condemns Chávez's decade in power

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Rory Carroll in Caracas  
The Guardian, Friday September 19 2008

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Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez, has flouted human rights, persecuted opponents and undermined democracy during his decade in power, according to a damning new report. Human Rights Watch, a New York-based watchdog, yesterday accused him of betraying a pledge to shore up the rule of law and turn Venezuela into a progressive beacon.

It claimed his government had taken over the courts and cowed the media, trade unions and civil society, leaving the South American oil giant dominated by an over-mighty executive. "Discrimination on political grounds has been a defining feature of the Chávez presidency, [as] has been an open disregard for the principle of separation of powers," it said.

The Washington-based Venezuela Information Office, which promotes the Chávez government's view, said Human Rights Watch was biased. "Their reports on Venezuela have typically been politicised. They don't highlight real advances," said Olivia Goumbri, a spokeswoman. Lavish spending of oil revenues on social programmes, for instance, had boosted human rights by reducing poverty and illiteracy, she said.

Human Rights Watch said Venezuela's worst setback in the past decade was a 2002 coup which briefly replaced Chávez, an anti-democratic putsch backed by George Bush's administration. "Fortunately it lasted only two days. Unfortunately the Chávez government has exploited it ever since to justify policies that have degraded the country's democracy," said José Miguel Vivanco, the advocacy group's Americas director.

The 230-page report, *A Decade Under Chávez*, accused the government of sacrificing basic guarantees enshrined in a 1999 constitution - which Chávez had championed - to further its political agenda.

It had "neutralised the judiciary" by packing the supreme court with allies, and undermined freedom of expression by toughening penalties for criminal defamation and bullying private media into softening criticism. Opponents had been blacklisted from state agencies and the national oil company, notably through a database of those who had signed a petition against the president. Trade unions had been emasculated and human rights activists had been harassed.

Steve Ellner, a professor at Venezuela's University of the East, said Human Rights Watch overlooked the opposition's role in polarising Venezuela, not least by refusing to accept Chávez's legitimacy and electoral mandates.

"The report is exaggerated. It fails to place events in their context," he said.

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MiamiHerald.com

Posted on Thu, Sep. 18, 2008

## Human rights report blasts Chávez's government

BY PHIL GUNSON

President Hugo Chávez has systematically and deliberately weakened democratic institutions since coming to power almost 10 years ago, according to a new report from New York-based Human Rights Watch.

The 230-page report, based on 18 months of research in Venezuela, concludes that the government has "largely squandered" a unique opportunity to make sweeping changes after replacing a discredited and corrupt two-party system and rewriting the constitution in 1999.

After a coup attempt against him in 2002, Chávez, "selectively abandoned the 1999 constitution," José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director for the rights group, said at a press conference Thursday in Caracas.

Venezuelan officials condemned the report.

"The report is limited in its analysis of the Venezuelan situation, and runs contrary to the findings of other organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, that have highlighted the extension of universal human rights under Chávez," said Olivia Goumbri, Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office in Washington. "It reads like the talking points of Venezuela's discredited opposition."

There was no immediate response from the Venezuelan government, which in the past has accused the nongovernmental organization of pursuing a political campaign against Chávez on instructions from Washington.

The new constitution expanded existing rights, notably by giving international treaties the force of domestic law. But in practice it has frequently been ignored, especially since the attempted coup in 2002 provided a pretext to crack down on the opposition.

Political discrimination, an "open disregard" for the principle of separation of powers, and attacks on freedom of expression, the independent labor movement and human rights advocates themselves, are the main charges leveled at the government in the report.

By packing and purging the Supreme Court, for example, it has "effectively neutralized the judiciary as an independent branch of government."

Press freedom has been undermined by several measures, including potential stiff penalties for defamation, incitement to violence and other alleged media crimes.

The government abuses its control of the airwaves to threaten, and -- in the case of the TV channel RCTV last year -- take opposition broadcast media off the air. It also systematically blocks access to official information, the report says.

Despite his claim to be engaged in a "socialist revolution," Chávez has nothing but disdain for autonomous unions, according to the report.

Chávez's government has interfered in union elections, fired workers for their political affiliations and denied collective bargaining rights to those deemed to belong to the opposition, the report says.

Accusations of human rights violations by Venezuela over the last decade have been gradually working their way through the courts.

The closure by Chávez of the highest court dealing with administrative issues -- and the firing of its judges after they have ruled for several times against the government -- recently triggered a landmark verdict from the Inter-American Human Rights Court in San José, Costa Rica.

Finding in favor of the judges, the court called for them to be compensated and given their jobs back.

Another case involved a ruling by the Venezuelan comptroller-general banning certain politicians from standing for election because of corruption allegations.

Such political bans should only result from court sentences relating to actual crimes, Vivanco said.

"This is a fact of the utmost gravity," he added, "which merits a response from the regional community."



washingtonpost.com

## Venezuela expells rights activist over remarks

Advertisement

By JORGE RUEDA  
The Associated Press  
Friday, September 19, 2008; 2:39 AM

CARACAS, Venezuela -- Human Rights Watch said Venezuela's record on human rights has worsened under President Hugo Chavez, particularly with regard to government critics.

Venezuela responded by expelling the group's Americas director, Jose Miguel Vivanco, on Thursday night, saying that he made unacceptable remarks against the country's institutions.

"We aren't going to tolerate any foreigner coming here to try to sully the dignity" of Venezuela and its institutions, Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro told state television.

He said Vivanco was driven to the airport and forced to leave the country immediately on a flight.

Vivanco, a Chilean who had arrived on a tourist visa, "has violated the constitution" and Venezuela's laws, he said.

Vivanco was ordered to leave along with a Human Rights Watch deputy director, U.S. citizen Daniel Wilkinson, Maduro said. He accused them of acting at the behest of the U.S. government.

It was the first such expulsion by Chavez's government. The leftist leader has threatened previously that Venezuela could expel foreigners if they come to slander his government.

A government statement read on state television said Vivanco violated the law by "attacking the institutions" of Venezuela's democracy, and "illegally interfering in the internal affairs of our country."

The U.S.-based group said in a report Thursday that a failed 2002 coup against Chavez has been "a pretext for a wide range of government policies that have undercut the human rights protections" laid out in the constitution.

Chavez's government has "weakened democratic institutions and human rights guarantees" while trying to sideline the opposition and consolidate power, said Jose Miguel Vivanco, the group's Americas director.

Venezuela condemned the report, saying it provides "an incomplete and biased account" and that the government has a strong record on human rights.

The New York-based group said Chavez "has encouraged his subordinates to engage in discrimination

by routinely denouncing his critics as antidemocratic conspirators and coup-mongers \_ regardless of whether or not they had any connection to the 2002 coup."

The U.S.-based Venezuelan Information Office, which is funded by Chavez's government, said in a statement that the report "overstates the issue of political discrimination" and noted that Chavez has pardoned supporters of the 2002 coup.

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## Venezuela expels two rights activists

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By Benedict Mander in Caracas

Published: September 20 2008 01:36 | Last updated: September 20 2008 01:36

Venezuela on Friday expelled two Human Rights Watch activists after they released a report criticising president Hugo Chávez's human rights record on Thursday.

The report, which described the president's nearly 10 years in power as a "lost decade", attacked the government for weakening democratic institutions and human rights guarantees.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, said the expulsion of Jose Miguel Vivanco, the Americas director, and Daniel Wilkinson was evidence of Venezuela's "descent into intolerance".

"Chávez may have kicked out the messenger, but he has only reinforced the message – civil liberties in Venezuela are under attack."

The move is also likely to strain Venezuela's relations with the US still further, after it expelled the US ambassador last week, ostensibly in solidarity with Bolivia's expulsion of its US ambassador.

Nicolás Maduro, foreign minister, accused Human Rights Watch – an independent, nongovernmental organisation that says it does not accept any government funds, directly or indirectly – of being financed by the US government. Nevertheless, it is also critical of Colombia, whose rightwing government is a Washington ally.

Andrés Izarra, Venezuela's communications minister, said the measure was taken to "defuse and prevent plans to overthrow the government, conspiracies, plans of assassination". Only last week the government claimed to have uncovered a plot for a coup.

The Human Rights Watch report argued that Mr Chávez had encouraged discrimination against political opponents, and stacked the courts in its favour in an attempt to consolidate power after an unruly political opposition launched a coup against him in 2002.

Although the rights group praised Venezuela's 1999 constitution, written by Chávez supporters for enshrining many basic rights, it said they had not been implemented fully.

But the Venezuela Information Office, a US-based organisation funded by the Venezuelan government, argued that the report was incomplete and biased.

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### Venezuela decries McCain ad

Sun, 21 Sep 2008 02:08:45 GMT

**Caracas has criticized the US Republican presidential nominee John McCain and Sarah Palin's campaign ad targeting President Hugo Chavez.**



Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez

The Venezuela Information Office (VIO) condemned the McCain-Palin campaign ad Friday as an "attempt at fear-mongering" that demonizes Chavez.

Venezuela and Chavez were shown as an evil and threatening characters that cursed the United States in the advertisement by expelling US ambassador , a Spanish-language TV running in Florida reported Saturday.

The ad indicates that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama is keen to meet with Chavez, and asks: "Do you think we should talk with Chavez?"

Meanwhile, the VIO said this ad is an attempt to gather votes, and it is offensive to the people of both nations and harmful to the bilateral relations.

VIO said the images and words of Chavez were extracted out of context and used as a groundless assault against Venezuela and its legitimate foreign policy.

Although the US and Venezuela criticize each other harshly, diplomatic ties between the two countries have not been affected and Caracas has always been a steady business partner and a reliable source of energy for Washington.

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## What Venezuela's Regional Elections Really Mean

By Olivia Burlingame Gombri, AlterNet. Posted December 3, 2008.

State and municipal elections held in Venezuela strongly favored President Chávez and his political party.

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State and municipal elections held in Venezuela on Sunday, November 23rd strongly favored President Chávez and his political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), not the opposition, as one might be misled to believe after reading the coverage available in much of the mainstream media. The vast majority of state governorships and mayoralties in Venezuela will remain under pro-government leadership. The races provided yet another check on the democratic credentials of the president, and certainly reflected the consistently high rates of popular approval garnered by his policies.

The day after the elections, *Washington Post* and *New York Times* editorials reacted with more of the same mudslinging that is their usual fare on Venezuela. The *Times* accused Chávez of "authoritarianism and incompetence" and attempts to "skew the elections." It stated that candidates facing charges for the misuse of public funds were disqualified

from elections by a "government watchdog," when in fact this was done by elected leaders in Congress determined to curb corruption. The *Times* also said more than half of Venezuelans will now be under opposition leadership, but electoral results show that the opposite is true: the majority of citizens -- 57 percent -- will be under pro-government leadership.

With all of the misinformation swirling around this scene, what should we take from Venezuela's latest elections? The most important lesson for many observers, including the Secretary General of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza, has been that democratic procedure in Venezuela is essentially 'all grown up.' Insulza said in a statement that these were "peaceful, exemplary" elections reflecting the "maturity that strengthens democratic institutions."

Venezuela has seen eleven electoral processes in about a decade. What was remarkable this time is the fact that voters set an all-time record for turnout in regional races. Some 65.6 percent of eligible voters showed up at the polls, despite rainstorms that drenched parts of the coast around Caracas and caused deadly mudslides two days earlier. This showed that Venezuelans trust their democratic institutions and take them seriously. The National Electoral Council (CNE) again proved its reputation for efficient and accurate electoral oversight, posting complete results online less than 24 hours after the polls closed.

A look at the statistics provides essential insights into what will likely be the political pulse of Venezuela during the next few years. First off, most Venezuelan citizens voted for candidates aligned with the Chávez government. The United Socialist Party of

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Venezuela (PSUV) and its allies won 77 percent of governorships and 81 percent of municipal posts. Even in Caracas, where the overarching metropolitan mayorality went to the opposition, residents of the city's most populous district of Libertador elected a PSUV candidate as their local representative.

Opposition candidates were elected to govern five states in Venezuela, compared to the 17 that went to the PSUV. Their victories came in some of the most heavily populated states. However, the map of municipalities across the country looks more uniform, because in at least four of the five states that went to the opposition, most local municipal mayoralties were won by pro-government PSUV candidates. This is true in the coastal state of Carabobo, for example, where at least 11 out of 14 of the new municipal mayors are members of the PSUV, including the mayor of Puerto Cabello, a major port city that is of strategic importance to the oil industry. In Valencia, another of the Carabobo municipalities that is an important industrial and manufacturing city, the PSUV got elected at the local level for the first time ever during the tenure of the Chávez administration.

Most states in Venezuela that hold strategic natural resources and industries elected PSUV governors. In accordance with predictions, the Western state of Zulia that is the traditional seat of the oil industry went to the opposition. However, the PSUV won in the states of Anzoátegui, Bolívar, Monagas, and Delta Amacuro that encompass the lucrative

Orinoco Oil Belt region. Bolívar, in particular, also boasts the country's other important basic industries: hydroelectricity, aluminum, steel, and petrochemicals.

In the gubernatorial races, the 17 PSUV wins were generally far more decisive than those five earned by the opposition. Opposition candidates won by margins of just ten percentage points or less in four of them (in Tachira, a narrow 1.3 percent), and gained 15 percentage points on the PSUV in the fifth state (Nueva Esparta). In contrast, candidates supportive of the Chávez government won by roughly 50 percentage points in two states, 30 percentage points in five states, 20 percentage points in four states, and five to ten percent in six more states.

Unfortunately, despite the extensive records available on the website of the CNE, many media outlets in the U.S. have failed to report accurately on the results of Venezuela's regional elections.

As the numbers slip from the picture, a dangerous thing happens; blanket statements about "rising stars of the opposition" who are "gaining ground" and baseless claims about an "authoritarian" Chávez losing his "grip" on power become substitutes for the truth. They become stand-ins for factual information that media consumers have little choice but to digest. Soon, people might think a country that has free speech and fair elections isn't really a democracy at all. Before our knowledge of Venezuela goes too far in that direction, it is time to bring the facts back into the picture.

Find the full results of Venezuela's regional elections on the official CNE

website.

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### FEATURED Q&A

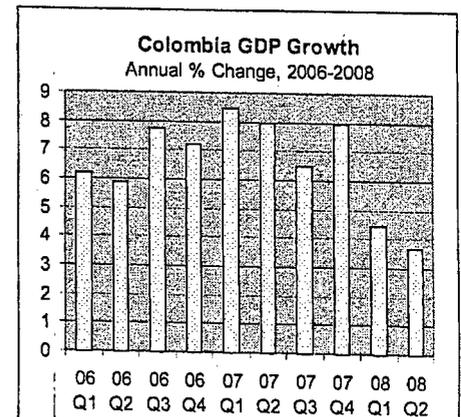
#### Are Human Rights Abuses in Venezuela a Priority Concern?

**Q** The Venezuelan government last week expelled Jose Miguel Vivanco, the Americas regional director at Human Rights Watch, just hours after he presented a report stating the government of President Hugo Chavez has weakened democratic institutions and human rights guarantees in Venezuela. Do you view human rights abuses in Venezuela as a priority concern? What is the state of human rights protections in the Americas, relative to times past and other parts of the world today?

War in Argentina and the era of gross human rights abuses. The current trend toward constriction of human rights is subtler and perhaps not so dramatic but troublesome nonetheless. Human rights are trampled in the name of security in some places, large segments of society are denied access to basic services such as health and education in others and elected leaders try to close off democratic freedoms in still other countries. The region is still a place where respect for human rights cannot be taken for granted. Governments

*Continued on page 3*

**A** Guest Comment: Donald Planty: "The Human Rights Watch statement on Venezuela stands on its own merit. I think it is clear to most outside observers—and certainly to Venezuelans—that Chavez has systematically sought to undermine democratic institutions and individual liberties in order to consolidate his power. Chavez would prefer a compliant Venezuela, one that does not challenge his authoritarian proclivities. Unfettered democratic institutions, such as a free press, are not congruent with Chavez's long-term goals in Venezuela. More leaders in the region, both public and private, need to speak out against this trend in Venezuela. Jose Miguel Vivanco's courage is exemplary. As for the region as a whole, the human rights record is still a mixed one. Without a doubt, there have been great improvements since the days of the Pinochet dictatorship, the Dirty



#### Colombia GDP Falls Sharply in Second Quarter of 2008

Declining domestic demand was behind the slower economic growth; construction and manufacturing sectors had a weaker quarter. See story on page 2.

Data: DANE.

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## NEWS BRIEFS

**Guatemalan President Requests Big Increase in Military Budget**

Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom, who has grappled with public safety problems since taking office in January, has asked Congress to approve a bigger military budget and boost the number of soldiers by around 60 percent to 25,000 by 2010. Reuters reported. Guatemala ended a three-decade civil war in 1996 and has since been wary of the military's role in government.

**Chavez Promises to Double China Oil Shipments in Four Years**

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on Tuesday promised to increase oil exports to China from the current 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 1 million bpd within four years. Chavez said he will sign over 20 agreements on his trip to China this week. Prior to a meeting today with Chinese President Hu Jintao, Chavez said both nations shared an international strategy of seeking a "multipolar world." China and Venezuela currently have a trade relationship worth \$8 billion a year.

**Argentina-Bound Cash Payments Said to Exceed \$5 Million**

Guido Alejandro Antonini Wilson, a businessman who US prosecutors say flew to Argentina last year with a suitcase containing \$800,000 in Venezuelan government cash, testified Tuesday he was told a second suitcase holding \$4.2 million was aboard the same plane, the Associated Press reported. Prosecutors, who critics say are motivated by animosity against the administration of President Hugo Chavez, suggested more money was frequently sent from Venezuela's government to Argentine officials. Both governments flatly deny the charge.

**Political News****Chilean President Calls for Second Emergency Unasur Meeting**

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet on Tuesday called for a second presidential-level meeting of Unasur, suggesting it take place while member heads of state are in New York for UN meetings this week, local Chilean daily *El Mercurio* reported. Bachelet is the current chair of Unasur, the group of South American nations that convened an emergency meeting a week and a half ago to seek a solution to political violence in Bolivia that had claimed dozens of lives. Venezuelan President Chavez is currently in China and will likely not participate in the Unasur discussion in New York. Not all the other 11 member heads of state have agreed to participate in the meeting yet, according to the report. Chavez had been a sharp critic of the United States in the previous Unasur meeting, offering support for embattled President Evo Morales by declaring the US ambassador to Venezuela *persona non grata* in solidarity with the same move by Bolivia earlier in the week. Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva defended the legitimacy of Morales' government and said that South American nations, through Unasur, are capable of resolving the conflict, Bolivian daily *La Razon* reported.

**Economic News****Ecuador Expels Brazil's Odebrecht, Forbids Executives from Leaving**

Ecuador's military expelled a leading Brazilian construction firm on Tuesday, accusing Norberto Odebrecht SA of negligence in several infrastructure projects. Acting on threats issued earlier this month, President Rafael Correa ordered the military takeover of two dams, a rural irrigation project and a regional airport on Tuesday. The government said in a statement it was acting "to prevent an

energy crisis in the country and a state of internal turmoil, with the possibility of widespread blackouts throughout the nation." Odebrecht and consortium partners had been at odds with Correa's Administration over Ecuador's insistence that it be indemnified against structural faults and what it describes as poor technical work in the San Francisco hydroelectric facility. Tuesday's decree orders the



President Correa

Photo: Ecuadorean Government.

Armed Forces to take custody of Odebrecht property and facilities "with the aim of using them to overcome the emergency." Ecuador has forbidden company executives Fabio Andreani Gandolfo, Fernando Bessa, Luiz Antonio Mameri and Eduardo Gedeon from leaving the country.

**Colombia Economic Growth Falls Sharply in Second Quarter**

Colombia's National Statistics Department (DANE) announced Tuesday that GDP growth in the second quarter of 2008 slowed sharply, registering 3.7 percent over the same period a year ago and 0.7 compared to the previous quarter. The mining, financial services and transportation sectors grew more than the average of all sectors in the second quarter, while the construction and manufacturing sectors registered slower growth. Domestic demand is driving the slowdown, registering 4.2 percent over a year ago in the second quarter of 2008, falling from 9.2 percent in 2007. As a result, the economy should grow below potential not only this year, but also in 2009, JP Morgan stated in a research note today. The Colombian peso dropped the most in two months Tuesday, falling 3.1 percent to 2,106.5 per dollar, Bloomberg News reported.

**Featured Q&A***Continued from page 1*

and non-governmental organizations alike need to remain vigilant."

**A Guest Comment: Olivia Gombri:** "Last week, Venezuelan officials expelled Human Rights Watch staff for a report on the administration of President Chavez that they deemed 'meddling in internal affairs'. The Human Rights Watch report and the reaction of Venezuela must be seen in the context of deteriorating political relations with the Bush Administration as a result of repeated attacks. US support for the coup against Chavez in 2002 was followed by US Treasury sanctions, blacklisting in State Department reports on drugs and terrorism, an arms embargo, and refusals to respect extradition treaties. Just days after the escalation of provocations caused Venezuela to expel the US ambassador and Washington to follow suit, the Human Rights Watch report was released amid wide media attention. Contrary to the findings of the report, human rights in the political arena and in social and economic life have seen advancements under Chavez. Voter registration and participation have expanded, and free and fair elections have been consistently certified by international observers. Open debates thrive more than ever in the media and in civil society, and reforms to police laws and the judiciary have been praised by respected human rights groups in Venezuela such as PROVEA. Moreover, new guarantees exist for universal human rights like education, healthcare, and employment, contributing to a 35 percent reduction in poverty since 1998. These achievements were completely overlooked by Human Rights Watch in its unfortunately one-sided account."

**A Guest Comment: Jennifer McCoy:** "While the expulsion of Human Rights Watch by the Venezuelan government was not necessarily surprising given the defensiveness of that government, the manner in which it was carried out was shocking. Individual human rights abus-

es of physical integrity or illegal detention are not an issue in Venezuela. Instead, the major issues affecting human rights are the absence of an independent and impartial judiciary to protect individual rights equally, and the widespread crime threatening physical security of citizens. In addition, laws criminalizing political dissent and criticism of the government with long jail sentences are a backward step from the positive trend in Latin America and the rulings of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights. Although these laws are not frequently enforced, their existence intimidates citizens and inhibits free speech. In much of Latin America, threats to journalists investigating corruption and organized crime is a major concern. In addition, physical security of citizens is threatened by ordinary crime as well as organized crime ranging from gangs to drug cartels to mafia to paramilitaries. While high crime rates are a problem in much of the region, Guatemala, Mexico and Colombia face particular challenges with organized crime and reported corruption of factions of the security forces. Therefore, while state-sponsored terror associated with the military dictatorships has mostly ceased, the capacity of states to protect individual human rights on an equal basis and to combat the scourge of organized crime is the major challenge today."

**Donald Planty** is Chairman of the International Relations Department at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, President of Planty & Associates LLC, and former US Ambassador to Guatemala.

**Olivia Gombri** is Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC.

**Jennifer McCoy** is Director of the Americas Program at The Carter Center and Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University.

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### FEATURED Q&A

#### Are Chavez's Opponents Gaining Strength in Venezuela?

**Q** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on October 12 accused Manuel Rosales, the governor of the country's Zulia state and Chavez's opponent in the 2006 presidential election, of plotting to overthrow the government. Political tension also flared in Zulia after the October 1 murder of university student Juan Soto, a member of the Copei opposition party. Does opposition coming from Zulia represent a threat to Chavez's government? Are opposition parties gaining strength in Venezuela nationwide?

jurisdictions that vote for the opposition. These are statements of despotism, not of democratic leaders adhering to the rule of law. The 'more insane' hypothesis is that Chavez fails to realize that a similar campaign strategy of hate speech toward opponents, intimidation of voters, and calls for more power for the incumbent did not serve him well in the 2007 referendum—his most disastrous electoral performance ever. Rather than promote abstentionism by the opposition, Chavez's intimidation strategy actually backfired, encouraging

*Continued on page 3*

**A** Guest Comment: Javier Corrales: "It is hard to tell whether this episode suggests if Chavez is becoming more strategic, more despotic, or more insane. The 'more strategic' hypothesis is that, by arguing that opposition candidates are seeking to unseat him—even kill him—Chavez is trying to convert this election into another plebiscite about his popularity, rather than about the popularity of the candidates for governor or mayor. He is hoping that his still-high approval ratings will carry the day. He needs to personalize the election because there are clear signs that many of the president's candidates may lose. The 'more despotic' hypothesis is that here we have the state again raising serious, unfounded accusations and threatening retaliation without due process. Among the many worrisome declarations that Chavez made recently was a threat to cut off funding to



#### Morales Administration Strikes Agreement With Opposition

Bolivian President Evo Morales led supporters on the last leg of a march to La Paz to pressure Congress, which Monday announced a date for a referendum on a new Constitution. See story on page 2.

*Photo: Bolivian Government*

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## NEWS BRIEFS

**At Least 11 Die During Heavy Rains In Honduras**

Flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains have resulted in at least 11 deaths in Honduras, according to the AP. Floods have destroyed crops, caused evacuations and isolated communities in several parts of Honduras. A pair of large landslides have stopped up the Coyol River in the western part of the country, forming a lake that in some parts is 500 feet deep.

**Poll: US Hispanics Overwhelmingly Support Obama**

An overwhelming majority of Hispanic voters in the US support Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) for president, a new poll shows. The Democrat has the support of 70 percent of likely Latino voters while republican Senator John McCain (R-AZ) lags behind with 21 percent, according to the Zogby poll. Five percent of respondents in the poll back other candidates and four percent are undecided. The telephone survey queried 600 likely Hispanic voters between October 3-17 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

**Ecuador Says it Has No Plans To Scrap US Dollar As Its Currency**

Officials in Ecuador say the country will not drop the US dollar as its currency in order to combat the global financial meltdown.

Ecuador's Economic Policy Minister, Pedro Paez, on Monday said Ecuador can tap a \$6.3-billion dollarization fund and a \$2.5 billion in reserves held in Ecuadorean banks to soften the financial crisis. Paez also said global financial problems could threaten exports and jeopardize \$15-billion in Ecuadoreans' foreign investments.

**Political News****Morales Administration Strikes Agreement Over Bolivia Referendum**

The Bolivian government said Monday it reached an agreement with opposition leaders in Congress to set a new date for a constitutional referendum and to limit President Evo Morales to one more term in office. Congressional leaders agreed to hold the referendum on January 25, 2009 and scheduled national elections for the

*Thousands of Bolivians held a vigil in the Plaza Murillo in front of the Congress.*

following December, reported state news agency ABL. "Our President will have to count these three and a half years as his first period," Felix Rojas, a congressman from Morales' MAS party, told reporters at a press conference. "The President can be a candidate in 2009 for five [more] years of government, after which he won't have the right to run again," Rojas added. Both the Morales administration and the opposition made tough concessions during the marathon legislative session, which was scheduled to continue overnight and into Tuesday until the bill is signed into law. While the administration had been pushing for elections in July 2009 and not to count Morales' current term as his first mandate, the opposition had hoped to delay elections until 2010, according to the BBC. Meanwhile, thousands of Bolivians held a vigil in the Plaza Murillo in front of the Congress, arriving at around 3 pm local time to conclude a week-long march aimed at pressuring lawmakers to approve the constitutional referendum and the text of the document itself. Morales, who led the final leg of the march, told his supporters to be patient, and praised them for demonstrating peacefully, unlike "some opposition groups" who had used violence and taking public buildings as a tactic.

**Mexico Agrees to Deport Cubans Found Traveling Illegally to US**

Cubans found traveling illegally in Mexico on their way to the US will be deported, under a new agreement signed Monday by Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa and Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. The two countries were spurred to ink the agreement because Cubans are increasingly attempting to enter the U.S. through Mexico due to the heavy US Coast Guard presence in the Straits of Florida, the AP reported. More than 11,000 Cubans attempted to reach the US through Mexico last year, but just more than 1,000 arrived in the Miami area, according to the US Department of Homeland Security. The new policy takes effect in a month. The Cuban and



Espinosa  
Photo: Mexican Gov't.

Mexican officials also criticized the US policy that allows Cubans to stay if they reach land, but not if they are intercepted at sea. Currently, Mexico orders Cubans found in the country illegally to leave Mexico in 10 or 30 days—orders that Cubans routinely ignore before continuing on to Texas. Once Cubans reach Texas, they are allowed to stay after presenting identification and submitting to background and medical checks. The vast majority of Cubans who are in Mexico illegally will now be sent back to Cuba, said Perez Roque. Immigration detention facilities in Mexico currently house approximately 2,000 Cubans. Mexico has been forced to deal with human trafficking that is part of illegal Cuban migration through Mexico. In June, armed men forced 33 Cubans from a government-operated bus that was heading to an immigration center in southern Mexico, possibly planning to extort money from the Cubans. Also, many Cuban-Americans, believed to be part of smuggling operations, have been murdered in the Cancun area.

## Economic News

### Brazil's Central Bank Provides Exporters \$1.6 Billion in New Loans

Brazil on Monday issued a relief package of \$1.6 billion worth of loans to exporters hurt by the global credit crisis. The six-month loans are intended to provide liquidity in dollars, the *Financial Times* reported. Brazil has also taken steps to provide liquidity in Brazilian reais to counter the tightening credit lines. The country's central bank also has released \$47.5 billion into Brazil's economy by lowering its reserve requirements, which force banks to keep a significant percentage of their deposits in the central bank. However, several banks have been using the funds to purchase government bonds instead of using them to supply credit. Central Bank Governor Henrique Meirelles is warning banks that the loans provided Monday must be used only for trade finance. Banks using the money for anything else will be penalized, he said.

## Company News

### IBM Forms Agreements with Three Companies in Brazil

IBM has formed three new agreements with companies in Brazil, which the technology company says is part of its long-term goal of expansion in emerging markets. IBM, based in Armonk, N.Y., has struck agreements with telecommunications company *Telefonica*, retailer *Leroy Merlin* and vehicle manufacturer *Mercedes-Benz*. IBM's office in Hortolandia, near Sao Paulo, will manage *Telefonica*'s midrange servers in Brazil. IBM also will support and maintain *Telefonica*'s technology infrastructure 24 hours a day. In July, the telecommunications company struck a similar agreement with IBM to provide the same services for \$50 million through 2011. IBM is also expanding its contract with home building and decoration retailer *Leroy Merlin*. IBM will provide round-the-clock support to the enterprise resource planning system that connects *Leroy Merlin*'s 15

### Featured Q&A

*Continued from page 1*

instead abstentionism among his supporters and higher participation among opponents. A sane person would not want to repeat the same failed strategy."

**A** **Guest Comment: Olivia Gombri:** "The topic raised here is presented in a way that wrongly guides readers to associate the murder of a student with the current regional elections campaign. There is no evidence of a link between the two. Two weeks after the murder of Juan Soto, who happened to be a student

"The Zulia governor was supportive of the 2002 coup and was present at the swearing-in of de facto ruler Carmona."

— Olivia Gombri

leader of the COPEI political party, police investigations have so far produced six arrests. To suggest that his death has any political significance when the motives of the crime have yet to be discovered is irresponsible. It is important also to be aware that violent crime is unfortunately quite common in Zulia, which borders volatile Colombia. On the unrelated topic of Chavez's recent assertions concerning Rosales: the Zulia governor was supportive of the 2002 coup and present at the swearing-in of de facto ruler Carmona, who dissolved Congress and the Supreme Court. New allegations of coup plots have not implicated Rosales, but the reverberations of the 2002 overthrow are still

stores in Brazil. For the next five years, IBM also will provide customer relationship management services with the goal of ensuring customer loyalty and avoiding the loss of sales. IBM also will be working with Mercedes-Benz in Brazil to replace

deeply felt throughout the country. Rosales has been a powerful opposition governor in Zulia since 2000, though the mayoral post in the capital city of Maracaibo has remained pro-government. Regional elections in November will show whether opposition policies in this state still resonate with voters. Meanwhile, it is positive to see the opposition participating in elections rather than attempting to subvert institutions."

**A** **Guest Comment: Robert C. Helander:** "This is not surprising. Don Hugo has used the 'foreign devil' strategy, almost from the start (shall we recall the uprising in 1989, or the attempted coup in February 1992, as the Venezuelans do?). The real problem is that his 'Bolivarian Revolution' is a farce. With oil prices falling, his ability to sustain domestic subsidies for food, fuel and foolishness (los tres 'effes'), will disappear, along with his capacity to purchase votes at home, no-good Argentine bonds, give freebie prices for oil to Cuba and the Eastern Caribbean states, Nicaragua, Bolivia, etc., and be the biggest purchaser of arms for the FARC, ELN, Neo-Sandinistas and Bolivia? The tragedy, for Venezuela, is that most of the people who should be most up and outfront have traditionally decided to go along, get rich and, when times were tough, get their money to Miami, leaving the politicians' fight to their despised surrogates. So now, it is a wake up call. Where will the brave come from in the land of Bolivar? My guess is that, much like the kids in Eastern Europe in 1989, it will be from the universities. Caution to the State Department: stay out of this and let the true Venezuelans settle it at the ballot box. But keep the Carter Center out of the validation of the deal—it really didn't do Venezuela (or itself)

*Continued on page 4*

and modernize the vehicle maker's network infrastructure. Over the next few months, IBM plans to integrate the new network infrastructure with Mercedes-Benz's existing systems.

## Featured Q&amp;A

Continued from page 3

any good last time. Let's get the EU or Transparency International in for the next elections."

**A** **Guest Comment: Michael Penfold-Becerra:** "Political noise is a common thread for depicting Venezuelan elections. Those who are still surprised by Chavez's use of this kind of language during a political campaign have certainly not been following politics in the country for the last decade. What is surprising is the surge in the public mind of public policy issues as the main concern of mainstream citizens: violence and

"For the first time, the opposition can win in poor areas in Caracas."

— Michael Penfold-Becerra

crime have become basically the only problem the voters are facing in the street. Even *chavista* voters are demanding more efficiency and state-sponsored solutions to these kinds of issues. In a recent poll conducted by Ecoanalitica, more than 68 percent of the respondents claimed that crime was the single most important theme affecting the country; unemployment was the second most important issue, lagging way behind with 18 percent of the respondents. Clearly, local issues that directly affect quality of life have become more important than radical and anti-American revolutionary promises that in the recent past have characterized Chavez's rhetoric. The election in late November for regional and municipal authorities is the single most important election for Venezuela's democratic future since the 2004 recall referendum. Chavez will certainly have a good performance, probably winning over 10 governorships out of

23, but this will not be sufficient to sustain a revolutionary aspiration of installing a political hegemony in Venezuela. By contrast, there is a chance that former allies such as Podemos and PPT might win important governorships as Aragua, Sucre, Barinas and Guarico without his support; and more surprisingly, without the support of opposition movements either. There are new groups within *chavismo* that are taking advantage of this election to create their own constituencies in order to come up with policy solutions for real problems such as reducing crime rates and improving public spaces and infrastructure. The opposition movement will have good performance—but not an extraordinary one as many wish. For the first time, the opposition can win in poor areas in Caracas, such as Sucre, and in states like Miranda and Carabobo (the most populous states in the country). However, they have a good chance of losing Zulia, the single most important oil state in the country and a strong opposition bastion during the last decade. These elections will leave Venezuela with a new political map; one very different from what both opposition and *chavista* movements are expecting. A map that will show the emergence of a stronger critical movement within *chavismo*, an opposition movement that will finally rip the benefits of its electoral strategy and a radical *chavismo* that will have to reinvent itself to cope with the problems that citizens are demanding."

**Javier Corrales** is Associate Professor of Political Science at Amherst College.

**Olivia Gombri** is Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office.

**Robert C. Helander** is Managing Partner at InterConsult LLP in New York.

**Michael Penfold-Becerra** is Associate Professor at IESA and Director of Ecoanalitica in Caracas.

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## FEATURED Q&A

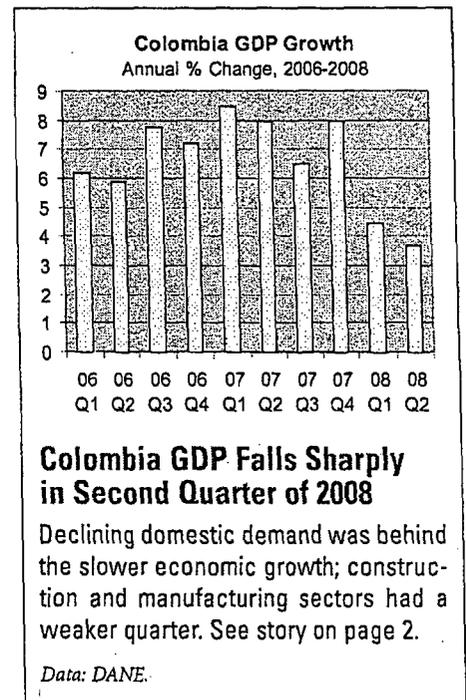
### Are Human Rights Abuses in Venezuela a Priority Concern?

**Q** The Venezuelan government last week expelled Jose Miguel Vivanco, the Americas regional director at Human Rights Watch, just hours after he presented a report stating the government of President Hugo Chavez has weakened democratic institutions and human rights guarantees in Venezuela. Do you view human rights abuses in Venezuela as a priority concern? What is the state of human rights protections in the Americas, relative to times past and other parts of the world today?

War in Argentina and the era of gross human rights abuses. The current trend toward constriction of human rights is subtler and perhaps not so dramatic but troublesome nonetheless. Human rights are trampled in the name of security in some places, large segments of society are denied access to basic services such as health and education in others and elected leaders try to close off democratic freedoms in still other countries. The region is still a place where respect for human rights cannot be taken for granted. Governments

*Continued on page 3*

**A** Guest Comment: Donald Planty: "The Human Rights Watch statement on Venezuela stands on its own merit. I think it is clear to most outside observers—and certainly to Venezuelans—that Chavez has systematically sought to undermine democratic institutions and individual liberties in order to consolidate his power. Chavez would prefer a compliant Venezuela, one that does not challenge his authoritarian proclivities. Unfettered democratic institutions, such as a free press, are not congruent with Chavez's long-term goals in Venezuela. More leaders in the region, both public and private, need to speak out against this trend in Venezuela. Jose Miguel Vivanco's courage is exemplary. As for the region as a whole, the human rights record is still a mixed one. Without a doubt, there have been great improvements since the days of the Pinochet dictatorship, the Dirty



## Inside This Issue

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## NEWS BRIEFS

**Guatemalan President Requests Big Increase in Military Budget**

Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom, who has grappled with public safety problems since taking office in January, has asked Congress to approve a bigger military budget and boost the number of soldiers by around 60 percent to 25,000 by 2010, Reuters reported. Guatemala ended a three-decade civil war in 1996 and has since been wary of the military's role in government.

**Chavez Promises to Double China Oil Shipments in Four Years**

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on Tuesday promised to increase oil exports to China from the current 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 1 million bpd within four years. Chavez said he will sign over 20 agreements on his trip to China this week. Prior to a meeting today with Chinese President Hu Jintao, Chavez said both nations shared an international strategy of seeking a "multipolar world." China and Venezuela currently have a trade relationship worth \$8 billion a year.

**Argentina-Bound Cash Payments Said to Exceed \$5 Million**

Guido Alejandro Antonini Wilson, a businessman who US prosecutors say flew to Argentina last year with a suitcase containing \$800,000 in Venezuelan government cash, testified Tuesday he was told a second suitcase holding \$4.2 million was aboard the same plane, the Associated Press reported. Prosecutors, who critics say are motivated by animosity against the administration of President Hugo Chavez, suggested more money was frequently sent from Venezuela's government to Argentine officials. Both governments flatly deny the charge.

**Political News****Chilean President Calls for Second Emergency Unasur Meeting**

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet on Tuesday called for a second presidential-level meeting of Unasur, suggesting it take place while member heads of state are in New York for UN meetings this week, local Chilean daily *El Mercurio* reported. Bachelet is the current chair of Unasur, the group of South American nations that convened an emergency meeting a week and a half ago to seek a solution to political violence in Bolivia that had claimed dozens of lives. Venezuelan President Chavez is currently in China and will likely not participate in the Unasur discussion in New York. Not all the other 11 member heads of state have agreed to participate in the meeting yet, according to the report. Chavez had been a sharp critic of the United States in the previous Unasur meeting, offering support for embattled President Evo Morales by declaring the US ambassador to Venezuela *persona non grata* in solidarity with the same move by Bolivia earlier in the week. Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva defended the legitimacy of Morales' government and said that South American nations, through Unasur, are capable of resolving the conflict, Bolivian daily *La Razon* reported.

**Economic News****Ecuador Expels Brazil's Odebrecht, Forbids Executives from Leaving**

Ecuador's military expelled a leading Brazilian construction firm on Tuesday, accusing Norberto Odebrecht SA of negligence in several infrastructure projects. Acting on threats issued earlier this month, President Rafael Correa ordered the military takeover of two dams, a rural irrigation project and a regional airport on Tuesday. The government said in a statement it was acting "to prevent an

energy crisis in the country and a state of internal turmoil, with the possibility of widespread blackouts throughout the nation." Odebrecht and consortium partners had been at odds with Correa's Administration over Ecuador's insistence that it be indemnified against structural faults and what it describes as poor technical work in the San Francisco hydroelectric facility. Tuesday's decree orders the



President Correa

Photo: Ecuadorean Government.

Armed Forces to take custody of Odebrecht property and facilities "with the aim of using them to overcome the emergency." Ecuador has forbidden company executives Fabio Andreani Gandolfo, Fernando Bessa, Luiz Antonio Mameri and Eduardo Gedeon from leaving the country.

**Colombia Economic Growth Falls Sharply in Second Quarter**

Colombia's National Statistics Department (DANE) announced Tuesday that GDP growth in the second quarter of 2008 slowed sharply, registering 3.7 percent over the same period a year ago and 0.7 compared to the previous quarter. The mining, financial services and transportation sectors grew more than the average of all sectors in the second quarter, while the construction and manufacturing sectors registered slower growth. Domestic demand is driving the slowdown, registering 4.2 percent over a year ago in the second quarter of 2008, falling from 9.2 percent in 2007. As a result, the economy should grow below potential not only this year, but also in 2009, JP Morgan stated in a research note today. The Colombian peso dropped the most in two months Tuesday, falling 3.1 percent to 2,106.5 per dollar, Bloomberg News reported.

## Featured Q&amp;A

Continued from page 1

and non-governmental organizations alike need to remain vigilant."

**A** **Guest Comment: Olivia Gombri:** "Last week, Venezuelan officials expelled Human Rights Watch staff for a report on the administration of President Chavez that they deemed 'meddling in internal affairs'. The Human Rights Watch report and the reaction of Venezuela must be seen in the context of deteriorating political relations with the Bush Administration as a result of repeated attacks. US support for the coup against Chavez in 2002 was followed by US Treasury sanctions, black-listing in State Department reports on drugs and terrorism, an arms embargo, and refusals to respect extradition treaties. Just days after the escalation of provocations caused Venezuela to expel the US ambassador and Washington to follow suit, the Human Rights Watch report was released amid wide media attention. Contrary to the findings of the report, human rights in the political arena and in social and economic life have seen advancements under Chavez. Voter registration and participation have expanded, and free and fair elections have been consistently certified by international observers. Open debates thrive more than ever in the media and in civil society, and reforms to police laws and the judiciary have been praised by respected human rights groups in Venezuela such as PROVEA. Moreover, new guarantees exist for universal human rights like education, healthcare, and employment, contributing to a 35 percent reduction in poverty since 1998. These achievements were completely overlooked by Human Rights Watch in its unfortunately one-sided account."

**A** **Guest Comment: Jennifer McCoy:** "While the expulsion of Human Rights Watch by the Venezuelan government was not necessarily surprising given the defensiveness of that government, the manner in which it was carried out was shocking. Individual human rights abus-

es of physical integrity or illegal detention are not an issue in Venezuela. Instead, the major issues affecting human rights are the absence of an independent and impartial judiciary to protect individual rights equally, and the widespread crime threatening physical security of citizens. In addition, laws criminalizing political dissent and criticism of the government with long jail sentences are a backward step from the positive trend in Latin America and the rulings of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights. Although these laws are not frequently enforced, their existence intimidates citizens and inhibits free speech. In much of Latin America, threats to journalists investigating corruption and organized crime is a major concern. In addition, physical security of citizens is threatened by ordinary crime as well as organized crime ranging from gangs to drug cartels to mafia to paramilitaries. While high crime rates are a problem in much of the region, Guatemala, Mexico and Colombia face particular challenges with organized crime and reported corruption of factions of the security forces. Therefore, while state-sponsored terror associated with the military dictatorships has mostly ceased, the capacity of states to protect individual human rights on an equal basis and to combat the scourge of organized crime is the major challenge today."

**Donald Planty** is Chairman of the International Relations Department at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, President of Planty & Associates LLC, and former US Ambassador to Guatemala.

**Olivia Gombri** is Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office in Washington, DC.

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# Los Angeles Times

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<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/letters/la-le-letters21-2009feb21.0,6675694.full.story>

*From the Los Angeles Times*

Letters

## Letters to the editor

February 21, 2009

### Clouded view of Venezuela

Re "Hugo Chavez's staying power." editorial, Feb.17

The Times' editorial made the encouraging suggestion that Venezuela and the United States have "many issues of mutual interest and importance" -- too many, in fact, to remain at odds diplomatically.

The editorial's claim that Venezuela is moving toward dictatorship after a national referendum, however, sadly negates that attempt at greater understanding.

Voters approved a constitutional amendment to end term limits for elected officials in a process that was free and fair and, according to reports quoting State Department spokesman Gordon Duguid, "fully consistent with democratic practice."

Duguid also has avoided weighing in on the result of the referendum, deeming it "a matter of the Venezuelan people," while reports have said that State Department spokesman Noel Clay praised the election's "civic spirit." It is ironic that The Times' call for reengagement with Venezuela comes not as a result of respect for this democratic spirit but rather of the fallacious claim that Chavez has become an "autocrat."

George Ciccariello-

Maher

Oakland

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## Chavez's term limits

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Saturday, February 14, 2009

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John R. Thomson makes the bizarre assertion that the Feb. 15 referendum on term limits in Venezuela equates to a choice between democracy and dictatorship ("Democracy or dictatorial destiny?" Commentary, Thursday). This is not true, as regular free and fair elections will continue to be held no matter what voters choose in the referendum. Venezuelans are being asked to decide whether all elected officials - not just the president - should have the chance to run for re-election after serving two terms in office. Winning an election still would require a majority of the

popular vote.

Mr. Thomson also claims there is corruption in the voting process, but all electoral observers, including the Organization of American States, the European Union, the Carter Center and the NAACP have certified electoral processes in Venezuela as free and fair. Observers also have praised the National Electoral Council, the independent branch of government responsible for electoral oversight, for its transparency.

Tejas Kadia  
Senior research analyst  
Latin America Information Office  
Washington

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## LETTER TO EDITOR: Improving conditions

Saturday, January 24, 2009

- ..... Comment "Chavez hit hard by cheap oil" (Web, World, Monday) reads more like the talking points of Venezuela's opposition parties than a news article based on facts.
- ..... Print
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- ..... Got a Question? The article suggests that Venezuela's international development programs are losing appeal at home because of lowered oil prices. However, the only evidence of this is provided by a single source, a well-known figure in the political opposition.
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The article fails to mention that Venezuela has development agreements with many countries that are allies of the U.S., in addition to supposed foes. Venezuela has signed energy-cooperation agreements with all but two Caribbean countries and has provided humanitarian assistance to the neediest, such as Haiti. Central and South American nations have agreements with Venezuela on pressing issues like food security. The biggest beneficiaries of the policies of the Chavez government, though, have been Venezuelan citizens. Programs providing free health care and education have contributed to a 32 percent drop in poverty and raised the quality of life. This record of improving conditions at home has fueled Mr. Chavez's electoral wins and high approval ratings.

OLIVIA GOUMBRI  
Executive director  
Venezuela Information Office  
Washington  
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## Voice of the People

—Olivia Goumbri, executive director, Venezuela Information Office, Washington  
January 26, 2009

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### Venezuela's oil

Your depiction of Venezuela in the Jan. 19 editorial "[Hugo Chavez](#), chagrined" is one-sided. The Tribune claims that Venezuela "squandered" oil profits and reduces its groundbreaking development programs to mere charity aimed at mollifying the masses.

Venezuela indeed uses a significant portion of oil profits to fund anti-poverty programs. It is not true, though, that lowered oil prices caused Venezuela to do an about-face and scramble for more foreign investment.

In fact the bidding for Orinoco Belt oil projects began last October, and was part of a long-term plan to develop those reserves announced back in August 2006. It was not contingent on oil prices.

Furthermore many foreign firms, including BP, Chevron and Total, have maintained assets in Venezuela despite last year's nationalization. Only Exxon and Conoco Phillips chose to exit.

Contrary to what your editorial suggests, Venezuela's government has taken steps to avert an economic downturn. Foreign currency reserves are at a record high, and the state oil company reinvested \$15 billion in the industry last year. Thanks to sound social and economic policies, employment in Venezuela has risen and poverty has fallen by more than 30 percent over the last 10 years.

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### Regulating markets

Tribune columnist [Steve Chapman](#)

recently wrote about regulating markets ("The empty case for even more regulation," Commentary, Jan. 8).

His point was that since the current regulators could not catch a moth sitting on a wall, more regulators could do no better.

The basic problem is one he does not mention: Regulators were not doing the job. They did not care; in some cases they were not there.

True, if other regulators did no better, criminals like [Bernard Madoff](#) would continue to plague the investment community, fraudulent underwriting schemes would continue to flourish, overly optimistic ratings on bundles of securitized mortgages would continue to deceive investors, and derivatives would continue to be subject to no controls.

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The market mess was caused by the failings of many.

Regulators like everyone else must either work or be replaced. In order for effective compliance to occur, competent, motivated people must be put to work.

When government watchdogs are asleep or not even on the job, markets will fail to operate fairly and the life savings of the nation's work force will continue to be decimated.

Let's have the government get serious about carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities; have it fill positions with competent people and regulate financial markets so that the interests of investors and others are safeguarded.

—Donald R. Sutherland, *Glen Ellyn*

**Insensitive headline**

Puns have their time and place. However, I believe both were missing when the Tribune printed this Jan. 17 headline about the loss of 34,000 jobs: "Circuit City shorts out."

The insensitivity was egregious.

My daughter recently lost her job to this recession and I am offended that an editor would use a pun so inappropriately.

—Michele Vondracek, *Bourbonnais*

**Obama class**

Thankfully it seems that the Obamas have a bit more class and dignity than some of the people who voted for them. Their graciousness and warmth toward our outgoing president was appropriate and respectful, worthy of the office that Barack Obama now holds.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to George W. Bush and his lovely wife, Laura, for their service to this country during a time plagued with such huge challenges.

Our problems still face us.

But we will continue as a country to do what we can to overcome them.

Let's roll.

—Sharon Jackson, *Wheaton*

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# A Matter of Morals, Not Morales: Respect Bolivia's Democracy!

By Olivia Burlingame Gombri, AlterNet. Posted September 13, 2008.

Yet again, the United States appears to be siding with violent right-wing elements to undermine a Latin American democracy.

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As an American and an expert on US-Venezuela relations, the events unfolding in Bolivia are simply too familiar to escape my notice. The tactics used by opponents of President Chavez during Venezuela's short-lived coup in 2002 are currently being replicated in a "civic coup" in neighboring Bolivia that is designed to undermine the democratic government of Evo Morales. That nation, though different from Venezuela in so many ways, seems to be travelling down a strikingly similar road, not least in terms of the role of the media in encouraging right-wing, anti-democratic opposition groups and the active support of that process by US officials.

Just over a month ago, on August 10th, Morales won a recall referendum with over 67% of the popular vote. This successful electoral process served as a check on his mandate, and was a powerful reaffirmation of the legitimacy of his democratic administration. Bolivians turned out at the polls in even higher numbers for that referendum than during the last presidential race in 2005, when Morales won 53% of votes.

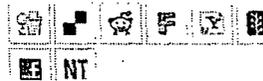
Nine days after the peaceful referendum, opposition governors in the eastern states of Tarija, Bani, Pando, and Santa Cruz mobilized protests around their secessionist agenda and desire to exert total control over local natural gas reserves. With those disturbances barely in the past, a new bout of violence is again threatening national unity. Two days of mayhem and violence have wracked the city of Santa Cruz, spurred on by calls broadcast over the national media to join in "civil disobedience" against the government. Journalists considered sympathetic to the government were also harassed and injured.

OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza quickly called for the violent actions of opposition groups to end. Calls to dialogue with the government were issued and the destruction and illegal seizures of government buildings, a human rights NGO, and a gas pipeline were condemned. The violence was not merely symbolic, but also carried with it economic consequences; damage to the pipeline slowed exports to Brazil, and repairs to the pipeline could cost an estimated \$100 million.

The US Ambassador to Bolivia, Phillip Goldberg, remained astonishingly silent in the lead-up to the unfolding coup. He did, however, attend a meeting with opposition leaders a week earlier, causing great concern to many, including the Bolivian government who declared him *persona non grata*.

Goldberg is known by Bolivians and many in the policy world as "the Ambassador of Ethnic

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Cleansing" for his previous role as Special Assistant to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, one of the architects of the breakup of Yugoslavia. He also promoted the separation of Serbia and Montenegro, and helped foment conflict between Serbian and Albanian forces in Kosovo. It would seem that Goldberg has a particular knack for promoting racial and ethnic divisions, and that doing so has been central to his political career. Among Goldberg's closest friends are Croatian businessmen in Santa Cruz, who happen to be leaders of the opposition's "Nación Camba" movement and the local "Civic Committee," one of the main proponents of destabilization in Bolivia.

In response to the turmoil, President Evo Morales has called for non-violence and ordered the police and military not to use force against the opposition. Instead, the government hopes to uphold the rule of law and wait for opposition actors to abide by calls from the international community to put down their weapons and talk with the government.

So far, this has not happened. On September 10th, after most of the destructive acts had already been carried out, Santa Cruz opposition senator Óscar Ortiz threatened more violence if President Morales continued with a new constitution. Despite the fact that he represents the majority of Bolivians, refusals to recognize President Morales and his legitimate policy initiatives since he was first elected in 2005 have been a growing problem, and one that reflects racism. In Bolivia, the Indigenous majority has often been targeted by violent mobs and paramilitary activity.

Of interest here are many lessons from Venezuela, where opposition elites have been known to mock President Chavez's mulatto features by calling him a "monkey." The dangers of an unbridled anti-government media were on display during the 2002 coup, which was advertised by television stations that committed the serious crime of inciting political violence. After advocating the overthrow of the president, these channels conducted news blackouts as the pro-Chavez rallies grew and demanded the return of the democratic order. Also, as in Bolivia, US officials from the Bush administration were quick to lend their support to the opposition.

Let us hope that things do not go this far, -- or further -- in Bolivia. For all of us Americans who espouse democratic ideals here at home, it is important to demand the same standards for Bolivia. Support for democracy cannot be selective. We must respect the right of Bolivians to live in a country that remains peaceful and united, not ransacked and bitterly divided.

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*Olivia Burlingame Gombri is Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office.*

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Venezuela's Stability

Monday, November 3, 2008; Page A20

The Oct. 26 editorial "Rogue States Gone Bust" wrongly labeled Venezuela a "rogue." The country is one of the longest-standing democracies and most important trade partners of the United States in the hemisphere.

President Hugo Chávez recently said that "the U.S. is a great country . . . what we need to do is talk." Indeed, he has criticized the widely unpopular and unilateral policies of the Bush administration. Venezuela has endured aggressive acts such as U.S. support for the 2002 coup in Venezuela, a subsequent embargo on sales of military equipment and frequent condemnations from the State Department.

Experts have found that Venezuela will fare better than most nations in the global financial crisis. All oil states are familiar with economic booms and busts, but Venezuela is well prepared to experience lean times -- it has \$40 billion in foreign currency reserves, tens of billions more in discretionary funds and a strong Standard & Poor's credit rating on government debt.

Mr. Chávez has said that current rates of social spending on anti-poverty programs can continue even if oil falls to \$55 per barrel. Many forget that when Venezuela began investing in these programs five years ago, oil was far cheaper still, at around \$25 per barrel.

MEGAN MORRISSEY

Washington

*The writer is communications manager of the Venezuela Information Office, which is sponsored by the Venezuelan government.*

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THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

## Venezuela's role in fight against drugs

The Boston Globe

October 26, 2008

THE ARTICLE "Strained US ties with Venezuela a boon for traffickers" (Page A17, Oct. 19) misled readers to believe that Venezuela is taking a passive role in the fight against drugs. True, Venezuela is situated between the world's largest producer of cocaine, Colombia, and the drug's largest consumer, the United States. But thanks to Venezuela's efforts to thwart the flow of drugs across its border, the country ranks fourth in the world in cocaine seizures; 32 tons of cocaine were stopped in 2007 alone. Five drug kingpins, also wanted in the United States and Colombia, have been detained by Venezuelan officials this year. More than 200 illicit airstrips used to transport drugs have been detected and destroyed, and seven radar stations have been installed throughout the country to improve tracking and interception.

Venezuela has committed to 50 bilateral antidrug cooperation agreements with 37 countries. President Hugo Chavez is not "anti-American," as your article claims. Just this month, he said in a speech that "the US is a great country." What we need to do is talk; we need to reach agreements. We need each other.

MEGAN MORRISSEY

*Media analyst*

*Venezuela Information Office*

*Washington ■*

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## LETTER TO EDITOR: Democracy in Venezuela

Sunday, September 7, 2008

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Norman Bailey's column on Venezuela ("Threats in the hemisphere," Commentary, Thursday) made the politicized and dangerous argument that the country is a security threat. Venezuela is actually an advocate for peace and cooperation. Democracy is in full force in Venezuela. The media is still opposition-dominated. Regular, free and fair elections have been certified by credible international observers; local elections this year will likely reaffirm this. The only individuals ineligible to run are those that face corruption charges, due to a law dating back to the 1970s. The branches of government operate independently; the electoral council upheld the 'no' vote in last year's

constitutional reform referendum.

Finally, Venezuela does not support terrorist groups, and charges of anti-Semitism would come as a surprise to global Jewish leaders who recently met with President Hugo Chavez and stated that "he is a great friend of the Jewish people" and "wants to fight anti-Semitism in Latin America."

OLIVIA BURLINGAME GOUNBRI

Washington

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Originally published Tuesday, December 23, 2008 at 3:46 PM

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## Surprising lessons from Venezuela's 2004 election

Election observers Larry Hildes and Karen Weill think the Venezuela election council's strides in running a fair and credible election have some lessons for U.S. elections. Among the strategies that impressed them — paper trails for electronic voting and providing results only after polls close, results are counted and audited.

By Larry Hildes and Karen Weill  
*Special to The Times*

IN many ways, 2008 was the year of the elections. That normalcy seemed to carry the day during balloting Nov. 4 and was a relief for us, a husband-and-wife legal team from Bellingham. The situation was quite harrowing in 2004, when we served as monitors in Florida and saw — in just one example — voting machines give one man a "Bush" result no matter how many times he pressed "Kerry."

There are signs some improvements have been made since that debacle; however, we still have a lot to learn about how to run smooth elections. Interestingly, those lessons are increasingly coming from abroad.

We recently joined more than 130 observers from around the world in Venezuela to monitor state and local elections Nov. 23. What we saw there contradicts the Bush administration's portrayal of Venezuela. We witnessed a vocal, uncensored media unrestrained in its criticism of the Chávez government. Opposition candidates campaigned without impediment, giving speeches and holding rallies.

We saw an open democratic election that allowed fair voting for all parties. We also found an electoral system designed to encourage voting and ensure that anyone who wishes to vote can do so.

Believe it or not, we found a system far more transparent, inclusive and accountable than what we observed in the past as monitors in the U.S. Unlike in Florida in 2004, we saw a process in Venezuela where no one tried to deny voters their voice. The polls stayed open hours later than planned to accommodate long lines and an unexpectedly high turnout for a regional election.

For months beforehand, Venezuela's electoral council held an educational campaign explaining how to use the new polling machines and demonstrated how the voting system worked. The council ensured the vote results could be checked through a process in which electronic machines produce a paper trail voters can compare with the machine and change if necessary. Finally, audits were made to 55 percent of the paper ballots before the results were announced — four to five times the amount needed statistically to rule out fraud.

The electoral council under the controversial Chávez has worked tirelessly to prove to the Venezuelan electorate, and to the world, that it has eliminated fraud. The new voting machines are a response to the blatant ballot-box stuffing of the 1990s. The paper trail is a response to flawed voting machines in the U.S. and elsewhere.

After last year's referendum, the National Lawyer's Guild concluded that, amid intense scrutiny, "[Venezuela] has developed one of the most advanced electoral systems in the region, if not the world." U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., in a 2006 hearing on Venezuela, remarked "Florida is not even doing that with a paper trail. So maybe Venezuela will teach Florida something."

At our final stop on Election Day, a polling station that was supposed to close at 4 p.m. was still admitting voters as we were leaving at 5:10. According to other observers we met, voting centers accommodated extra long lines throughout Venezuela. This meant the results were not announced until 10 or 12 hours later after all polls had closed, tallying was complete, and the results had been audited.

Wouldn't that be a nice change in the U.S.? Barack Obama was named the winner two minutes after the West Coast polls officially closed, whether or not people were still in line (as in California) or officials were still counting the absentee ballots (as in our home state of Washington).

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As our political system evolves here in the U.S., we must remember democracy is not an end unto itself. It is a vehicle by which we realize the vision that we have of the future, and it is one that belongs in the hands of the people, not the power brokers.

Venezuela has rejected the top-down politics that were once the status quo. Doubtless, the country is paying the price through threats and interference. Bush government agencies contributed \$4.7 million to the campaigns of Chávez foes in Zulia and Tachira states.

In the U.S., Fox News twice attempted to strike fear in potential Obama supporters by portraying him as a "socialist" who would follow in that "dictator Chávez's shoes."

The truth is hard to find, unless you can go search it out on the ground, as we did in Venezuela. From every attempt we made to assess the conduct of the government, we found a process that was trusted and reflective of the will of the people. We in the U.S. can still stand to learn some lessons about how to run a fraud-free and protected election, if only we are willing.

*Larry and Karen Weill practice civil rights law in Bellingham. They volunteered as election monitors in Tampa, Fla., with the Election Protection Coalition in 2004.*

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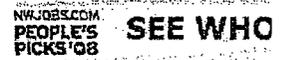
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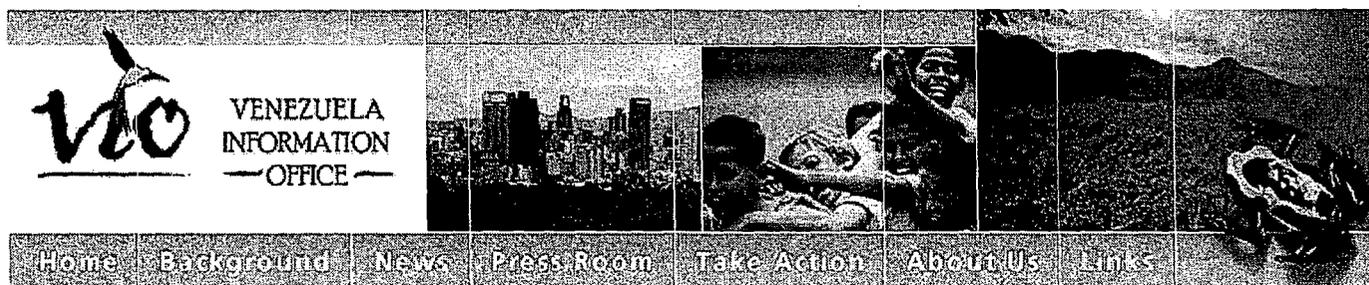
## **Part IV: Internet Information**

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**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>

**Date:** Thu, 11 Sep 2008 23:56:42 -0400 (EDT)

**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

### CIVIL COUP UNFOLDS IN BOLIVIA, DEMOCRACY IN DANGER BY VIOLENT/RACIST OPPOSITION



With little more than a month past since Bolivian President Evo Morales won a recall referendum with 67% of the vote, Bolivia's secessionist opposition has taken to the streets beginning in Santa Cruz, one of the wealthiest regions of the country. Three days of mayhem and violence have wracked the city of Santa Cruz resulting in at least 8 deaths so far, spurred on by calls broadcast over the national media to join in "civil disobedience" against the government. Journalists considered sympathetic to the government have also been harassed and injured. Opposition mobs ransacked the recently nationalized telephone office, and took control of the internal revenue and agrarian reform offices.

OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza quickly called for the violent actions of opposition groups to end. Calls to dialogue with the government were issued and the destruction and illegal seizures of government buildings, a human rights NGO, and a gas pipeline were condemned. The violence was not merely symbolic, but also carried economic consequences; damage to the pipeline slowed exports to Brazil, and repairs to the pipeline could cost an estimated \$100 million.

This Wednesday, September 10<sup>th</sup> President Morales declared US Ambassador to Bolivia, Phillip Goldberg, persona non grata and asked him to leave the country. The Bolivian government stated that he was involved with the opposition and interference would not be tolerated. He had met with opposition leaders just last week. Goldberg, known as "the Ambassador of Ethnic Cleansing" for his previous role as Special Assistant to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, is one of the architects of the breakup of Yugoslavia. He also promoted the separation of Serbia and Montenegro, and helped foment conflict between Serbian and Albanian forces in Kosovo. It would seem that Goldberg has a particular knack for promoting racial and ethnic divisions, and that doing so has been central to his political career. Among Goldberg's closest friends are Croatian businessmen in Santa Cruz, who happen to be leaders of the opposition's "Nación Camba" movement and the local "Civic Committee," one of the main proponents of destabilization in Bolivia. Last night, the Bush administration answered back and declared Bolivia's Ambassador to the US, Gustavo Guzman, persona non grata.

In response to the turmoil, President Evo Morales has called for non-violence and ordered the police and military not to use force against the opposition. Instead, the government hopes to uphold the rule of law and wait for opposition actors to abide by calls from the international community to put down their weapons and talk with the government. So far, this has not happened. Opposition congress members have threatened more violence if Morales continues moving forward with the new constitution. For the most up to date news on the situation [CLICK HERE](#).

**VENEZUELA STANDS WITH BOLIVIA, US AMBASSADOR TO VENEZUELA SENT HOME**

After hearing the news that Bolivia's Ambassador to the US would be expelled for his very likely role in the destabilization of that country, Venezuela made the decision to show its solidarity with Bolivia by expelling Patrick Duddy, the US Ambassador to Venezuela. President Chavez also recalled his Ambassador in the US, Bernardo Alvarez, to Venezuela for consultation. [Read the full story here.](#)

Considering the failed coup attempt lived by Venezuelans in April 2002, it is not surprising that Venezuela would take this posture. Many of the same actors seem to be at play in Bolivia today. Venezuela is said to be the first country to have suffered a media coup, one that also encouraged violent attacks on pro-government supporters and the poor. It has also been well documented that the US government was openly supportive of coup plotters and met with them prior to their illegal attempts to take power.

This all comes as today, Venezuela uncovered a plot by retired generals to assassinate him. [Read more about this story here.](#)

### **TAKE ACTION**

If you would like to make sure that democracy is respected and that the rule of law is restored in Bolivia call your members of Congress and ask them to condemn the violent actions of the opposition and support the democratically elected President in his calls for dialogue. Unfortunately, Chair of the Western Subcommittee in the House of Representatives, Eliot Engel, [has condemned](#) the actions of Morales rather than the opposition.

**Let your members know that he got it wrong!**

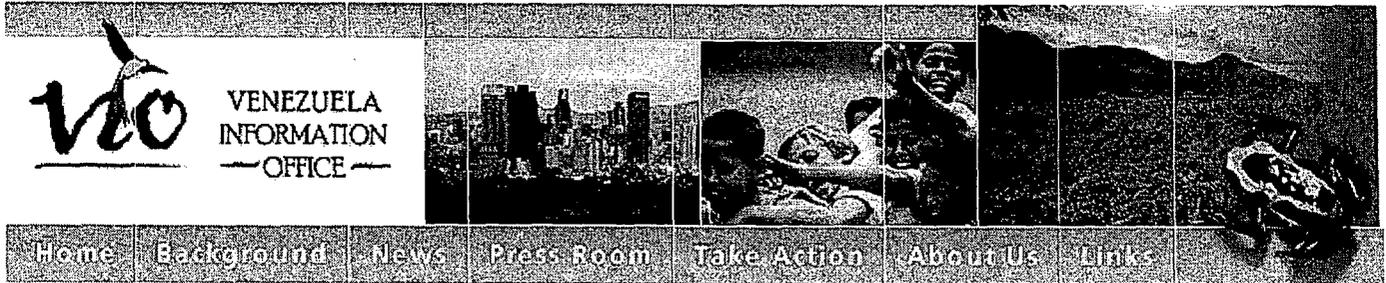
**Call (202)224-3121 and ask for your senators' and/or representative's office!**

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**Subject:** VIO Article "A Matter of Morals, Not Morales: Respect Bolivia's Democracy!"  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <vio@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Sat, 13 Sep 2008 08:29:28 -0400 (EDT)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



### VIO Press Release

This Saturday, Olivia B. Gombri, Executive Director of the Venezuela Information Office published the following article on the unfolding situation in Bolivia and its relation to recent Venezuelan history.

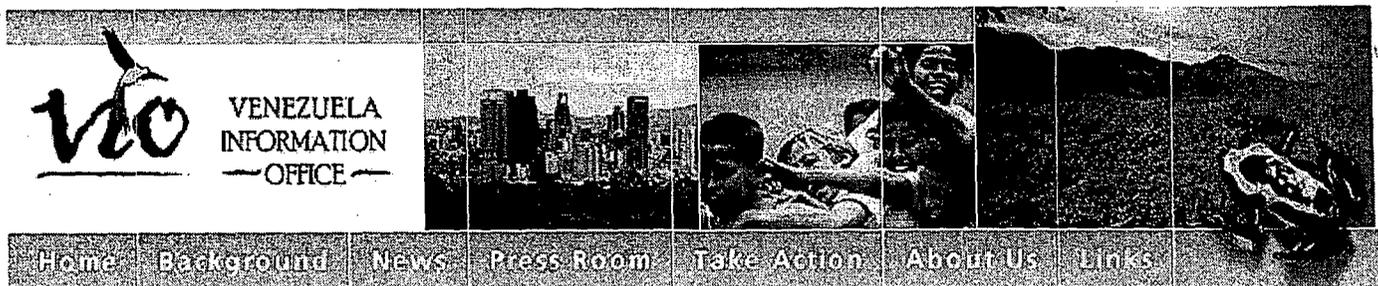
#### A Matter of Morals, Not Morales: Respect Bolivia's Democracy!

As an American and an expert on US-Venezuela relations, the events unfolding in Bolivia are simply too familiar to escape my notice. The tactics used by opponents of President Chavez during Venezuela's short-lived coup in 2002 are currently being replicated in a "civic coup" in neighboring Bolivia that is designed to undermine the democratic government of Evo Morales. That nation, though different from Venezuela in so many ways, seems to be traveling down a strikingly similar road, not least in terms of the role of the media in encouraging right-wing, anti-democratic opposition groups and the active support of that process by US officials. [Read full article.](#)

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action-Venezuelan Ambassador Returns Home, Regional Leaders Unite  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <vio@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Tue, 16 Sep 2008 11:52:59 -0400 (EDT)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

### VENEZUELAN ENVOY RETURNS TO CARACAS



Last week, Venezuela acted in solidarity with Bolivia by dismissing US Ambassador Patrick Duddy and recalling its Venezuelan envoy in Washington, Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez Herrera. Bolivia's move came after its own US Ambassador held secret meetings with violent anti-government groups.

When Ambassador Alvarez returned to Caracas last Friday, he was met with applause and warm embraces. "Venezuela is not responsible for the deterioration of the relationship," Alvarez explained, emphasizing the state of false allegations lodged by the Bush administration against Venezuela. "For me it is an honor to return in such a dramatic manner, as a

result of the commitment of our President to the dignity, independence, sovereignty and right of the peoples to promote their own development." To watch a video clip of his arrival in Caracas and reception by Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro and President Chavez, [click here](#).

During more than five years of diplomatic service in the US, Ambassador Alvarez made possible a level of mutual respect and understanding between Venezuela and the American people that many had thought impossible. Though he faced hostility from the Bush camp, Alvarez prioritized relations with local communities throughout the US, where he was always met with open arms and open minds. Alvarez visited California, Florida, Texas, the Midwest, the Northeast, and several Native American Reservations prioritizing the common agendas and progressive vision shared by the peoples of our two nations. To watch what we believe to be one of his finest speeches, made at an energy conference in Houston, [click the following links: Part 1, Part 2, Part 3 and Part 4](#).

Venezuela will maintain the rest of its diplomatic corps in Washington, with the embassy headed by Minister Counselor Angelo Rivero Santos. President Chavez has stated that no new appointee will be named until January, after the US presidential elections. In the meantime, those of us who strive to improve US-Venezuela relations will continue to confront new challenges as they arise.

### REGIONAL LEADERS UNITE

Yesterday, a meeting of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), regional leaders rallied behind Bolivia's President Morales much as President Chavez had done, demonstrating their support for his democratic government and the cause of national unity in Bolivia. Morales called it "the first time in history that we South Americans are deciding to solve the problems of South America." Listen to an interview from today with Bolivia's Ambassador to the UK and the VIO's Executive Director on developments in the region or [read more here](#).

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action-The Truth Suffers in Human Rights Watch Report on Venezuela  
**From:** VIO News & Action <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Thu, 18 Sep 2008 21:22:16 -0400 (EDT)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org

## VIO Venezuela News and Action

### Human Rights Watch Report on Venezuela Issued Today, Truth Suffers

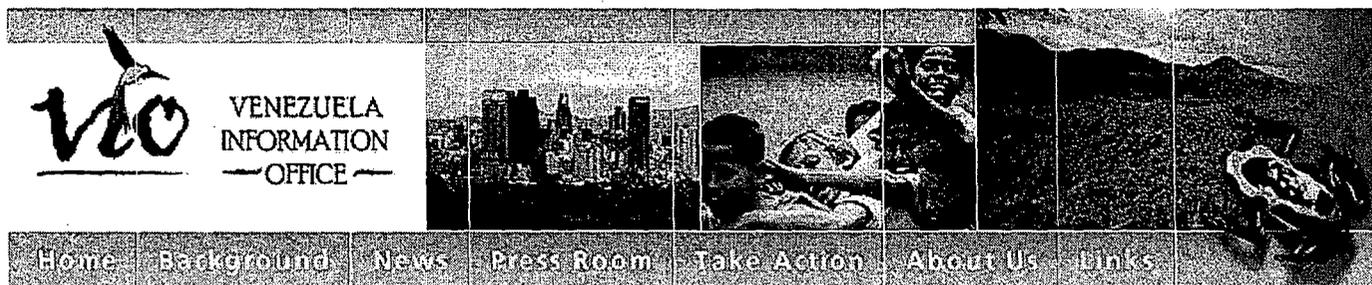
The Venezuela Information Office condemns the new Human Rights Watch report on Venezuela released today as a biased and politicized attack that should be regarded with suspicion in the context of the recent deterioration in diplomatic relations between Venezuela and the Bush administration.

Human Rights Watch wrongly claims that the democratic government of President Chavez "flout[s] human rights principles," ignoring its tremendous progress on extending the most fundamental of human rights to all citizens, such as food, education, and health. In the region as a whole, Venezuela compares favorably with other countries on human rights issues. To read the full press release and our analysis of the report click [here](#).

If you believe any part of the report merits a correction make your voice heard [here](#).

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - U.S. Unfairly Condemns Venezuela, Bolivia on Drugs  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Fri, 3 Oct 2008 15:44:29 -0400 (EDT)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

Dear Friends,

Recently, the White House released its annual "majors list" of drug transit or drug producing countries, which named Venezuela, Bolivia, and Burma as having "failed demonstrably" to meet international agreements in the fight against drugs. Bolivia was designated for the first time, while Venezuela has already been on the list for four years. Bolivia has been particularly affected by the blacklisting, for it is being used by the White House as an excuse to take away trade privileges under Andean Trade Preference Act.

The record shows that both Bolivia and Venezuela have made major strides in the last few years in fighting drug trafficking. Bolivia, unlike countries that are not on the list -- such as Colombia and Peru -- has seen a fall in cocaine production thanks to the destruction of processing plants. In Venezuela, the government has destroyed over 200 illicit airstrips that were being used by drug traffickers along the border with Colombia. It is clear, therefore, that the decision to put these two countries on the list is politically motivated due to the Bush administration's opposition to the foreign and domestic agendas of Venezuela and Bolivia. It is not based on concrete efforts to fight drug trafficking.

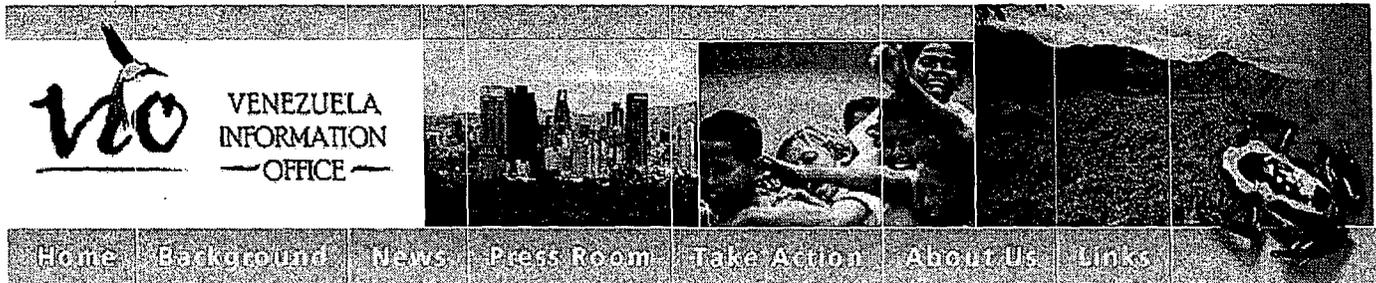
To find out more, see this new [VIO fact sheet](#).

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Support Venezuela and Bolivia  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Tue, 7 Oct 2008 15:59:46 -0400 (EDT)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

October 7, 2008

Dear Friends,

Once again, we need your help in keeping the U.S. government accountable for its unfair actions against Venezuela! This time is particularly crucial as other democracies in the region, such as Bolivia, are also facing threats.

### UNFAIR CONDEMNATION OF BOLIVIA AND VENEZUELA ON DRUGS

The U.S. government has in recent weeks stepped up attacks on Venezuela and Bolivia regarding the issue of drugs, unfairly accusing the countries of "failing" to fight trafficking. The accusations are increasingly used to condemn the two Andean nations, most recently through a resolution in Congress.

House Resolution 1483 was introduced on September 23rd after Venezuela and Bolivia were listed on the White House's annual "majors list" of drug trafficking or transit countries. The list, though, reflects the political goals of the Bush Administration, not the reality of the drug problem throughout the world. For details, see the VIO fact sheet.

HR 1483 confirms the White House condemnation by asserting that Venezuela and Bolivia have "failed demonstrably" to meet international commitments to combat the production and trafficking of illegal drugs. It was introduced by Representative Dan Burton (R-IN) of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and co-signed by 7 others, including right-wing Florida Republican Connie Mack, whose own anti-Chavez initiatives include unsuccessfully attempting to designate Venezuela a "state sponsor of terrorism." HR 1483 should also be stopped before it progresses any further.

### TAKE ACTION

Call your Member of Congress and tell them to oppose HR1483. Remind them that Venezuela and Bolivia have in fact made significant progress on fighting drugs, according to the United Nations, and that Congress should not repeat the White House's politicized attacks on their democratic governments.

Let your representatives know that Venezuela and Bolivia do not deserve to be condemned!

Call (202)224-3121 and ask for your representative's office!

### SOVEREIGNTY UNDER FIRE AGAIN IN SOUTH AMERICA

Yesterday, Bolivia's government held talks with the leaders of opposition groups that have violently demanded autonomy for the eastern part of the country, but no solution was reached. The opposition has threatened to undo

national unity even following a referendum in which 67% of voters in Bolivia supported President Morales.

U.S. media coverage has been overly sympathetic to the same anti-government secessionists that massacred scores of peasants and threatened to overthrow Morales. See a Christian Science Monitor column called "Boiling Point in Bolivia."

### MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

The events unfolding in Bolivia closely resemble those experienced by Venezuelans in recent years. To help prevent history from repeating itself, write a letter to the editor of the Christian Science Monitor telling them that you think the sovereignty of the Bolivian people should be respected. Send your letter of 200 words or less to [letters@csmonitor.com](mailto:letters@csmonitor.com) and be sure to include your contact information.

### HUMAN RIGHTS MISJUDGED

Members of the U.S. Congress also recently sent a letter to President Chavez condemning his decision to expel Human Rights Watch staff from Venezuela. What the 41 Members who signed the letter ignored was the context around that action, which followed the release of a biased account of the state of human rights under Venezuela's current democratic government. The Chavez government has been relentlessly criticized by U.S. officials and agencies, and was even threatened by a U.S.-backed coup in 2002. Tensions escalated in recent weeks, though, after the U.S. ambassador in Bolivia was thought to be colluding with violent opposition groups, prompting both Bolivia and Venezuela to expel their U.S. reps.

The inaccurate Human Rights Watch report closely resembled the Bush White House's line on Venezuela. For a detailed analysis from the point of view of the government, please see a [new fact sheet](#) by the Embassy of Venezuela in Washington.

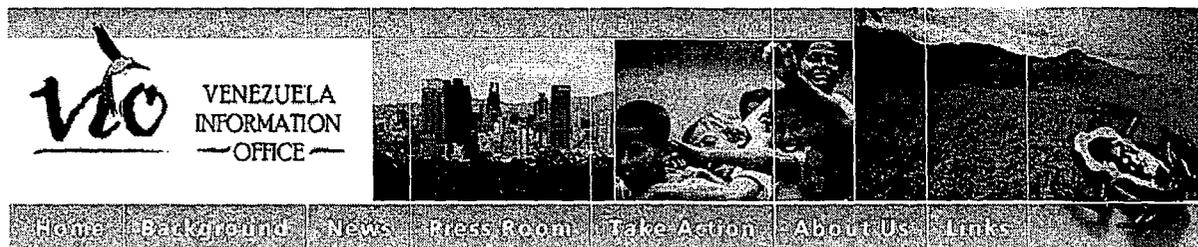
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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - LatAm Congratulates Obama, Brown University Suggest New Policy  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Fri, 7 Nov 2008 14:32:49 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

VIO News & Action - November 7, 2008

### LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS CONGRATULATE OBAMA, HOPE FOR BETTER RELATIONS

Venezuela and many other Latin American countries sent letters of congratulations to the new president-elect Barack Obama on Wednesday. In a statement released by Venezuela's Foreign Ministry called it a "historic election" and an "important victory." The statement also reaffirmed the commitment of the Chavez government to build better ties with the U.S. You can read the full letter here: <http://embavenez-us.org/news.php?nid=4633>

### BROWN UNIVERSITY POLICY BRIEF ON THE ANDES CALLS FOR RESPECT & COOPERATION

On November 5, The Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University issued a letter to President-elect Obama laying out their international policy suggestions. Brown University also issued a policy brief for the new U.S. administration, urging renewed engagement with the Andean region, specifically Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. The brief was the result of a conference on the Andes held earlier this year at that Ivy League university. The four main policy recommendations are outlined below.

- 1) The new administration should engage in diplomacy rather than confrontation with the region's political leaders and governments.
- 2) U.S. academic institutions should increase their discussion about Latin America, and in particular Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. Exchanges between scholars from these countries and the U.S. should increase, and academic focus on the region should be a priority for U.S. institutions and politicians.
- 3) Cross-cultural and people-to-people exchanges should be developed between the U.S. and the Andean region. City exchanges, study abroad programs, and cultural activities should increase.
- 4) U.S. foreign policy toward Andean countries should respect national sovereignty.

You can view the full report on the website of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies of Brown University.

For a larger pdf version [click here](#).

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

The Brown policy brief is one of the first documents produced by an Ivy League institution that calls for a sound and balanced approach of engagement with the democratically elected Andean governments. Not only does it encourage the new administration and Congress to prioritize dialogue, it also urges civil society and local elected officials to promote better understanding between people in the U.S. and in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.

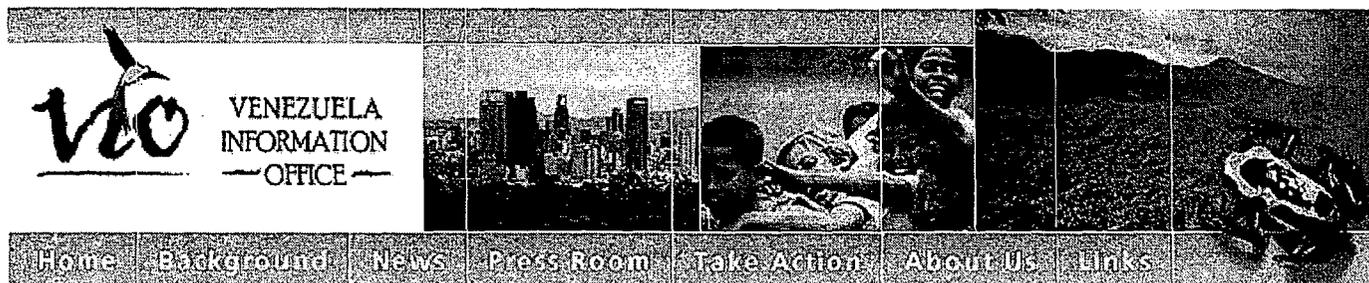
Send this brief to your Member of Congress and tell them that you agree with the policy suggestions laid out by Brown University. Better relations with the region can only come from a policy that is based on mutual respect and understanding.

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action-New Poll Predicts PSUV Victory in Majority of States  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Fri, 21 Nov 2008 10:54:27 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

### Poll Shows Rising Satisfaction with Democracy in Venezuela

A new survey published on November 14, 2008 by the respected Chilean polling firm Latinobarómetro finds that Venezuela has the region's highest rate of support for democracy as the best system of government, and the second highest rate of satisfaction with the actual functioning of democracy. Citizen satisfaction with democracy has risen by 14 percentage points since 1998, when President Chavez was elected for the first time.

According to the poll, Venezuela also has remarkable levels of support for democratic procedures such as voting, and also for democratic institutions including political parties, congress, and the judiciary. This portrait brings a level of detailed factual analysis to the political realities of Venezuela that is rarely seen in the media.

You can read the full survey in Spanish [here](#).

### New Poll Predicts PSUV Victory in Majority of States

A poll released on Tuesday by the Venezuelan firm Consultores 30.11 projects that the great majority of state governorships and mayoralties will be won by candidates of the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) in regional elections this Sunday, November 23rd. Close races are expected to ensue in only three states: Sucre, Carabobo, and Zulia.

The poll finds that voting trends in the November 23rd elections closely resemble those present in the previous presidential election in December 2006, which President Chávez won with 62.84% support. Read our full press release and review the poll in detail [here](#).

### Mainstream Media Offers Doomsday Approach

News outlets suggest altogether different scenarios, emphasizing criticisms of the government. Many sources say the opposition will win one third of state governorships and forecast so-called "power grabs" by President Chavez regardless of the outcome of the vote. These distortions can lead readers to believe that democracy in Venezuela is threatened. Read one of the most

reckless articles out today by Bloomberg here.

Even more disturbing is a PBS television special scheduled to air next week on Frontline just two days after Sunday's elections. The ninety-minute program provides a bleak and unrealistic view of President Chavez and his administration by focusing almost exclusively on negative themes and stories. Watch the program.

The most egregious mistakes are outlined below and merit a response.

1. Frontline states that President Chavez resigned during the 2002, which is not true. The Venezuelan leader did not renounce his presidency, although he was held captive and threatened with a bombing of the presidential palace.
2. Frontline completely ignores the well known manipulation of the events of the 2002 coup by Venezuela's private media, as well as its role in staging the coup.
3. Frontline asserts that Chavez used the enabling law to pass 12 laws that did not pass in a referendum on constitutional reforms. However, the 26 laws decreed on the last day of the enabling law are fundamentally different from those that faced referendum last December. All of them are in accordance with the constitution.
4. Frontline irresponsibly closes the program with the following quote: "Chavez barred hundreds of opposition candidates from running [in regional elections]." Again, PBS gets it wrong - this law was not written nor approved by Chavez. It was made in the National Assembly in 2001 by opposition and government supporters alike, including the former political party of opposition Mayor Leopoldo López, Primero Justicia. The law enables administrative sanctions for a variety of corruption charges and allows politicians to finish their term in office.

### **Make your voice heard today!**

Please share your comments with Frontline editors here and let them know that fact checking, among other things, is expected from their audience.

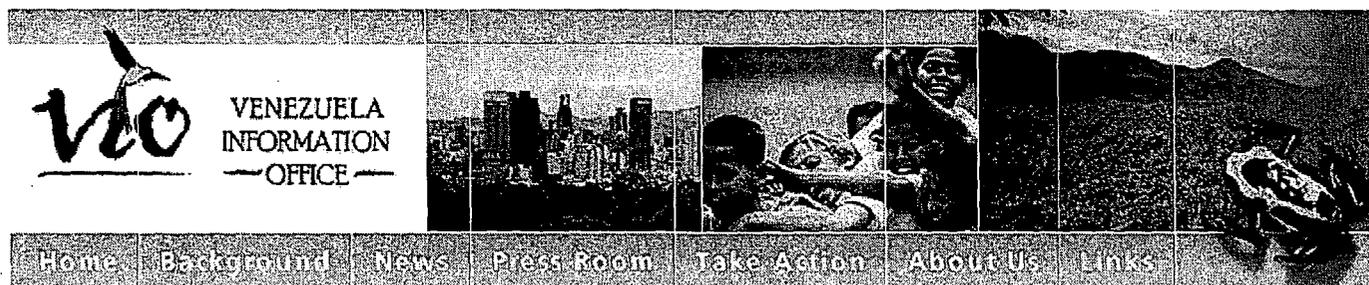
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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Pro-Government Candidates Win in Regional Elections

**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>

**Date:** Mon, 24 Nov 2008 12:03:33 -0500 (EST)

**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

### PSUV WINS MAJORITY OF GOVERNORSHIPS & MAYORALTIES

A large majority of local and state elections were won by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the CNE announced early this morning. In a heated race which produced a record turnout for regional elections, an astonishing 65% of registered voters showed up to the polls. Chavez supporters and his administration alike are claiming victory in Sunday's regional elections. You can view full results on the CNE website.

The states of Zulia, Nueva Esparta, Miranda, Tachira, Carabobo and the office of the Caracas metropolitan mayor were won by the opposition. The latter came as a surprise to many, as former Education Minister Aristobulo Isturiz was seen as a strong contender. Nevertheless, the PSUV and allies emerged victorious in the country, claiming 75% of all governorships and mayoralties. The last time the opposition participated fully in regional elections (in 2000) they won 7 states, this time only 6.



### DESPITE ALL EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY, MEDIA CLAIMS FRAUD

A few of the most outrageous examples are below, in order of egregiousness.

The Washington Post features an online forum this Wednesday at 11 am with the producer of a PBS Frontline special called "The Hugo Chavez Show," scheduled to air Tuesday at 9pm. Of the many distortions made in the program, the most unfortunate is the ending, which implies that fraud has been carried out in Venezuela's regional elections. You can view the full program online now and make a comment online at PBS's website. We also encourage you to submit a question to the Washington Post's forum. While PBS and the Post certainly have a right to their opinions, their bias should not be substituted for fact.

The Chicago Tribune followed suit yesterday and wrongly asserted that President Chavez and Venezuela's Electoral Council (CNE) were responsible for disqualifying opposition candidates from running in the elections. The Tribune failed to mention that the law was passed not by the CNE nor Chavez, but rather by the National Assembly in 2001 with the support of opposition members including the former political party of Leopoldo Lopez. Please use this link to submit a letter of no more than 200 words to the editor here and voice your concern with their distorted coverage of Venezuela.

The Washington Times has systematically sought to discredit the electoral system in Venezuela and the democratic government of President Chavez in columns published over the past week. The accusations culminated on Election Day in "Chavez's fraud game," by John R. Thomson. The full op-ed is [here](#). Read last Sunday's similarly distorted account by the author [here](#).

Thomson attacks the government's electoral body, its electronic voting machines, and legislation barring individuals under investigation for corruption from running for office. His claim that fraud was present in yesterday's elections is not only premature and preemptive, but also entirely unfounded. It symbolizes attempts by the mainstream media to undermine Venezuela's democracy at any cost. These attacks are likely to increase in the wake of elections which are widely predicted to see a majority of victories for pro-government candidates.

### HELP SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Write to the Washington Times and remind them that Venezuela's electoral system has been confirmed as free and fair by all international observers. Demand that the Times cease to mislead its readers about Venezuela and the Chavez government. Send a concise letter of 200 words or less including your contact information to [letters@washingtontimes.com](mailto:letters@washingtontimes.com), and cc the Deputy Commentary Pages Editor, Ben Tyree: [btyree@washingtontimes.com](mailto:btyree@washingtontimes.com). The following information may be useful:

- Venezuela's voting machines are highly advanced and not subject to manipulation. This has been confirmed in past elections scrutinized by observation missions from around the world. Delegations from the Carter Center, the NAACP, the National Lawyers Guild, the European Union, and Organization of American States have all certified electoral processes in Venezuela as free and fair and absent of fraud. They have also praised the electronic voting machines employed by the National Electoral Council as some of the most advanced in the world. Read their observations [here](#).
- Laws that prevent those accused of corruption from running do not amount to political discrimination. In these elections, they have been applied to pro-government candidates as well as members of the opposition. A fact sheet by the Embassy of Venezuela in Washington provides a helpful analysis of the disqualifications. It explains that they are based on a law passed by the National Assembly in 2001 and upheld by the Supreme Court, which ruled that they are indeed constitutional in separate legal challenges in 2005 and 2008. View the fact sheet [here](#).
- Venezuela is a democratic country in which civil liberties are guaranteed to all citizens. It is not a "police state," as Thomson so irresponsibly states in his op-ed. Opposition leader Teodoro Petkoff, who is one of the most vocal critics of the Chavez government, recently told Reuters: "This is not a Cuba-style police state, we don't live under the G2, or the Stasi or the Gestapo." According to the 2008 Latinobarometro poll on attitudes toward democracy in Latin America, Venezuelans were the third most likely in the region to agree that all citizens are equal before the law. Read more highlights from the poll [here](#).

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - What Election Results Mean for Venezuela  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Wed, 26 Nov 2008 10:56:25 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org

## VENEZUELA'S 2008 REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Regional elections held in Venezuela on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 have been portrayed in the U.S. media as a defeat for the government of President Hugo Chávez, when in fact the results strongly favor his party, the PSUV. The vast majority of state governorships and mayoralties, including those in many strategic parts of the country such as the Orinoco Oil Belt, remain under pro-government leadership.

The majority of Venezuelan citizens voted for candidates aligned with the Chávez government. Due to this broad popular support, the PSUV and its allies won 77 percent of governorships and 80 percent of mayoralties. Even in Caracas, where the overarching metropolitan mayoralty went to the opposition, residents of the city's most populous district of Libertador elected a PSUV candidate as their local representative.

Voter turnout in the regional elections was a record-setting 65 percent. The electoral process was the 11th to occur in Venezuela in about a decade, and was deemed "peaceful and exemplary" by OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza. He commented that the process was a powerful expression of the maturity of the country's democratic institutions as well as the trust that Venezuelans have in them. The National Electoral Council again proved its reputation for efficient and accurate electoral oversight by posting official results online less than 24 hours after the polls closed.

U.S. media coverage - including editorials in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* - has ignored the facts enumerated below, points which are essential to understanding contemporary political realities in Venezuela.

### **Most Governors and Mayors Support the Chávez Government**

The electoral map of Venezuela shows that pro-government PSUV candidates gained the majority of offices throughout the country. They won 17 out of 22 governorships, or 77 percent of the total. This is more than was claimed by PSUV governors and allies before the 2008 regional elections, at which point they held 15 states out of 22. PSUV candidates and allies also won mayoral posts in 80 percent of municipalities throughout the nation. Meanwhile, in at least four out of the five states where opposition governors were elected, the majority of mayoralties went to the PSUV (Zulia is still to be decided). This is true in Carabobo, where an opposition governor won, but at least 11 out of 14 of the new municipal mayors are members of the PSUV, including the mayor of Puerto Cabello, a major port city that is important to the oil industry. (Source: [National Electoral Council](#), [Embassy of Venezuela](#))

### **Most Venezuelans Live Under Pro-Chávez Local Leaders**

As has been true for nearly a decade, the majority of Venezuela's population will continue to live in states with pro-Chávez governors. This is currently true for 57 percent of the country's

population, while a smaller amount - 43 percent - have opposition governors. Some municipalities shifted to PSUV leadership by choosing a progressive leader for the first time during the tenure of the Chávez administration, including Valencia, an important industrial and manufacturing city in the coastal state of Carabobo. (Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Diario El Carabobeño)

### **The PSUV Achieved Victory in Strategic Areas of the Country**

All states in Venezuela with strategic natural resources and industries elected PSUV candidates for governor, with the exception of Zulia in the West. This means that pro-government leadership prevailed in the oil-rich states of Anzoátegui, Barinas, Bolívar, Monagas, and Delta Amacuro, some of which encompass the lucrative Orinoco Oil Belt. The state of Bolívar, in particular, also hosts the country's other important basic industries: hydroelectricity, aluminum, steel, iron, and petrochemicals. A majority of the mayoral races in these states also went to PSUV candidates. The PSUV won mayoral races in 15 out of 21 municipalities in Anzoátegui, at least seven out of 11 in Bolívar, at least eight of 12 in Barinas, at least 12 of 13 in Monagas, and three out of four in Delta Amacuro. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Pro-Government Candidates Won by Wide Margins**

In races for state governors, the opposition's five victories were claimed by far smaller margins than those earned by the PSUV, which clearly dominated in the remaining 17 states. This is a key difference. Opposition candidates won by margins of just 10 percentage points or less in four of those states (as low as 1.3% in Tachira and 3% in Carabobo), and won by 15 percentage points in the fifth state (Nueva Esparta). In contrast, the 17 pro-government victories were more decisive overall. Candidates supporting the government won by roughly 50 percentage points in two states, 30 percentage points in five states, 20 percentage points in four states, and 5 to 10 percent in six more states. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Residents of the Largest Caracas Municipality Voted for the PSUV**

Although the mayor for metropolitan Caracas went to the opposition, Libertador, the city's most heavily populated district - home to 1.7 million residents - elected the PSUV's municipal mayoral candidate Jorge Rodríguez. Libertador is by far the largest of the five urban districts in Caracas. The PSUV won this election by a wide margin of 12 percent, earning 106,487 more votes than the opposition's candidate. (Source: National Electoral Council)

### **Even in Opposition-Controlled States, Key Municipalities Went to the PSUV**

The assertion that nearly half the country will be under the leadership of the opposition is incorrect. In states where the governorships went to the opposition, a large number of the mayoral seats went to PSUV candidates or their allies. The opposition won the governorship in Carabobo, Tachira, Nueva Esparta, Zulia, and Miranda. In the state of Carabobo, the opposition only managed to win two of the mayoral races, while the PSUV won 11 mayoral races. In the state of Nueva Esparta, 6 of the 11 mayoral races went to the PSUV. In Tachira, the PSUV won at least 15 of 29 mayoral races. In Miranda, they won at least 14 of 21 races. (Source: National Electoral Council)

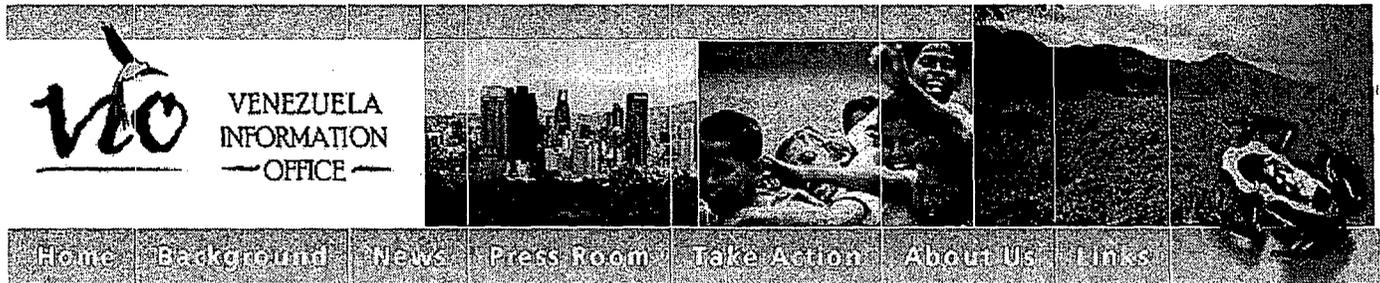
### **Venezuela's Electoral Authority Handled Record Voter Turnout**

The regional elections saw a record-setting 65.5 percent voter turnout. Of the 16.8 million registered voters in Venezuela, roughly 11 million went to the polls. This is a record for the country, and likely among the highest rates of voter turnout in local elections anywhere in the

hemisphere. Despite this, the National Electoral Council (CNE) managed the influx at the polls and made results of the voting available online through its website just hours after all of the 11,297 polling stations closed. This was made possible by the electronic voting machines used in Venezuela, which have been praised as among the most advanced and accurate in the world. The CNE presents results broken down by candidate for each state and municipality in an easily accessible format. (Source: Embassy of Venezuela, National Electoral Council)

Unfortunately, despite the extensive records available on the CNE website, many media outlets in the U.S. have failed to report accurately on the results of the regional elections. One example is the claim made in a *Wall Street Journal* article and a *New York Times* editorial on November 25th that more than half of Venezuela is under opposition control, which, according to the official statistics presented here, is inaccurate and misleading.

**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Washington Post Wrong Once Again  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Fri, 19 Dec 2008 18:07:21 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

Dear Friends,

The Washington Post ran yet another misleading editorial about Venezuela today, this time making the false and damaging claim that the country does not have free and fair elections. The Post ignores the fact that all international observers have consistently certified democratic elections carried out during the Chavez administration as free and fair. OAS Secretary General Miguel Insulza said recently that the regional elections that took place on November 24th, 2008 were a "peaceful, exemplary" process that showed the maturity of democratic institutions in Venezuela.

### HELP DEMAND THE TRUTH

Read the Washington Post editorial [here](#). Then, send a brief letter to the editor (200 words or less) to [letters@washpost.com](mailto:letters@washpost.com). Don't forget to include your full contact information. You may want to mention the following points:

- All international electoral observers have certified elections carried out under the Chavez administration in Venezuela as free and fair. Venezuelans have gone to the polls 11 times in the past decade, and the country's independent National Electoral Council has been repeatedly praised for carrying out transparent elections. Read quotes from observers [here](#).
- The Post's claim that pro-Chavez candidates attempted to "buy votes" in the recent regional elections does not stand up to scrutiny. It cites a single obscure article in the Miami Herald that is based on rumors spread by the political opposition and does not provide sufficient grounds upon which to discredit Venezuela's entire electoral system.
- The Post needs to check its facts and stop spreading lies about Venezuela. Contrary to what the Post writes, the country does not have the second-highest murder rate in the world, nor even the second-highest rare in the region.
- Also contrary to what the Post states, the Electoral Council did in fact publish the official results of last year's referendum. Furthermore, President Chavez conceded defeat quickly and calmly when the reforms were narrowly rejected by voters. He was not, as suggested, forced to do so by the military.
- Venezuelans will likely vote in a national referendum early next year on whether to remove presidential term limits. This is not a bid by President Chavez to "corruptly entrench himself in power," as the Post claims. Regardless of what citizens decide, the system of participatory democracy will remain in place, and elections in Venezuela will continue to be intensely scrutinized.

### VENEZUELA RATIFIES RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Venezuela again showed its commitment to human rights and religious freedom this week by signing a joint declaration with Argentina and Brazil to unequivocally condemn "discrimination and religious tolerance, in

particular, anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism."

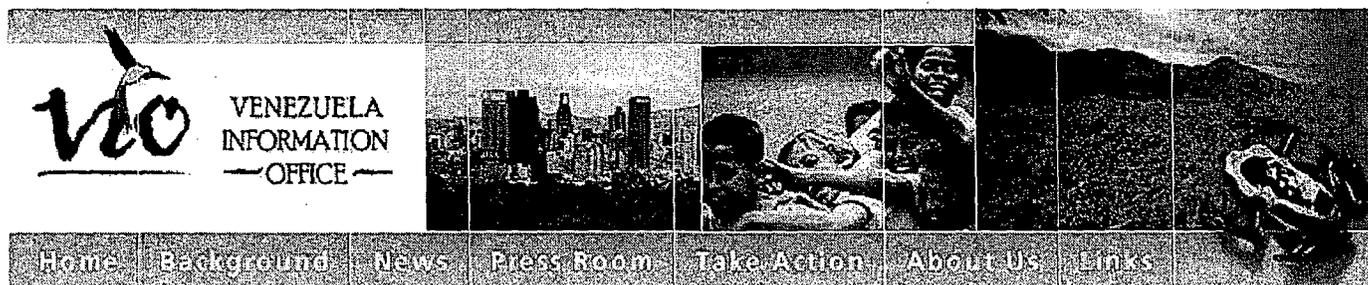
This initiative began last August, when President Chavez hosted a meeting with the leaders of the World Jewish Congress and the Latin American Jewish Congress in Caracas. The President of the World Jewish Congress called the declaration "an important and very welcome step" that "could set a positive example to other countries in the world." See a pdf of their press release [here](#).

### THANK YOU AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS

The Venezuela Information Office sends its sincerest gratitude for all of your support this year. Our work would not have been possible without your efforts to help set the record straight on Venezuela. We at the VIO appreciate the efforts that each of you has made in your communities and beyond. Wishing you all a happy and productive 2009.

[Click here to unsubscribe](#)

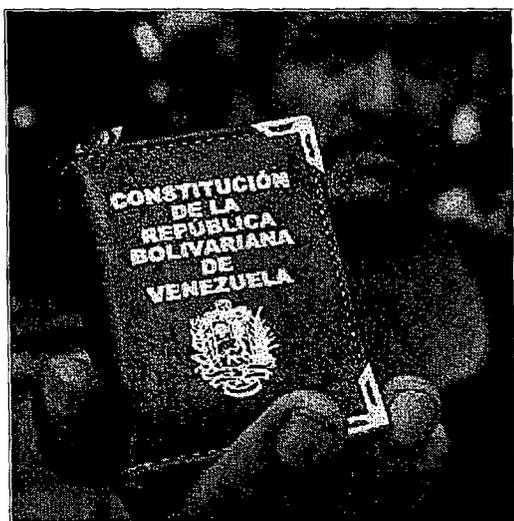
**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Update on Upcoming Referendum  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Mon, 5 Jan 2009 16:52:12 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

Monday, January 5, 2009

### IMPRESSIONS OF VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS IN THE NEWS



Two recent op-eds about Venezuela have taken a refreshingly different view

from that normally seen in U.S. newspapers. In the Seattle Times, two electoral observers compare the well-functioning system of voting they observed in Venezuela to the problems that plagued the ballot box in Florida

in 2004. Their eyewitness account concludes: "in Venezuela... we found a

process that was trusted and reflective of the will of the people. We in the

U.S. can still stand to learn some lessons about how to run a fraud-free and

protected election, if only we are willing." [Read the full story here.](#)

A second op-ed by a sociology professor at Sonoma State University discusses

the truth about democracy and electoral participation in Venezuela. He writes: "Democratic socialism means health care, jobs, food, and security, in neighborhoods where in many cases nothing but absolute poverty existed 10 years ago. ...It is a learning process for all involved and certainly a democratic effort from the bottom up." [Read the full article here.](#)

### CALLS TO SUPPORT VENEZUELAN'S RIGHT TO AMEND THEIR CONSTITUTION

Late last month, the Venezuela Solidarity Network circulated a petition in English and Spanish supporting the right of Venezuelans to amend article 341 of their Constitution. The measure is currently under debate in the National Assembly. If it gains majority approval in a national referendum, it would remove limits on the amount of terms that a Venezuelan citizen can serve as President.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

[Read a more detailed explanation here](#) and [sign the petition.](#)

Please forward to all those who might be interested.

[Click here to unsubscribe](#)

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Citgo Heating Oil Launch 2009, VIO Becomes Project of Latin America Information Office

**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>

**Date:** Mon, 26 Jan 2009 11:08:16 -0500 (EST)

**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

### 2009 VENEZUELA-CITGO DISCOUNTED HEATING OIL PROGRAM UNDERWAY

Citgo, the US-based subsidiary of Venezuela's national oil company, will officially launch its home heating oil assistance program for 2009 this week in Washington DC. Although news reports earlier this month had suggested otherwise, the Citgo-Venezuela Heating Oil Program is continuing for a fourth year.

The community launch is scheduled to take place at the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House in Washington D.C.'s deserving Petworth neighborhood. The Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House serves the homeless community in Washington DC and carries out a variety of social programs that benefit the poor.

If you are in the Washington DC metro area please feel free to attend the public launch with the community and share this announcement with friends. It will take place on Wednesday, January 28, 2009 from 11:30am-12:30 pm at the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House, 503 Rock Creek Church Rd., NW, Washington DC 20010. If you need further information please contact 301-613-4767.

### VIO BECOMES A PROJECT OF THE LATIN AMERICA INFORMATION OFFICE

Earlier this month, the Latin America Information Office was created to raise public awareness on the important political, economic, and social changes taking place throughout the region.

Intent on providing a more accurate view of governments as well as social movements in the hemisphere, the office aims to serve as an information clearinghouse for the American public, the media, and policy makers who want to have a better understanding of Latin America.

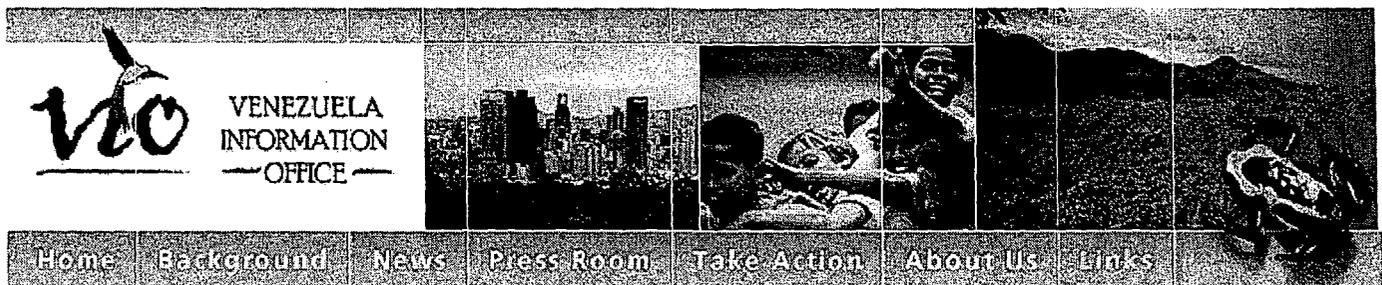
The Venezuela Information Office will continue to operate at full capacity however, it will now be a project of the Latin America Information Office. We invite you to visit the site and sign up to receive information on the rest of the hemisphere through the Office's monthly newsletter on our homepage.

[Click here to unsubscribe](#)

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**Subject:** Citgo Launch in DC MOVED to Thursday  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Tue, 27 Jan 2009 16:37:54 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

Dear Colleagues,

Please note that due to inclement weather, the Citgo Washington DC heating oil launch has been moved from Wednesday, January 28 to Thursday, January 29, 2009.

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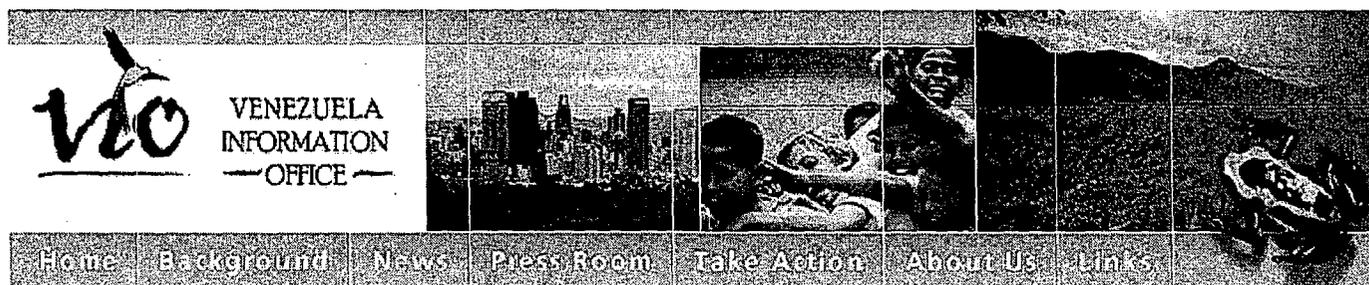
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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Referendum Approaches, ECLAC Applauds Venezuela, Anti-Semitism Charged  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Tue, 10 Feb 2009 17:42:20 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



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Venezuela's upcoming referendum, which will take place this Sunday, February 15th, will let voters decide whether or not to remove limits on the number of times a candidate for any public office may run for reelection.

According to Venezuela's 1999 constitution, all changes to the constitutional text must be put to a popular vote in a national referendum. Only if proposed amendments or reforms gain majority approval at the polls can they become law. This is a political right that Venezuelans never had under previous administrations. Some media have falsely suggested that, with this amendment proposal, President Chavez is attempting to become "president-for-life." The fact is, this amendment would simply remove limits on the amount of times any elected official - whether president, governor, mayor or legislator - can run for reelection.

It is worth noting that President Chavez's policies remain popular after 10 years in power. Reuters cited 60% approval ratings for Chávez in mid-January. However, President Chávez has indicated that he will gracefully accept defeat if voters decide to reject the amendment. He told CNN en Español on February 2nd: "I am a democrat. I am subordinated to the constitution and to the people's decision. If we lose, we simply lose, and I have four years left in the government."

It should be pointed out that a number of the world's democracies do not have term limits for public office. Even in the U.S., President Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected for four terms in office. The U.S. Constitution did not include presidential term limits until the 1950s, a change that was voted on by Congress and not through a popular vote, as is the case in the coming referendum in Venezuela.

Elections in Venezuela occur frequently, and are among the most transparent in the world. All observers - including the OAS, the Carter Center, the NAACP, the EU and others - have certified electoral processes in Venezuela as free and fair. Observers have also praised the work of the National Electoral Council (CNE), the independent branch of

government that is responsible for electoral oversight. See quotes from observers here.

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During an interview with CNN En Espanol this week, Executive Secretary Alicia Barcena of the prestigious Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) corroborated statements made in an earlier interview with President Chavez, that his administration's achievements in alleviating poverty have been impressive. She points out that "unemployment has decreased from 11 percent to 7.4 percent" and overall, "extreme poverty and poverty went from 51 percent to 28.5 percent." You can watch the interview in spanish here and read the English transcripts here.

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As has often been the case before each national election in Venezuela, much of the U.S. press has decided to abandon basic journalistic ethics in their reporting and editorializing on Venezuela. This past weekend, the Miami Herald and the NY Daily News both issued scathing editorials alleging that the Chavez administration was responsible for anti-semitism in Venezuela. The Washington Post and many other newspapers followed suit with articles that promoted a similar line.

The reality is far more complex. Here are some of the facts that should, at a minimum, be mentioned in any discussion of anti-Semitism in Venezuela:

- Criticism of certain policies of the current government of Israel by the Venezuelan government cannot be construed in any way as anti-Semitic. In fact, in recent criticism of Israel's military action in Gaza, Venezuelan officials have always accompanied their protests with statements of good will towards the Jewish people.
- Venezuela's 1999 constitution embodies a spirit of multiculturalism and religious pluralism. The human rights guarantees it establishes are among the most progressive of any constitution in the world. SENTENCE REMOVED HERE AS IT RINGS COMPLETELY HOLLOW.
- The vandalization of the oldest Caracas synagogue on January 30th was quickly condemned by President Chavez, as well as the Venezuelan Vice President and several government ministers. They ordered a swift investigation of the crime that has yielded eleven arrests so far. Though it is being depicted by some media as a symptom of rampant anti-Semitism, this isolated incident is not in any way emblematic of attitudes toward the Jewish community in Venezuela.

## **YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!**

PLEASE WRITE TO THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS at: [voicers@edit.nydailynews.com](mailto:voicers@edit.nydailynews.com) and give your opinion of their recent editorial entitled "Venezuela's Jews are facing a wave of hate generated by President Hugo Chavez" or WRITE TO THE MIAMI HERALD at: [heralded@miamiherald.com](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com) in response to its editorial, "Campaign of hatred grows in Venezuela."

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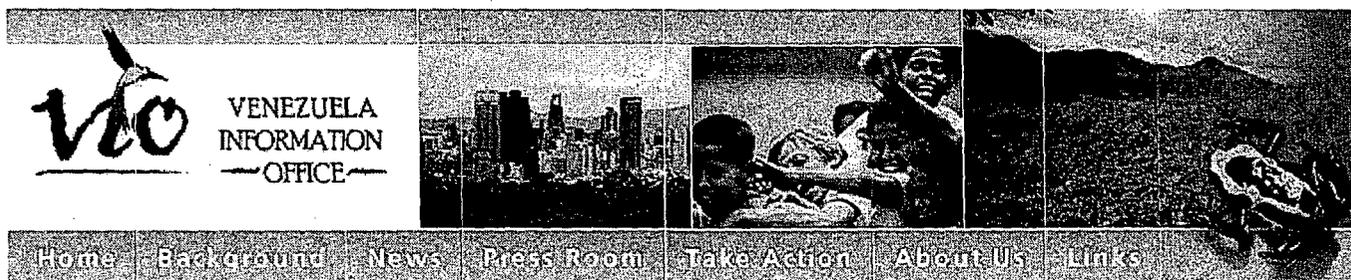
Remember, letters to the editor should be brief (usually 150 words) and can respond to any article or opinion piece you would like to comment on. Letters to the editor can critique coverage or point out information that has been overlooked. Letters must include your name, city/state, and contact information for verification. Letters that are personalized, fact-based, and polite in tone are much more likely to be published.

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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Elections Sunday, ECLAC Cites Advances, Anti-Semitism Charged  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Wed, 11 Feb 2009 08:59:08 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

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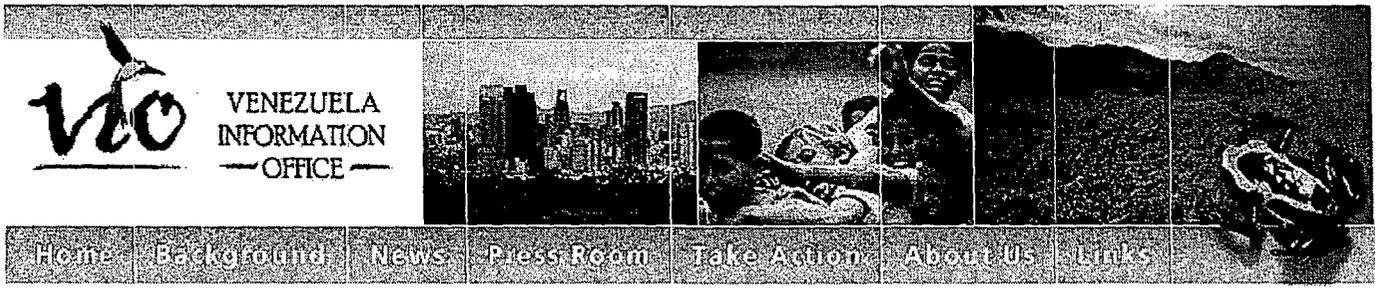
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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - Anti-Venezuela Resolution in Congress as Elections Approach  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Thu, 12 Feb 2009 13:09:38 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

Dear Friends,

As political campaigning wraps up this week in Venezuela, one member of the U.S. Congress is just beginning his campaign against the country. Yesterday, Florida Congressman Connie Mack made the following statements before the House of Representatives:

"Mr. Speaker, this weekend, the Venezuelan people will go to the polls to determine the future of freedom and democracy in their country. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez in his continued quest for power, is demanding that the people of Venezuela get rid of presidential term limits. Chavez has just celebrated 10 years in power, and his legacy is clear: Higher poverty, more crime, rampant inflation, growing anti-Semitism, less freedom, alliances with Iran, Russia, and Cuba, and a loss of hope and opportunity for the Venezuelan people. Mr. Speaker, Venezuelans cannot afford to have Chavez leading them into the Communist abyss. Today, I am introducing a resolution calling upon the Members of the House to stand for free and fair elections this weekend in Venezuela. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the important resolution and to stand with the Venezuelan people in their fight for freedom from the iron fist of Hugo Chavez."

As of 10am today, his resolution (H. RES. 161) had no co-sponsors. However, given the wave of anti-Venezuela sentiment in the press this week, we urge you to call your Representative and ask them not to support this resolution. If passed, it would "Express the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the need for free, democratic, transparent, and fair elections in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela without threats or intimidation."

Considering that Venezuela has one of the most heavily scrutinized electoral systems in the world, and has consistently been certified by international vote monitoring organizations as having free and fair elections, this resolution is nothing short of ridiculous. Let your members of Congress know this!

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Call your Congressional Representative and tell them not to support H. Res. 161. You can find your representative's phone number here. Remind yourself of the key issues surrounding Sunday's referendum by reading this fact sheet.

You may also want to review what electoral observers have said over the years about Venezuela's electoral system. You can read their statements here.

As always, send us a note to let us know that you have taken action. And as the referendum nears, stay on top of the news by reading the VIO Daily News Roundup, available in blog format. We encourage you to write letters to the editor in response to the most egregious articles you will find on our blog here to make sure the news media is held accountable when they misrepresent the truth about Venezuela and its democracy.

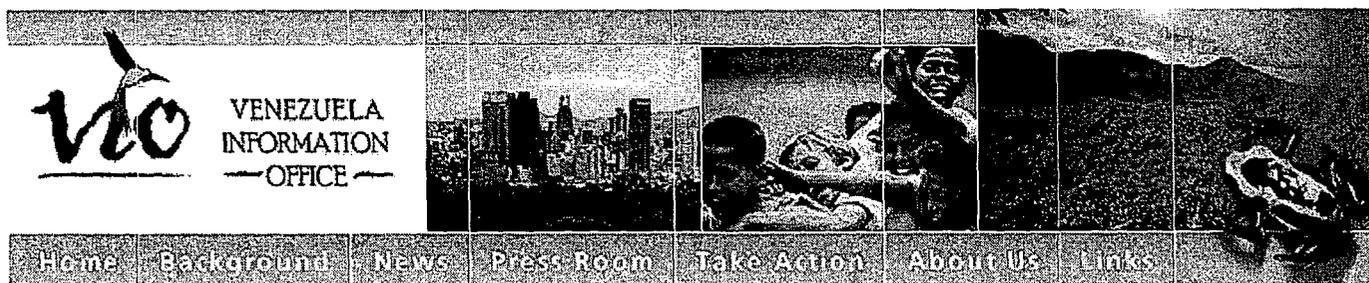
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**Subject:** VIO News & Action - On Referendum Day, Support Venezuela's Democracy  
**From:** Venezuela Information Office <newsandaction@veninfo.org>  
**Date:** Sun, 15 Feb 2009 13:37:59 -0500 (EST)  
**To:** admin@veninfo.org



## VIO Venezuela News and Action

February 15, 2009

### Voters Go To the Polls in Venezuela

By 8 a.m. today in Venezuela, over 34,600 polling stations had opened across the country. There are about 17 million registered voters, and turnout for today's national referendum is expected to be as high as it was in regional elections last November (about 65%). Voters make an historic decision today on whether or not to end term limits for all holders of elected office, allowing officials to compete in elections after serving two terms. This is in line with the "transfer of power to the people" underway in Venezuela, for it gives voters more options and leaves the choice of leadership solidly in their hands.

### U.S. News Accounts Misleading - Set the Record Straight!

The referendum is highly distorted in the U.S. press, both in news articles that wrongly portray the amendment as a "president-for-life bid" by Hugo Chavez, and in editorials making all manner of allegations to discredit Venezuela's democracy.

As the voting unfolds, please take the time to help us dispel some of the media myths by writing to the New York Times and NPR. To get the facts, see the most recent public opinion poll and our analysis of the referendum.

A New York Times editorial tells Venezuelans something they already know: they are allowed to vote "no" in the referendum. Contrary to what the editorial states, though, the "yes" option is also democratic. The Venezuelan government is not "resorting to intimidation" to influence the vote, nor has it "clamped down on free speech" or "attacked" opponents. The Times has editorialized against President Chavez for an entire decade, even going so far as to endorse the coup against his elected government in 2002. It is time for the "newspaper of record" to respect the will of the Venezuelan people, rather than rejecting any majority decision that doesn't go against Chavez.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Send a letter of 150 words or less to [letters@nytimes.com](mailto:letters@nytimes.com). Remember to include your contact information.

NPR coverage calls President Chavez "a thorn in the side of the Bush administration," while ignoring the fact that the Venezuelan leader said yesterday he welcomes direct talks with President Obama. NPR coverage of Venezuela ignores government supporters (approval ratings for the President are around 60%) in favor of anti-Chavez voices. One opposition politician is quoted as saying the government did not respect the results of regional elections last November, which is patently untrue. The results of that democratic process were honored, as were all others taking place in the last decade. Chavez has repeatedly stated that he will accept the results of today's voting whatever they may be, and added: "I would like to hear the same from the opposition leaders."

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Comment on the article [here](#). Then remind NPR that its listeners expect more balanced coverage of Venezuela by writing to "Weekend Edition Saturday" using [this online form](#).

Thank you for doing your part to support Venezuela's democracy!

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## **Part I: Fact Sheets**



## **DRUG ENFORCEMENT IN BOLIVIA**

### **Yes to Coca, No to Cocaine**

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January 1, 2009

On November 1st, 2008, President Evo Morales cancelled the activities of the United States Drug Enforcement Agency, (DEA) in Bolivia, citing its alleged complicity in efforts by the political opposition to destabilize his government.<sup>1</sup> The measure was taken less than two months after the Bolivian government expelled U.S. Ambassador Goldberg for his open association with radical members of the opposition before and during the civil conflict that rocked Bolivia in July and August of 2008. The Bush administration in turn expelled the Bolivian Ambassador in Washington, and less than two weeks later, administration officials announced that they would suspend trade preferences with Bolivia under the 1991 Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA) due to a supposed "failure to cooperate sufficiently in anti-narcotics efforts."<sup>2</sup>

Bolivia's cancellation of DEA operations has most often been analyzed as simply an extension of the current diplomatic tensions between the US and Bolivia. It is important to note, however, that beyond the political differences and allegations of US intervention, there has been a growing opposition to the DEA in Bolivia that takes issue with the specific methods used by the US agency in its approach to fighting drug trafficking. The Bolivian government has argued, with significant supporting evidence, that it can be significantly more effective in fighting drug production and trafficking through a policy framework that prioritizes cooperation with local communities and acknowledges the legitimate traditional uses of the coca plant.

#### **The Failure of Forced Eradication**

As part of its "War on Drugs," the U.S. strongly promotes coca eradication in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia – the three Andean countries which produce the majority of the world's coca, a product essential for the manufacturing of cocaine. Under its "zero coca" policy in Bolivia, the DEA supported drug eradication efforts targeting *cocaleros* (small coca farmers), by providing the Bolivian army with training and funding to conduct crop eradication raids throughout the countryside.

Coca eradication, which in Bolivia involves the manual removal and destruction of coca crops, has had major negative economic and social repercussions on

farming communities. It has also led to the persecution and displacement of many thousands of citizens residing in the coca-growing regions.<sup>3</sup> Soldiers conducting forced coca eradication operations have committed gross human rights violations including the harassment, torture, and murder of indigenous people in the Chapare region.<sup>4</sup> The Bolivian human rights organization *Asamblea de Derechos Humanos* estimates that in the conflicts provoked by eradication campaigns between 1998 and 2002, in Cochabamba alone, 33 coca growers were killed by security forces.<sup>5</sup> While the DEA has dedicated some funds to the promotion of alternative crops in Bolivia, the programs were largely unsuccessful because they failed to introduce crops that could compete with the price and durability of coca leaves.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the Andes region, crop eradication programs have been unable to reduce coca production, while proving damaging to the health and livelihoods of *campesinos* whose fields are targeted regardless of whether or not they are involved in the cocaine trade. According to the US Government Accountability Office, between 2000 and 2006, coca cultivation increased by 15% in Colombia, the country with the largest cocaine production in the world. This is despite the activities of 'Plan Colombia,' an immense counter-narcotics program in which the US has invested \$6 billion over eight years.<sup>7</sup> According to the United Nations, Colombia also saw a 27% increase in coca cultivation between 2006 and 2007.

## **A Bolivian Plan for Fighting Drugs**

### **History of Coca**

At a World Health Organization Assembly in 1992, then Bolivian President Paz Zamora said, "coca is an Andean tradition while cocaine is a Western habit."<sup>8</sup> In the Andes, the cultivation and consumption of coca leaves dates back over 4,000 years to the pre-Columbian civilizations in which the leaves were used in ceremonies to worship and express gratitude to the 'Pachamama,' or Mother Earth, for providing the means for life to continue.<sup>9</sup> Coca leaves are still valued in Andean culture and serve a sacred role in spiritual functions today.

Coca leaves are also chewed in social settings, and used for medicinal purposes in herbal teas and poultices.<sup>10</sup> They have several medicinal applications, including the treatment of physiological and psychological sicknesses, stomach and digestive ailments, improving metabolism, and preventing vertigo.<sup>11</sup> Communities have continued to rely on this traditional crop to help cope with hunger pangs and the extreme environmental conditions in which they live, particularly the high altitudes.

### **ANTI-DRUG SUCCESS IN BOLIVIA**

- Cocaine seizures have risen from 14 tons in 2006 to 17 tons in 2007.
- Coca cultivation in Bolivia remains well below mid-1990s levels.
- Eradication of coca crops suspected for cocaine use increased by about 25% between 2006 and 2007.
- More coca processing sites were destroyed in 2006 than in previous years.

*(2008 World Drug Report, UN Office on Drugs and Crime.)*

## Strategy & Results in Bolivia

The anti-drug strategy developed by the government of Bolivia involves improving the image of the coca leaf and promoting its historical and cultural values. Currently, efforts are being mounted to lobby for a change in the United Nations 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which lists the coca leaf as an illicit 'schedule 1' substance, prohibiting its production, industrialization, and trade.

The administration of President Morales has argued for "shared responsibility" in the fight against cocaine. This means that, while coca-producing countries must actively work to disrupt narco-trafficking networks, countries that consume large amounts of the drug must also do their part by reducing demand.

Instead of the forced eradication of coca plants, the Morales government has pursued the destruction of laboratories and interdiction of chemicals used to produce cocaine, and monitoring and prosecuting those involved in drug-related money laundering. In 2006, after Morales was elected, Bolivia destroyed significantly more coca maceration pits and coca processing laboratories (both used to create cocaine), than in previous years.<sup>12</sup> While the Bush administration accuses Bolivia of failing to fight drugs, the 2008 UN World Drug Report makes clear that cocaine seizures are actually on the rise in Bolivia.<sup>13</sup> Seizures of cocaine in Bolivia rose from 14 tons in 2006 to 17 tons in 2007. Meanwhile, Peru and Colombia conducted fewer seizures during the same period.<sup>14</sup>

A central part of the anti-drug efforts of the Morales government is winning the trust and support of coca growers and farming communities in a non-coercive manner, and depending on their help, to limit coca production. In this way, the government has been able to reduce the amount of coca crops grown for illicit use while permitting limited cultivation for legitimate use in small 1600-square meter plots called *catos*. This policy has been successful in large part due to the cooperation of coca growers, and the high level of organization in these communities that allows them to effectively monitor levels of coca production. Elmerjildo Chávez, a coca grower from the Yungas region, said, "we make sure no one is growing too much, and that our coca is being sold to people who sell it for traditional uses and not for cocaine." By monitoring crop tallies and buyer licenses, coca grower unions are able to control how much of the plant is being produced, while making sure that the coca leaves are sold for legitimate purposes.<sup>15</sup>

United Nations figures demonstrate Bolivia's success in the fight against drugs and directly contradict the claim made by the White House that Bolivia is failing to combat drug trafficking. The UN Office of Drugs and Crime notes in its 2008 World Drug Report that Bolivia's current coca cultivation remains "well under annual totals during the early and mid 1990s."<sup>16</sup> Experts have highlighted this discrepancy. Larry Birns, Executive Director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs in Washington DC said, "I'm not at all surprised because the (US) drug certification process has been so tainted and archly politicized."<sup>17</sup> *Time*

*Magazine* reported on “Bolivia’s surprising anti-drug success” in August 2008, noting that “coca cultivation is under control and drug trafficking interdiction is up.”<sup>18</sup>

There has in fact been a significant increase in targeted coca eradication in Bolivia. Between 2006 and 2007, the amount of coca crops destroyed increased from 12,528 acres to 15,491 acres.<sup>19</sup> Still, President Morales has promoted the industrialization of legal, non-narcotic coca-based products such as tea, flour, medicine, and shampoo. The government has a vision of channeling all coca production toward traditional or industrial uses by limiting production to certain zones and developing markets for licit coca-based products.

### **A New Era of International Cooperation**

The end to DEA operations in Bolivia does not signal unwillingness on the part of the Morales government to coordinate its counter-narcotics strategy with the international community. On the contrary, Bolivia has actively sought international cooperation on drugs, but always in a manner which respects the traditions and sovereignty of the Bolivian people.

Bolivia and Brazil recently announced a new bilateral anti-drug program that will begin on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009. The agreement involves permanent cooperation in operations between the police forces of both countries, including joint coordination on cross-border drug trafficking, and the monitoring of controlled chemical substances used to make cocaine. The judicial branches of both countries will also cooperate in prosecuting suspected drug traffickers.<sup>20</sup> The Bolivian government has allocated \$20 million in emergency funds that could be used to fund anti-drug operations if necessary.<sup>21</sup>

Bolivia is also seeking the joint cooperation of Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, and Peru, recognizing that coordinated drug enforcement with neighboring countries is essential in improving the fight against drugs.<sup>22</sup>

The Bolivian government has consistently pointed out that, in order to be effective, anti-narcotics efforts require more rigorous measures for addressing demand in the major consumer countries. President Morales has argued that while Bolivia will continue to work arduously to stop cocaine trafficking, the US must take “shared responsibility” seriously by doing its part to reduce demand for cocaine at home. The US remains the largest market for cocaine in the world. By UN estimates, 460 metric tons – or 46% of all cocaine produced worldwide – was consumed in North American markets in 2006.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The US decision to blacklist Bolivia for the first time ever in its 2009 list of “Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries” was perceived by many experts as politically motivated rather than based on serious criteria. The adherence of the DEA to failed coca eradication techniques as well as its alleged involvement with violent, anti-government opposition groups led Bolivian officials to suspend the activities of the federal drug agency. Bolivia’s new drug

policy recognizes that coca has traditional and legitimate uses. For that reason, the Morales administration is focused on eliminating *cocaine* production while allowing traditional coca use to continue.

It is imperative that the DEA revise its drug enforcement policies and recognize that forced coca eradication is an ineffective means of curtailing coca production, and one that can create and compound social and economic conflicts. A more consensual method of controlling levels of coca production, while still in its infancy, is being demonstrated with good results in Bolivia. The strategy of the Morales administration also includes targeting drug trafficking networks, controlling the chemical substances used to make cocaine, and prosecuting money launderers.

President Morales has called for an international drug policy of "shared responsibility" in which drug consuming countries take steps to reduce demand at home. In order for a permanent reduction in supply to be achieved, it must be accompanied by a dramatic decline in the demand for cocaine in the largest markets: the US and Europe. Meanwhile, it is apparent that Bolivia will continue to expand its own regional and international cooperation agreements in order to more effectively fight drug-trafficking.

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<sup>2</sup> "Why Bolivia Quit the U.S. War on Drugs," Jean Friedman, *Time Magazine*, November 4, 2008. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1856153,00.html>

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<sup>4</sup> "Bolivia: Eradication and Backlash," George Ann Potter and Linda Farthing, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Vol. 5, Number 38, June 2001, <http://www.fpiif.org/briefs/vol5/v5n38bolivia.html>

<sup>5</sup> Estrategia de Lucha Contra El Narcotráfico Y Revalorización De La Hoja De Coca 2007-2010, Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Plan Colombia misses coca target," BBC, November 6, 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7712285.stm>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Coca: An Andean Cultural Tradition," John H. Burrows, Center for World Indigenous Studies. [http://www.erowid.org/plants/coca/coca\\_info1.shtml](http://www.erowid.org/plants/coca/coca_info1.shtml)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> 2008 World Drug Report, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2008/WDR\\_2008\\_eng\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/WDR_2008_eng_web.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Bolivia dice a EEUU que sus éxitos antidroga superan los de Colombia y Perú," AFP, September 28, 2008.

<http://www.univision.com/contentroot/wirefeeds/noticias/7608646.html>

<sup>15</sup> "Bolivia's Surprising Anti-Drug Success," Jean Friedman, *Time Magazine*, August 5, 2008. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1829782,00.html>

<sup>16</sup> 2008 World Drug Report, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2008/WDR\\_2008\\_eng\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/WDR_2008_eng_web.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> "US Lists Major Drug Producing and Trafficking Countries, Names Only Bolivia, Burma, and Venezuela as Not Complying," Council on Hemispheric Affairs, September 19, 2008. <http://www.coha.org/2008/09/us-lists-major-drug-producing-and-trafficking-countries-names-only-bolivia-burma-and-venezuela-as-not-complying/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Bolivia's Surprising Anti-Drug Success," Jean Friedman, *Time Magazine*, August 5, 2008. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1829782,00.html>

<sup>1</sup> 2008 World Drug Report, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

[http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2008/WDR\\_2008\\_eng\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/WDR_2008_eng_web.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> "Evo y Lula firmarán convenio de lucha contra el narcotráfico," *Erbol*, November 13, 2008, <http://www.erbol.com.bo/noticia.php?identificador=2147483914102&id=1>

<sup>20</sup> "Brasil y Bolivia ejecutarán plan antidrogas en 2009," *Los Tiempos Nacional*, 21 November 17, 2008. <http://www.lostiempos.com/noticias/17-11-08/nacional.php>

<sup>22</sup> "Brasil y Bolivia ejecutarán plan antidrogas en 2009," *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> 2008 World Drug Report, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

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## The Significance of Bolivia's New Constitution

On January 25, 2009 Bolivians approved a new constitution, with over 60% of voter support.<sup>1</sup> The previous constitution was written in 1967 and amended in the mid-1990s and early part of this century.<sup>2</sup> Calls to hold a constituent assembly and rewrite the constitution originated not with the current government of President Evo Morales, but with the demands of grassroots movements led by indigenous communities in the eastern lowlands of Bolivia beginning in the early 1990s.<sup>3</sup> The referendum marked the third time President Morales and his policies have been tested and approved.<sup>4</sup> With the passage of the charter, a new presidential election will be held in December 2009.

The constitution is structured in five parts and contains 411 articles which detail citizens' rights, the structure and functioning of the state, the territorial organization of the state, economic policies of the state, and the due process of constitutional reform.

The constitution recognizes education, healthcare, and housing as basic human rights. Healthcare and education will be free and universal for all Bolivians. The government will also launch plans for affordable housing. Ancestral indigenous land, medicine, and culture are protected. All 36 indigenous languages are recognized as official languages, and governmental services must be provided bilingually. For the first time ever, the new constitution gives Afro-Bolivians legal recognition as an ethnic group. Also, Bolivia is now one of the only countries in the world with a constitutional ban on sexual orientation discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

Although originally approved for referendum on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007 by the national assembly, a political struggle emerged that delayed a vote on the proposed constitution. Shortly after, in August 2008, President Morales won a recall referendum with 67% of the vote, even higher than the margin by which he won the 2005 presidential election.<sup>6</sup> Four out of six opposition governors also succeeded in their respective recalls and remained in office.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, they persisted in demanding more autonomy from the central government.

A crisis soon developed as violent groups opposed to the Morales administration attempted to destabilize the country.<sup>8</sup> These opposition groups were against government plans for using a portion of the country's natural gas revenues to fund a pension plan for the elderly as well as plans to conduct a national referendum on the then proposed constitution.<sup>9</sup> In mid-September in Tarija, these groups attacked a natural gas pipeline and temporarily cut exports to Brazil. In Santa Cruz, violent opposition groups looted

and occupied government offices, and in the department of Pando, at least 30 farmers sympathetic to the government were massacred on their way to a community meeting.<sup>10</sup>

### **Agreement Reached with Opposition**

In order to restore calm in Bolivia, the Morales administration actively sought dialogue with the opposition, but was systematically rebuffed. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) held an emergency summit on the crisis in Bolivia at which South American countries signed a declaration that denounced the violent tactics of the opposition, recognized the constitutional legitimacy of the Bolivian government, and called for dialogue.<sup>11</sup> On October 21<sup>st</sup>, an agreement was finally reached between the government and opposition parties, in which the new constitution underwent some modifications based on opposition demands. While some in the electorate are unhappy with the changes, the new constitution remains quite progressive and inclusive. Some of the changes include a scaling back of land reform, increased regional autonomy, and the continuation of a bicameral legislature, instead of a new unicameral one.<sup>12</sup>

### **A More Inclusive Institutional Framework**

The new national charter, approved on January 25, 2009, declares Bolivia to be a “unitary” or single and unified social state which is “plurinational” in origin, a concept implying a deeper sense of plurality of political and cultural inclusion and participation by all nationalities, groups and citizens within Bolivia’s boundaries. It also defines the Bolivian state as democratic, intercultural, and decentralized. Bolivia is now founded in political, economic, juridical, cultural, and linguistic pluralism. Historically, Bolivia has had separate administrative and judicial capitals. With the approval of the new constitution Sucre was recognized as the capital of the country while La Paz remained the administrative capital housing most branches of government except the Supreme Court.

The constitution states that Bolivia is a participatory, representative, and communitarian democracy. The government will continue to have four branches: legislative, executive, judicial, and electoral. The Supreme Electoral Court is the highest level of the electoral body, and has national jurisdiction over elections. Instead of five members, the court will now have seven members who serve for six years, without possibility of reelection. Two seats in the court are reserved for indigenous people. The original draft constitution proposed a unicameral legislature, but the existing bicameral legislature is maintained as part of the government’s compromise with opposition parties. Also, the Chamber of Senators is being expanded from 27 members to 36 members, or 4 per department. The Chamber of Deputies will continue to have 130 members.

The constitution also guarantees the equal participation of men and women in the Legislative Assembly and indigenous people are guaranteed a minimum number of seats relative to the population density in each department. Special indigenous districts can

be created by the electoral body to ensure equal representation in remote and rural areas.

All 36 indigenous languages spoken in Bolivia are recognized as official languages of the state. The national government and departmental governments will use at least two of the official languages, one being Spanish, and all others being indigenous languages selected based on the preferences of each community.

Elected officials will not enjoy legal immunity under the new constitution, and will be held accountable to the same laws as all other citizens.

### **Fundamental Rights and Values**

Some of the most progressive measures in the new constitution are defined as fundamental rights and values of the nation. The constitution promotes a culture of peace, rejects all wars of aggression as a solution to conflicts between states, and upholds the right to peace. In addition, foreign military bases are prohibited on Bolivian soil.

All Bolivians are entitled to the same fundamental rights as defined in the constitution. The anti-discrimination articles are intensive and in-depth, and contribute to making Bolivia's charter one of the most progressive in the world. All forms of discrimination are prohibited, including those based on sex, skin color, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, origin, culture, nationality, citizenship, language, religious creed, ideology, political or philosophical affiliation, marital status, economic or social conditions, occupation, education, disability, and pregnancy. There is no death penalty, and every person has the right to physical, psychological, and sexual integrity and well-being.

The right to food and water are granted to all in the new constitution, and the state has the obligation to guarantee food security through healthy, adequate, and sufficient food for all. Bolivians have the right to universal and equitable access to basic services, such as potable water, sewer service, electricity, cooking and heating gas, postal service, and telecommunications. The constitution bans the privatization of water and sewage services.

Education, health and housing are also guaranteed. Free, integral, intercultural and multilingual education without discrimination is a right. The state ensures access to healthcare for all people. The healthcare system will be universal, free, equitable, intercultural, and participatory. The right to dignified and adequate housing is also guaranteed in the new constitution. To advance this aim, all levels of government will promote housing plans which give preference to low income families, marginalized groups, and residents of rural areas.

### **Indigenous and Afro-Bolivian Rights**

The new constitution guarantees indigenous and Afro-Bolivian people several rights which have been historically denied since the colonial period. These include the right to exist freely and to maintain their cultural identity, religious beliefs, spiritualities,

practices and customs, and their own vision of the cosmos or universe. The constitution guarantees that indigenous and Afro-Bolivian institutions will be part of the general structure of the Bolivian state and that indigenous nations will receive collective titling of long-inhabited lands and territories, in addition to the protection of their sacred sites. Traditional knowledge, science, and medicine will be valued, respected, promoted, and treated as collective intellectual property. Similar to the new provision of multilingual governance, all citizens will be entitled to a multilingual and intercultural education.

The state will respect and guarantee the right to "prior obligatory consultation." This means that, where there is legislation or administrative action that could affect these two communities, they have the right to be consulted through their own institutions. Specifically, with respect to the exploitation of nonrenewable natural resources in the territory they inhabit, these communities must be consulted and have the right to partake in the benefits of the exploitation of natural resources. Autonomous indigenous communities maintain the exclusive use of the renewable natural resources that exist in their respective territories, without infringing on the legitimate rights acquired by third parties.

Finally, the new constitution gives legal recognition to Afro-Bolivians as an ethnic group and affords them the same economic, social, political, and cultural rights as the indigenous communities. For the first time ever, Afro-Bolivians will be included in the national census.

### **Land and Agriculture**

Land ownership in Bolivia is highly concentrated. More than 66 percent of all agricultural land is owned by less than one percent of land owners.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing that large *latifundios* are often unproductive, the new constitution will protect the public good, small family farms, and community farms by limiting the size of new landholdings. While voting on whether to approve the new constitution, Bolivians also decided in a national referendum what that limit would be. Voters approved a limit of 5,000 hectares. The new limit will not be imposed retroactively as originally proposed, but instead, applies only to future land acquisitions.

Every person has the right to individual or collective private property, and the right to inheritance is also guaranteed. The expropriation of land can only occur out of necessity or public utility, in compliance with the law, and with prior just compensation. Additionally, small family farms and collective properties will not be required to pay agricultural property taxes. The new constitution states that the collective property of indigenous or other communities is declared indivisible, inalienable, and irreversible.

The right to a healthy environment, water, and food security is guaranteed to all Bolivians. A new Agro-Environmental Court will protect these rights by ruling on claims related to agriculture, forests, environment, water, and rights of use and exploitation of renewable natural resources. The court will hear petitions regarding practices that endanger biodiversity or the ecological system. To that end, it will resolve contentious

cases of contracts, negotiations, distribution, and redistribution of rights of use of renewable natural resources.

### **Autonomy**

As part of the compromise between the government and the opposition, mechanisms to implement greater regional and local autonomy have been included in the new constitution. Autonomy is defined as the direct election of local authorities by citizens, and local administration of economic resources, as well as the exercise of legislative, regulatory, supervisory, and executive power within a given jurisdiction. Provisions are made for departmental, regional, and municipal autonomy. Municipalities or provinces within a department that have geographic continuity, and share a common culture, language, history, economy, and ecosystem, can constitute a space of "planning and management," as an autonomous region. In order for those entities to achieve autonomy, the Law of the Framework of Autonomy and Decentralization must be approved by two-thirds of members present in the Legislative Assembly. The law will regulate the transfer and delegation of powers, the fiscal regime, and the coordination between the central government and the decentralized and autonomous areas. The departments can achieve autonomy via referendum.

Although it remains unclear how departmental governments will exercise autonomy in relation to natural resources, the central government maintains exclusive power over hydrocarbons and the codification of mining and other industries. Additionally, the new constitution grants the Bolivian state sole jurisdiction over strategic natural resources including minerals and sources of water.

### **Conclusion**

The new constitution of Bolivia will take its place in history as one of the most progressive national charters in the world. The social and economic rights enshrined in it through the concept of "plurinationality" place it far ahead of most in the region, including the United States. Other key hallmarks of the document guarantee citizens the right to private property, communal property and state property; the right to clean drinking water, electricity, energy, and telecommunications as a responsibility guaranteed by the state, and the renunciation of all war.

The constitution aims to rectify the injustices of the past by protecting all Bolivians from discrimination, safeguarding the environment, and declaring social justice a national value. Despite the fact that the government enjoys majority support for the new constitution, in the spirit of cooperation, key compromises were made with the opposition. The changes include a scaling back of agrarian reform, the continuation of a bicameral legislature, and provisions for greater regional autonomy. Nonetheless, it remains a constitution that gives dignity to all human beings in Bolivia, and guarantees that basic needs will be treated as fundamental human rights.

- <sup>1</sup> "Bolivia's Revolutionary New Charter," Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, TIME, January 27, 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1874157,00.html?xid=rss-world>
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- <sup>12</sup> Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia, Nueva Constitución Política del Estado Diciembre 2007 [http://www.presidencia.gob.bo/asamblea/nueva\\_cpe\\_aprobada\\_en\\_grande\\_en\\_detalle\\_y\\_en\\_revision.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gob.bo/asamblea/nueva_cpe_aprobada_en_grande_en_detalle_y_en_revision.pdf)
- <sup>13</sup> "Staff Appraisal Report. Bolivia. National Land Administration Project," World Bank, 1995. Report No. 13560-BO, World Bank: Washington, DC.; "Bolivia: Modelos de desarrollo y cambios en la sociedad rural y sector agropecuario," Pacheco Balanza, Diego, Fundación Tierra: Bolivia, 1998.; "Sector Agropecuario Bolivia, 1990-2004," Unidad de Análisis de Políticas Sociales y Económicas, La Paz., 2006.

## **Part II: Press Releases**



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### *Bolivia Exit Polls Indicate New Constitution Will Pass*

January 25, 2009 - Exit polls show a national referendum in Bolivia will likely result in approval for a new constitution with approximately 60 percent support. By mid-day today, 40 percent of city residents and 60 percent of rural residents had already cast their vote.

When asked how they had voted in the referendum, 58 percent of respondents said they voted "yes" to the new constitution, while 35 percent said they voted "no."

The results confirm trends identified in recent surveys that suggested roughly six out of ten Bolivians approve of the new national charter. In rural areas the number rises to seven.

Voters who supported the new charter said the issues most important to them were the inclusion of vouchers for school attendance and pensions for the elderly, followed by Bolivian ownership over natural resources, and the recognition of Indigenous peoples.

Opposition to the proposed constitution has been concentrated in the eastern regions of the country. Most voters surveyed in the departments comprising the "Media Luna" tended to favor a "no" vote, while five of the nine departments - including Chuquisaca - preferred a "yes" vote, and by larger margins on average. In the most populous department of La Paz and in Potosi, the new constitution was supported by about 75 percent of voters, leading with margins of almost 60 percent. In Oruro the yes vote won by a margin of more than 40 percent.

Given the polarized political climate, it is worth noting that most Bolivians indicated they were prepared to accept the results of the national referendum. In a poll from January 15, the majority of respondents said they would honor the result even if opposition leaders did not, and that they would not support autonomy for departments in Eastern Bolivia.

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The Latin America Information Office, LLC (LAIO) serves as a resource for progressive social movements, policy makers, and governments who are searching for practical policy solutions to real-life problems: primarily poverty, inequality and exclusion. The LAIO receives funding from the Twenty-first Century Foundation of Bolivia and the government of Venezuela. More information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington DC.

## **Part III: Articles**

MiamiHerald.com

Posted on Thu, Feb. 12, 2009

## Bolivia independent

The Feb. 6 story *Iran courts new Andean friend* -- Bolivia does not stand up to scrutiny. It relies only on sources from Bolivia's delegitimized governments instead of current officials.

Last month, Bolivians voted for more recognition and control over their natural resources when they approved a new national charter by large margins. Bolivians are in the process of reclaiming their rights as a people and nation; they are not giving them away as the story suggests.

While it is true that Bolivia has economic relations with Iran, it is farfetched to suggest that the Middle Eastern country and other investors control it. In fact, Evo Morales' administration is trying to correct this imperial practice.

**OLIVIA B. GOUMBRI**, executive director, Latin America Information Office, Washington, D.C.

### Animal cruelty

Recently The Miami Herald published a photograph of the circus coming to town. Elephants were seen trotting down the street, and another was trying to push itself through a narrow opening of the train that carried them.

Then in the Feb. 8 edition there were four pictures with the headline *Alligator smackdown*. An alligator wrestler "struggled to lug his gator out of the pool [and] finished his routine by putting the monster to "sleep" by rolling him over on his back. Disoriented, the gator becomes quiet and stops struggling . . ." I wonder, who is the "monster" in this scenario?

The Miami Herald should stop promoting such cruelty to poor creatures who cannot stand up and be counted.

**TIZ STOCKTON**, Coral Gables

### Obama clear, honest

Finally, a president who speaks for the American people. After President Barack Obama's news conference on Monday night, there was no doubt in my mind that I voted for the right presidential candidate. He was clear and honest; he made sense and spoke for us. What are these other politicians doing? It is time for them to listen to our voices.

There is no time to waste just criticizing. We cannot wait for miracles. There is no perfect solution for an imperfect problem. But we must try.

President Obama is committed to doing his best to help our country.

**FRANCA FIUMANI**, Miami

### Bankers' earnings

A cap on bankers' earnings is a terrible idea. Like it or not, Americans now have a stake in banks and financial institutions. It is time to start thinking like smart investors.

First, fire the people who screwed up. Then give the new executives really big bonuses for making the companies profitable.

A financial incentive is the great motivator that built this country.

An earnings cap is fine for government employees. But it's bad management in private enterprise.

**CHARLES D. URSTADT**, Miami Beach

### One time only

Leonard Pitts' Feb. 8 Issues & Ideas column, *Draining D.C. swamp no easy job for Obama* is right when he calls President Barack Obama's "I screwed up" refreshing.

However, you only get to use that excuse once.