



# CORREO | DEL | ORINOCO

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## South America: a territory of peace

*President Chavez visited neighboring nations this week  
to strengthen ties and promote peace and unity in the region*

On a four country visit to Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia and Colombia, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez advanced his nation's commercial and political relations while ensuring South America would remain a zone of peace. Following last week's visit to the region made by US President Barack Obama, from where the US leader launched the war against Libya, the principal goal of Chavez's trip was to promote peace and unity throughout Latin America. His counterparts also advocated to defend South America as a territory of peace.



### Venezuela dismantles corrupt police force

Venezuela began dismantling a notorious police force this week as part of moves by President Hugo Chavez's government to tackle high crime rates that have been affecting the nation.

The authorities say a fifth of all crime in the country is committed by members of the security forces, including the Metropolitan Police in Caracas, which is linked to offenses such as homicides, kidnapping for ransom and armed robberies.

"We will not tolerate police who commit crimes ... nor those who assassinate anyone", Interior

Minister Tareck El Aissami said on state television, announcing the disbandment of the Metropolitan Police over the next 90 days.

He said more half the unit had already resigned, but that some of the others would be retrained and given the opportunity to join the new National Bolivarian Police, which is focused on communal policing and defense of human rights.

Many Venezuelans associated the Metropolitan Police with abuse and extortion and it also became entwined in politics.

The force was seen as an armed

wing of the opposition, and three senior Metropolitan officers are serving 30-year sentences convicted of shooting dead Chavez supporters during a brief coup against the President in 2002.

Later Chavez brought the unit under central government control, but that did little to clean up its record. Opinion polls put crime as the top concern of voters in South America's biggest oil producer and it will be a major topic for candidates at the Dec. 2012 presidential poll.

T/Reuters

### Bituaya in Washington



The Venezuelan band Bituaya will perform on Friday, April 1 at 7:00 pm in the Bolivarian Hall, the cultural space of the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in Washington, DC. Their performance will bring a fusion of Afro-Caribbean rhythms and Venezuelan culture to the people of the US and the Venezuelan community in the area. The members of the band will also share with the audience their experiences in developing cultural community work in the Venezuelan capital.

Bituaya has been touring the US since March 18. The band has performed in San Francisco and New York, as well as in Austin, Texas, as part of the South by Southwest Festival (SXSW).

In Washington, Bituaya will also meet with the cultural collectives Words Beats & Life and Puppet Underground to exchange experiences and strengthen ties between the US and Venezuela. Bituaya is linked to community-based cultural center Tiuna El Fuerte, a cultural project developed in Caracas' El Valle neighborhood, where classes and workshops in music, theater, cinema, dance, and circus arts take place.

The band will also perform at Lupe Cantina (1214 18th St. NW), on Saturday, April 2 at 7:00 pm.



### More investment in agriculture, housing

During his Sunday program, Alo Presidente, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced multi-billion dollar investments in agricultural production, housing construction, transportation and telecommunications, healthcare facilities and science and technology. The boost in funding is aimed to solve some of the major problems facing the South American nation today, particularly housing shortages and food scarcities.

### Economy Combating food hoarding and sabotage

Government agencies are working with local communities to put an end to sabotage of the nation's food supply.

### Social Justice Workers unite

Thousands of workers marched this week to demand more worker control of public industries.

### Social Justice Advancing literacy

Venezuela's International Book Fair offered hundreds of titles at affordable costs for all in an effort to promote literacy.

# Venezuelan President Chavez's South American tour promotes peace and unity

**On the heels of US President Barack Obama's deflated visit to Latin America, during which no concrete achievements were obtained, President Hugo Chavez launched a 4-stop South America tour advancing integration, commerce and political ties between nations, with a clear message of peace**



## ARGENTINA

The signing of twelve different agreements in areas of transportation, medical equipment, agricultural technology and energy was the result of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's visit to Argentina last Tuesday on the first stop of his tour to four South American countries.

Meeting with his counterpart Christina Fernandez, Chavez signed a contract for the construction of 16 barges in the Argentine shipyards of Tandandor at a cost of \$83 million and hailed the growing relations between the two

South American nations over the past 7 years as representative of the integrationist policies of both governments.

According to the Venezuelan head of state, who was also honored with an award for social communication by the University of La Plata during his visit, the newly signed accords will permit the two allies "to strengthen the axis of Caracas-Buenos Aires that began to arise after the first conversations with [ex-Argentine President] Nestor Kirchner were held in 2004".

In addition to the barges, other

accords signed between the two nations on Tuesday include the export of nearly 17 thousand vehicles to the Caribbean nation as well as the sale of 600 thousand tons of food and \$400 million worth of agricultural equipment.

"We're going to continue to open spaces of bi-national and multilateral integration in order to consolidate South America as a great territory of peace", Chavez said of the two nation's economic and social cooperation.

## UNASUR

During their meeting, Fernan-

dez and Chavez affirmed their willingness to further strengthen South American unity and expressed their collective opposition to the military action being carried out by NATO forces in Libya.

"We, the supposed savages and underdeveloped people have been able to resolve very violent situations using international law and a great willingness for peace", Fernandez said with respect to the founding of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in 2004 as a way to promote integration and harmony on the continent.

"When one sees the supposed civilized people resolving their issues through bombs, I feel proud to be South American and a member of UNASUR", she declared.

For his part, President Chavez echoed the sentiments of the Argentine president, comparing the military actions being carried out against Libya to a colonial campaign. "We can speak of a new form of colonialism that is more unmasked and ferocious. Now the United States and its allies in NATO and the United Nations feel that they have full freedom to bomb countries. They say that it's to save people

but what they want is to overthrow a government", Chavez exclaimed.

With respect to UNASUR, Fernandez also announced during her encounter with Chavez that the next secretary general of the regional alliance would be the former Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Emma Mejia.

"The next secretary of UNASUR is going to be a Colombian with the consent of Venezuela... This is knowing how to exercise diplomacy with capital letters", she said.

Last year, a diplomatic crisis was resolved between Venezuela and Colombia after former Argentine President and Secretary of UNASUR Nestor Kirchner worked within the South American alliance to mend relations between the neighboring countries.

Kirchner passed away unexpectedly last October, leaving the Secretary General position vacant.

Ali Rodriguez, current Venezuelan Energy Minister, is slated to take the position upon Mejia's completion of the Secretary term in 2012.

T/ COI

P/ Presidential Press

## Chavez, the "Latin American President of popular communication"

While in Argentina, the Venezuelan President was awarded the prestigious Rodolfo Walsh Prize - given to him by the University of La Plata's (UNLP) School of Journalism - for "his commitment to defending the liberty of the people, consolidating Latin American unity, and defending human rights, truth and democratic values".

While conservative elements within Argentine society, including owners of private media outlets, questioned the UNLP's decision to title Chavez the "Latin American president of popular communication", dean of UNLP's School of Journalism Florencia Saintout ratified the decision.

"We, the people, are here to reinforce our commitment with a president who has called into question the very notion that 'the word' [news and analysis] can be owned by a small few", affirmed Saintout in reference to private media ownership and concentration.

Chavez accepted the award "on behalf of the Venezuelan people, Simon Bolívar's people" who he described as having struggled for years to secure, "a new dynamic in communication and media, in popular information free of the media dictatorship imposed by the bourgeoisie and imperialism".

Since first taking office in 1999, Chavez has helped break media

concentration in Venezuela and abroad by promoting the creation of the regional television network TeleSUR as well as by greatly expanding publicly-owned media's reach, including numerous community-based radio and television networks.

Though critics accuse Chavez of media censorship, the Venezuelan government insists that all media outlets sanctioned to date have been so as a result of their non-compliance with Venezuela's media law and not because of their political perspectives. Globovision, for example, is an openly anti-Chavez television network that currently operates freely on Venezuelan airwaves.



Rodolfo Walsh (1927 - 1977), whom the media award is named after, is considered the founder of investigative journalism in Argentina. In March 1977, after denouncing the military government's neoliberal policies, Walsh was gunned down and

subsequently disappeared by members of the country's Armed Forces. Walsh remains one of the 30,000 people disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship of 1976 - 1983.

T/ Juan Reardon

# Venezuela and Uruguay advance satellite communications

The governments of Venezuela and Uruguay signed a series of strategic agreements on Wednesday, in the areas of science and technology, energy and oil, agriculture, food, commerce and finance, that will further the integral development of both nations.

The accords were reached during a trimestral visit between Uruguayan President Jose "Pepe" Mujica and Venezuelan chief Hugo Chavez.

Amongst the varied agreements approved in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, was a protocol amendment to a prior accord that will allow for the development of a satellite program "Venesat-1", using Venezuela's "Simon Bolivar" satellite, which will permit both nations a shared use of the orbit so that Uruguay can also develop spacial technology.

During the meetings on Wednesday, President Chavez praised the efforts Uruguay has made to advance the development of Venezuela's satellite, which according to the Venezuelan President, should "benefit all people in the region".

Chavez highlighted the support provided by the Uruguayan government during the presidency of



Tabare Vazquez (2005-2010), who helped initiate Venezuela's satellite program.

The "Simon Bolivar" satellite project "was an older idea, from the 1970s", explained President Chavez, but due to "foreign interests" it was never completed. "The project didn't happen at that

time, and those same interests tried to prevent us from completing it as well", revealed the Venezuelan head of state.

Nonetheless, other "developed countries with a progressive vision for the world offered us help", said Chavez. "With the aid of the Chinese and Russian gov-

ernments, we began our satellite program".

Thanks to Uruguay, detailed Chavez, the Venezuelan satellite was able to be placed in orbit, "because we were blocked; we didn't have an orbit to put our satellite in, because of the hegemony that also exists in space and

is controlled by the US and other developed nations".

Chavez also recalled that when the satellite was launched in October 2008, "the US government had sent a request to the Chinese urging them to suspend the launching of the satellite, because they were unsure as to what we would use it for, that it could interfere in another orbit...they just invented any excuse".

"But, President Hu Jintao said he had made a commitment to Venezuela and would proceed with the launching of the satellite. And there it is, in Uruguay's orbit, and we're sharing it", Chavez informed.

## REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

South American and Caribbean media outlets can use the "Simon Bolivar" satellite, offered the Venezuelan President. "We want the people of Uruguay, and those of South America and the Caribbean to enjoy the use of our satellite", he expressed. And thanks to the agreements signed between Venezuela and Uruguay, "the people of Uruguay have rights to the satellite".

T/COI

P/Presidential Press

## Our goal is achieving South American unity, says Chavez from Bolivia

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arrived on Thursday in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where he ratified his desire to achieve South American unity.

"I take the opportunity to reaffirm the determination, which grows stronger every day, of achieving unity in South America. We are traveling this immense territory, from the Caribbean down to Rio de la Plata, and we have now touched passionate Bolivian land, the heart of South America", he proclaimed.

The Venezuelan President was welcomed by Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca, Cochabamba governor Edmundo Novillo and Cochabamba Mayor Edwin Castellanos, reported Venezuelan television.

In declarations on Bolivian media, Chavez remarked, "Bolivia was born as a result of the Bolivarian Revolution, indigenous re-

sistance and the unity of people, who 200 years ago brought freedom to these mountains".

As part of the South American tour he initiated this week in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia and which concludes this Friday in Colombia, President Chavez arrived in Cochabamba to review accords signed by the two nations and endorse new agreements in matters of agriculture, energy, electricity and agroindustry.

The goal of the meeting was to exchange knowledge and propose projects that benefit the economies of the two South American countries.

"I reaffirm from Venezuela our commitment to integration. We will continue working and strengthening the axis 'Venezuela-Bolivia', a constituent core of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA)", said Chavez.



## SISTER NATIONS

For his part, Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca assured that the relation between his country and Venezuela is an unconditional alliance of sister nations.

The Minister commented that President Chavez's visit to Bolivia strengthened the cooperation and fraternal ties between

the two countries. Choquehuanca informed that working groups from both delegations evaluated projects on commerce, hydrocarbons, and the fight against drug trafficking, among other topics.

As part of Chavez's visit in Bolivia, a thermoelectric plant was inaugurated and several agreements were formalized between

the Venezuelan state-run oil company PDVSA and Bolivian Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB) for future oil exploration in both territories.

Additionally, the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies passed two agreements with Venezuela to promote commerce in the areas of textiles and mining, in accordance with the regulations established through ALBA. Chavez's visit to Bolivia concluded with a public event at the Coliseum of La Coronilla, in the city of Cochabamba, with the participation of social movements and government representatives.

Heads of state from ALBA nations meet this coming Sunday, April 3, in Caracas for an annual summit to further relations and incorporate social movements into the alliance.

T/AVN

P/Presidential Press

# Venezuela: major investment in social programs, housing, agricultural production

**The Venezuelan government has approved the allocation of billions of dollars to be spent on a diversity of social programs this year ranging from housing and agricultural development to public safety and energy**

During his show, Alo Presidente, broadcasting from the presidential palace of Miraflores, Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez reported that more than 12.5 billion bolivars [\$3 billion] will be disbursed to increase the nation's agricultural production, strengthen its transportation and telecommunication capacity as well as its science and technology programs.

The sector that will see the greatest boost in funding, however, will be housing construction as the Chavez administration continues to place heightened emphasis on its pledge to solve the nation's current housing shortage by 2017.

Working together with the private sector, Chavez elaborated last Sunday on an ambitious new plan to build two million homes in the next six years.

The effort, Chavez reported, already has the support of 74 private construction companies and various non-governmental banks operating in the country.

"This year we have secured resources, including those coming from private banks, of 49.4 billion bolivars [\$11.4 billion] for this great mission", the socialist leader announced.

## MISSION HOUSING

In recent months, the Chavez administration has placed greater emphasis on providing residents with affordable housing after torrential rains left more than 130 thousand displaced in coastal areas.

The organization and execution of the new housing project will fall under the rubric of the government's massive new social program called Mission Housing.

This new mission will be "of a greater magnitude" than those



previously created by the government and will be formally signed into law on April 12th as the Property Regime of the Great Housing Mission Law.

The law, as articulated by the President, will provide property titles to families under different schemes including single and shared possession.

In order to explain the creation of a new "multi-family" property relationship, Chavez cited the example of a military complex in Caracas that has been identified for residential development.

"In Fort Tiuna, we have 100 hectares [247 acres] which belong to the state. Thousands of families will inhabit this land, no less than 40 thousand...Of these families, for example, fifty will live in

a high rise and will be the owners of this building. It's multi-family property, direct social property and we're going to give the families title to the property even before the buildings are constructed", he expounded. The concept is similar to the cooperatives in New York City, where residents own shares of the building, as well as their own apartments.

A housing census is currently being prepared throughout the nation to lay the groundwork for Mission Housing, which envisions the construction of 150 thousand new residences this year.

## LAND FOR THE PEOPLE

Contributing to this goal, last weekend Chavez delivered via satellite 68 new apartments to res-

idents in the sector El Valle in the capital Caracas.

"This is part of the re-launching of the national housing plan and we will continue to provide more homes", said Jacqueline Faria, Head of the Capital District, during the event.

Faria explained that the land where eleven apartment complexes have been built once belonged to the banker Nelson Mezerhane who fled to the United States after being indicted on charges of financial malfeasance.

"This land now belongs to the people", Faria declared.

In addition to the delivery of housing units, Chavez also decreed during his 373rd televised broadcast Venezuela's new National Housing and Habitat System which will further aid the identification of available land for home construction.

## HEALTH MEASURES

Public health was another topic addressed by the Venezuelan head of state last Sunday as he inaugurated a newly renovated maternity hospital in the state of Zulia.

The Dr. Armando Castillo Plaza Maternity Hospital, first opened on March 19, 1943, has been completely re-equipped with the latest medical technology and now

consists of eight delivery rooms, four surgery theaters, and a neonatal therapy unit.

Health Minister Eugenia Sader, present at the inauguration, said the facility offers services for residents that were not available previously.

"An assistance room for fathers and special care for newborns has been created with the capacity for 30 children. This didn't exist in the old hospital", she stated.

The health center, financed by the state oil company, PDVSA, will attend to more than four million people in the Western region of the country, Sader reported.

According to President Chavez, the use of public funds for such essential services is an indication of the priorities of his revolutionary government.

"This is an example of how our resources are directed...One would have to ask [members of previous governments] what they did with the resources that they managed for more than 40 years", he remarked.

On Sunday, Chavez also addressed the outbreak of the influenza virus AN1H1, commonly referred to as swine flu, which has surfaced in the South American country recently.

Since March 17, nearly 400 cases have been registered in Venezuelan territory, with the majority occurring in the Andean state of Merida where classes have been suspended to prevent the spread of the virus.

The government has also distributed 80 thousand vaccinations in the state. "We're battling this together with the people", Chavez said as he called for calm and urged Venezuelans to engage in elevated hygiene practices to avoid infection.

"I just want to remind people that it's a difficult, controllable and controlled situation that should not be a reason for panic but rather of concern and the taking of the pertinent measures", he said.

The Venezuelan head of state praised the public health sector and media for dealing with the outbreak which to date has claimed four lives and has already begun to see a marked diminution in infection rates.

# Communities combat sabotage of consumer products distribution

**Investigations by state agencies have evidenced clear efforts by private companies to hoard basic consumer products in order to induce panic and fear in the population and justify illegal price hikes**

Indepabis, the government Institute for the Defense of People's Access to Goods and Services, is issuing fines, promoting a free complaint phone number, and calling for greater community council involvement in order to combat current scarcities of consumer products in Venezuela.

While the scarcities vary according to region, milk and sanitary products have disappeared off market shelves nationwide.

In the western Andean region of Merida, for example, powdered milk (the source of milk for most Venezuelans because it is cheaper than its liquid alternative) has been very difficult to find during the last six months. Oil, diapers, and sanitary pads for women have also been quite scarce, and coffee has sometimes been missing from stores.

Indepabis president Augusto Montiel, speaking on YVKE Mundial radio this week, said the Venezuelan government, through the institution, would work with organized communities under a model of "social auditing" to defend the rights of consumers against speculation of prices and other illegal economic activity.

Indepabis has also been encouraging the formation of food security committees within community councils so as to involve the population directly in the monitoring, reporting and resolution of food hoarding problems.

The state agency is also providing a free phone number for complaints and has been inspecting shops to make sure they are complying with regulated prices. Those who don't comply will receive fines but will not be shut down, "because the aim is not to affect the consumer but rather the speculator", Montiel said.



## EXPOSING FRAUD AND SABOTAGE

The agency chief reported that organized communities had already played an important role in denouncing real estate abuses and specific housing construction companies who scammed people into buying unfinished homes and apartment buildings, in a major real estate fraud scandal that was exposed last year.

"It's a complex process and we have to use the law to establish fines standardized in the Law for the Defense of People's Access to Goods and Services, fines which should be in accordance with the type of irregularity or crime committed. In the case of construction companies...many have been obligated to return the money they illegally received", Montiel explained.

He added that several individuals involved in the fraudulent scandals were now in prison, while others had fled the country with the "savings of the defrauded families".

Article 132 of the law outlines fines for speculation and hoarding, which range from 100 to 5,000 tax units. One tax unit is currently 76 bolivars (\$US 17.70).

## PRICE HIKES

Montiel said there are also some shop owners who don't sell



products in their stores because they don't want to comply with the regulated prices, and then they illegally re-sell the products at inflated prices by hiring people in the informal market.

"The national government guarantees food sovereignty. All agents and entities that form part of the networks of distribution, production and selling should respect the rights of the people to have access to all food products- the regulated ones as much as the non-regulated ones", he informed.

Regarding the scarcity of personal hygiene products such as sanitary pads and diapers, Montiel said

there was no good reason for such a lack of supply and that Indepabis was conducting an investigation.

"Those importers haven't complained of a lack of access to foreign currency", he stated. Because of the government's controls of the exchange rate, companies must apply for US dollars in order to be able to import.

"They have been given the required dollars needed to buy materials and for production, there shouldn't be any complaints in that respect, but it turns out that they aren't distributing those items".

He suggested the lack of such products in the stores implied hoarding in order to create an

"irregular situation" by "fraudulently or artificially modifying the conditions of demand", justifying an increase in prices.

## POLITICAL MANIPULATION

Opposition spokespeople and private media generally try blame the Chavez government for the scarcity of products, citing price regulations as a cause or the expropriation of some suppliers, producers or supermarkets, which they say are dysfunctional and have added to the problem.

At the end of 2007, there was a more serious food shortage, with a large proportion of basic products such as milk, rice, pasta, sugar, eggs, and toilet paper difficult to find nationwide. The situation, which caused major discontent across the country, had a clear impact on a negative vote for constitutional reform proposed by President Chavez.

At that time there were a range of factors involved in the food scarcity, including exaggerated discontent provoked by media causing people to overly stock up on products, a jump in consumption as a result of increased government social spending, rising global food prices, deliberate hoarding by private food companies, and the selling of regulated goods on the black market (or in neighboring Colombia) by both private companies and corrupt officials working in government food supply chains.

In immediate response to concerns expressed by the people, the government removed price controls on all but 20 products. Previously some 400 products were subject to controls in an attempt to assist consumers.

In response to this issue, as well as part of the government's plan for food sovereignty, the state has nationalized several supermarket chains to create its own network of markets with affordable prices, expanded subsidized food shops Mercal and PDVAL, nationalized and created new food factories, and launched Mission Agro Venezuela to try to increase local production, among other efforts.

T/ Tamara Pearson

[www.venezuelanalysis.com](http://www.venezuelanalysis.com)

# Strengthening worker control in Venezuela

Armed with banners, signs and an unwavering desire to deepen Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution, thousands of workers from a vast array of state-owned companies took to the streets last Friday in the southern state of Bolívar to defend government plans to strengthen worker control in the industrial sector.

The march, which began at Monument Plaza in the city of Puerto Ordaz and ended at the offices of the state-run industrial conglomerate Venezuelan Corporation of Guayana (CVG), called for a greater emphasis on worker-led initiatives and end to bureaucracy and corruption in publicly owned industries.

Present at the demonstration, alongside workers and unionists, were elected officials and members of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the political party headed by President Hugo Chavez, as well as representatives of various grassroots neighborhood organizations, known as community councils.

Also on hand were members of the executive cabinet who expressed their support for the workers' demands as well as their commitment to the struggle for self-management and democracy on the job.



"We affirm our support for the path of worker and socialist control of the industries in Guayana into the future", said Nicolas Maduro, Foreign Minister and political chair of Chavez's cabinet.

Bolívar state, located in the southern region of Guayana, is the largest geographical state in Venezuela and has come to be known as the industrial center of the nation as a result of its rich mineral deposits.

## PRO-WORKER AGENDA

Steel, aluminum and bauxite industries have all thrived in the region, as has labor union activity, which has led to a well-organized working class uninhibited in its willingness to voice its demands and push forth a pro-worker agenda.

Although not always unified in its political allegiances and many times plagued by infighting

and bickering, the union movement in Guayana has benefited from a wave of recent nationalizations undertaken by the socialist government of Hugo Chavez.

In addition to bringing essential industries under domestic management, President Chavez visited the region last year and ratified his support for worker control and gave his formal back-

ing to Plan Socialist Guayana – a project designed by workers to advance workplace democracy and public oversight.

Yet, many rank and file workers as well as union officials claim that entrenched members of the industrial and political bureaucracy have refused to recognize calls for greater worker participation and have attempted to sabotage the measure through a variety of tactics including arson and fraud.

The demonstration held last Friday was convened to protest these maneuvers and reassert the call for worker control in the state owned industries.

"Today all of the workers and union members are here", said Nestor Astudillo, member of the steelworkers union FTRS. "We're marching against bureaucracy, corruption, transnational [corporations], and in favor of putting the businesses in the hands of the Venezuelan people. We support the revolutionary process led by our President Hugo Chavez and we're making use of our strength and our desire to continue struggling for the recovery of our basic industries".

T/COI  
P/Agencies

# International Book Fair in Venezuela advances literacy

Children's books, art books, novels, social and natural science books, and books by socialist theorists and political leaders were among the tens of thousands of books available at discounted prices at Venezuela's VII International Book Fair in Caracas.

"This revolution has to be a revolution of culture, and in its own unique way, an editorial revolution", said Venezuelan Culture Minister Farruco Sesto at a forum during the fair.

Over the past two weeks, the annual festival hosted dozens of literary conferences, forums, workshops, educational expositions, an artisan craft fair with exhibits from each of Venezuela's 23 states, and dance and musical performances by children and adults.

Sesto, who is now also the minister for the revolutionary trans-



formation of greater Caracas, said the festival's purpose is to provide "open access to culture,

information, and knowledge".

Event organizers estimated that over 180,000 people visited

the Book Fair during its 10 days of operation. Christian Valles, the president of the National Book Center, said the turnout "exceeded all expectations" given that the last FILVEN was held just four and a half months ago.

## AFFORDABLE LITERATURE

The fair included 103 Venezuelan publishers and 20 international publishers representing both the public and private sectors. Many books were free or priced at under a dollar by state-owned publishers such as El Perro y la Rana (The Dog and the Frog), the National Center for History, the Andres Bello National House of Letters, and Romulo Gallegos Latin America Studies Center (CELARG).

The government's featured works included "Feminism and Socialism," by Alba Carosio and

Iraida Vargas and "The Environment in the Bolivarian Revolution" by multiple authors. The top-selling children's books were "Interviews with Animals" by Carlos Romero and published by El Perro y la Rana, and "Life Is a Game" by Irina Esparza.

The publicly-owned Venezuelan Book Distributor reported that state-owned publications alone had sold more than 30,000 books during the fair. Valles said this was an example of the government's efforts toward "the democratization of knowledge".

Authors from 15 countries participated in the book fair, including Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Hungary, Iran, Nigeria, Uruguay, Peru, Spain, Australia and Turkey.

T/VenezuelAnalysis  
P/Agencies

# Venezuela's new Social Responsibility Law

Last December, Venezuela's National Assembly (AN) passed a new Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Digital Media. Contrary to harsh criticism, it doesn't impose censorship. It expands on existing legislation to promote responsible programming, including online.

Whenever laws promoting social responsibility are approved by the Chavez government, unfair criticism in international media follows.

Right after the law was passed in December, Council on Foreign Relations Fellow and former director of USAID's funding program for anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela, Joel D. Hirst, called it an "attack on freedom of speech", stating, "[It] places severe restrictions on the Internet, centralizing access under the control of a government server. They require the airwaves as a 'public good' and set in place harsh penalties for arcane and obtuse violations of the law".

This statement is false, along with the following examples.

New York Times writer Simon Romero (a longtime Chavez critic) headlined, "New Laws in Venezuela Aim to Limit Dissent", writing, "The National Assembly has approved a sweeping set of laws that impose penalties for spreading political dissent on the Internet".

Human Rights Watch, a US-funded organization that denounces human rights abuses worldwide, but has taken a particularly aggressive position on Venezuela, also put out a statement on the new law. The agency's report titled, "Venezuela: Legislative Assault on Free Speech, Civil Society", concluded, "New Venezuelan laws pose serious threats to free speech and the work of civil society...The new media law introduces sweeping restrictions on Internet traffic, reinforces existing restrictions on radio and television content, and allows the government to terminate broadcasting licenses on arbitrary grounds".

This statement is absolutely false and HRW knows it.

The corporate funded Committee to Protect Journalists also "condemn(ed)" Venezuela's new media law", declaring, "It could promote further censorship and



seriously limit freedom of expression in Venezuela".

In reality, the law does nothing of the kind. Most countries, including the US, have laws and regulations setting acceptable media standards, especially for radio and television reaching large audiences.

## THE 2004 LAW

In 2004, Venezuela passed its first Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television. The legislation "established the social responsibility of radio and television service providers, related parties, national independent producers, and users in the process of broadcasting and reception of messages, promoting a democratic equilibrium between their duties, rights, and interests, with the goal of seeking social justice and contributing to citizenship formation, democracy, peace, human rights, education, culture, public health, and the social and economic development of the Nation".

The 2004 law affirmed freedom of expression without censorship and the exercise and respect for human rights; placed an emphasis on social and cultural information and material for youth to aid their development and social conscience; encouraged domestic independent productions; placed a balance on public duties, rights and interests, and those of radio and television providers; and

advocated for the needs of the hearing-impaired, amongst other issues.

According to the law, nonconformance to these standards may result in fines, denial of broadcast spaces, suspension or revocation of broadcast licenses, or refusal to renew broadcasting concessions.

Specific violations include: transmitting messages that illegally promote or incite disobedience to the law; transmitting material that impedes the actions of citizen security organisms and the judicial branch necessary to guarantee everyone the right to life, health and personal integrity; and transmitting propaganda or advertisements deemed lawless under the LSR code of conduct.

Despite international perceptions, Venezuela's media are notably free, open and corporate dominated, especially the four leading private TV companies, controlling over 80% of the market and majority of viewers. In addition, a majority of national newspapers are corporate-owned.

## THE NEW MEDIA LAW

The updated law passed in December 2010 enforces digital as well as conventional media social responsibility by "guaranteeing respect for freedom of expression and information, without censorship, within the limits of a social and democratic state". The legislation creates a Televi-

sion Programming Commission to establish ways and conditions for assigning airwave space to national independent producers "with the aim of guaranteeing the democratization of the radio electric spectrum, pluralism, freedom of creation, and effective conditions for competition".

According to Venezuela's Communication and Information Ministry, the new law changes the old one in several ways. Besides "radio and television, Internet media are added as subject to regulation, not to limit web sites or services available, but to ensure the responsible use of this important tool. Currently, the law provides for sanctions against those who use the Internet to incite hate, criminal activity, war propaganda, alterations in public order, homicide; or advocate to disobey constitutional authority".

The older law, stated the Ministry, "regulated television and radio, not the Internet. As a result, sites like Noticiero Digital... published numerous articles and messages inciting violence, rape, criminal activities and even the assassination of public figures. Often calls are made for the Armed Forces to revolt against the government or even to assassinate President Chavez on different web sites, blogs, Twitter or Facebook. These are dangerous actions that no civilized society can permit".

In fact, they're prohibited in the US, where anti-government propaganda intended to incite public hostility, violence, or rebellion would subject abusers to charges of sedition or treason.

Seditious conspiracy under Section 2384 of the US Code, Title 18 states:

"If two or more persons in any State or Territory...conspire to overthrow, put down, or to destroy by force the Government of the US, or to levy war against them, or to oppose by force the authority thereof, or by force to seize, take, or possess any property of the US contrary to the authority thereof, they shall each be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 20 years, or both".

Article 3, Section 3 of the US Constitution defines treason that may subject offenders to capital punishment if found guilty:

"Treason against the US shall consist only in levying War against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort".

Courts would then decide guilt or innocence of actions such as the following: "sedition as covered above, including inflammatory TV, radio, print or digital material intended to incite rebellion against the government; subversion defined as free speech gone too far, including transmitting blatantly false information aiding enemy or opposition forces; syndicalism organizing of a political party or group advocating the violent overthrow of the government; and terrorist systematic use of violence or threats thereof to intimidate or coerce the government or whole societies by targeting innocent noncombatants".

Overall, Venezuela's broadcast and digital media will remain open, free, fair and uncensored. The new law aims to improve programming with public committees involved in enforcement. Compared to it, US content is run by a government/giant media cabal, offering managed news, infotainment, and junk food news, creating what Project Censored calls a "truth emergency" needing fixing to restore fast eroding democratic values near extinction.

T/Stephen Lendman

## OPINION

*"To Bomb or Not to Bomb ... What a Silly Question"*

# Systems Come Unglued

The human mind doesn't easily process catastrophe. As Libyan forces battled, tens of millions witnessed televised images of ocean water rising over barricades, picking up cars, trucks, houses and other edifices and carrying them away - to somewhere else. While TV news reporters told of trains gone missing in northern Japan, other urgent cables warned of the impending battle for Benghazi. Reporters ask: how many will die in this battle? Should the United States interfere militarily as "humanitarian" hawks demand?

Imagine President Obama: pacing, Oval Office.

Hamlet, rewrite March 2011

To intervene or not to intervene - that is the facade. Whether 'tis nobler in the public discourse to suffer the slings and arrows of yet another opportunity for war. Pass on it or take arms against a desert of troubled oil wells. And by opposing extend them.

Meanwhile, TV viewers wondered: Where are the missing trains and passengers?

As nuclear power plants failed, experts talked of "cores melting", warned people to evacuate; ominous phrases that

destabilize the human mind. On March 15, President Obama, whatever his inner doubts, reassured Americans.

"Obviously, all energy sources have their downside - I mean we saw that with the gulf spill last summer. But I do think it's important for us to think through constantly how can we improve nuclear technologies to deal with additional safety concerns that people have". (CBS -- in Pittsburgh)

Energy Secretary Steven Chu told Congress people in the US, "should have full confidence that the United States has rigorous safety regulations in place to ensure that our nuclear power is generated safely and responsibly".

The Administration attempted to counter predictable skepticism about an industry that had already produced the Three Mile Island disaster in 1979 and who-

se facilities in Rocky Flats Colorado and Hanford Washington have had routine "leaks" over decades.

In addition, "Twenty-three of the US nuclear reactors use the same design as those found at the plant that failed in Japan". Indeed, almost each US nuclear power installation "shares key design traits with the Japanese plant". (CBS)

Imagine a strong swimmer, able to press 250 pounds, caught in rushing water, mixed with mud, and hurled against hard objects while drowning. Add radioactive clouds floating westward, sea water washing up on California shores with dead irradiated fish spilling onto the beach. The Japan shock feeds the fertile human imagination - and not in positive ways.

Previous nuclear "mistakes" like Chernobyl add mind pictu-

res to the Japanese nuclear drama and foster universal skepticism about assurances from distinguished "experts" who perpetually promise nuclear energy will be cheap, safe and clean. Think what a hip hop artist could do with those three words!

Did this era of seeming disintegration begin with Hurricane Katrina's devastation? Or the world financial system's collapse?

Obama faces stunning political change in the Arab world. Millions demand an end to dictatorial regimes, previously pillars of stability for the West's economic and geopolitical systems.

After mass uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt forced out despots, and Yemen and Gulf states began trembling under democracy's force, a revolt erupted in Libya.

At that point, talk of military intervention began. As the Saudi King dispatched his oily troops to quell revolt in neighboring Bahrain, "humanitarian interventionists" demanded that Obama order the Air Force, with or without the UN and NATO, to bomb Libyan military targets - no fly zone precursor.

Obama now faces resurgent interventionists, those who cannot resist the lure of war to spread freedom. Although the media and political circles have not defined the Libyan revolutionaries' values, they nevertheless demand "humanitarian intervention" on their behalf. Opponents of this freedom-loving quest got labeled as flaks for Gaddafi. Faint echoes whispered: Remember Saddam who possessed WMD and links with Al Qaeda? Milosevic who ordered genocide?

Remember Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Kuwait, Kosovo,

Iraq, Afghanistan? Who killed more: NATO forces or Saddam's loyalists in that "humanitarian invasion"? What did any of these people do to us? Who Invited Us?

Former NATO Commanding General Bill Smith offered his lesson from the experience of Vietnam: We shouldn't fight anyone who can fight back.

Reflecting this wisdom, Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned: an adviser who counseled a president to invade Asia or Africa "must have his head examined".

Defense intellectuals like Wolfowitz, Pearl, Libby and Lieberman who never had a school yard fight and draft dodgers like Dick Cheney pushed for war, while secretly scoffing at the fools who risk their necks in combat.

Liberals had jumped on the Iraq war wagon. NY Times columnist Thomas Friedman, who extolled globalization's virtues, became a cheerleader for the Iraq war. His fellow "humanitarian interventionists" without fear or fact demanded action on Libya. None offer information on the nature of the Libyan rebels.

Nature attacks, nuclear disaster, economic chaos and war coincide with the multiplication of the world's poor. Would a living Shakespeare have substituted banks and corporations for evil King Claudius and inspired his hero Hamlet (Barack) to denounce "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts; / Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters; / Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause".

Hamlet feigned madness. Obama could shed his procrastinating façade and reveal courage to "denounce and then act against the villainous banks and corporations". Barack and all good and noble men and women should act on Hamlet's painful insight. "The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right".

Instead, Obama in all sanity asked himself: "To bomb or not to bomb." His answer: "What a silly question".

**Saul Landau**

*Saul Landau's latest book is A Bush and Botox World. (CP/AK Press).*

