



## CNE warns of false expectations

During a nationally transmitted broadcast, the head of Venezuela's electoral authorities, Tibisay Lucena, informed residents on steps being taken to verify the results of the presidential election held on April 14th. The CNE President called for respect of the law and critiqued the stance of the politicians who are "generating false expectations" in their supporters by implying that the results of the election will be reversed by an extended audit of the nation's voting machines. [page 2](#)

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# CORREO | DEL | ORINOCO

Friday, May 3, 2013 | N° 156 | Caracas | [www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve](http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve)

ENGLISH EDITION / *The artillery of ideas* INTERNATIONAL

## Venezuelans march on International Workers Day, celebrate new Labor Law



Thousands of Venezuelans marched throughout Caracas to commemorate May Day, International Workers Day, this past Wednesday. While supporters of defeated presidential candidate Henrique Capriles also marched to protest their electoral loss, a much larger crowd gathered in western Caracas alongside President Nicolas Maduro to celebrate new gains for workers and to show support for the Bolivarian Revolution founded by late President Hugo Chavez. A new Labor Law, promoted by Chavez, came into effect May 1st that guarantees a shorter work week, a rise in minimum wage, better benefits, pensions and longer maternity leave. [\[Continued Below\]](#)

## New Labor Law Guarantees more benefits to Venezuelan workers

T/ AVN

Venezuela's 2012 Labor Law states that wages paid to workers must include increases resulting from collective bargaining agreements, as well as subsidies or grants given by employers for goods and services designed to improve the quality of life of families.

The law undoes a provision from a previous law from 1997 that allowed 20% of the workers based salary to be excluded from the calculation of benefits or other compensation from an employer.

Article 104 of the new law states that salary includes "commissions, bonuses, perks, participation in profits or earnings, bonuses, holiday

bonuses, overtime or work night, food and housing".

It also excludes from the definition of wages the word "atypical" and the term "basic", instead using the concept of "normal salary", which is understood as pay earned by an employee on a regular and continuing basis for the provision of services.

Thus, any increases resulting from collective agreements have a direct effect on social benefits and do not just count toward salary. This means that they 20% of pay that

was previously excluded from the calculation of vacation pay and utilities will now be included.

The new law gives all women workers the right to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave – six weeks prior to delivery, and twenty weeks after delivery. The same applies to mothers who adopt children or children under three years.

With this measure, Venezuela now has the 3rd longest maternity leave in the world after Canada and Norway.



### Upcoming petrocaribe summit

A total sixteen heads of state will take part on the next Petrocaribe Summit, expected to be held on May 4th in Margarita Island, informed Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. "Sixteen sister countries of the region with whom, due to agreements, we may share Venezuelan production", said Maduro. Last Friday, April 26th, Venezuelan foreign minister Elias Jaua invited the Petrocaribe members to a new summit of heads of state and government. Petrocaribe was founded on June 29, 2006 with the signing of an Agreement on Energy Cooperation on behalf of 14 Caribbean nations. The initiative gathers today 18 countries committed to transform the region. The agreement includes Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Venezuela.



# Venezuela's electoral authorities warn of 'false expectations', attempts to damage voting system

T/COI  
P/Agencies

During a nationally transmitted broadcast last Saturday, the head of Venezuela's electoral authorities, Tibisay Lucena, informed residents on the steps being taken to verify the results of the South American nation's presidential election held on April 14th.

The results of the election, which saw Nicolas Maduro of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) defeat his conservative challenger Henrique Capriles of the United Democratic Roundtable (MUD) coalition by less than 1.8 percent of the vote, have yet to be recognized by the country's opposition.

In her address last week, Lucena detailed the methods being employed by the National Electoral Commission (CNE) to audit the electoral outcome and criticized extremist elements in the country that are attempting to "damage the electoral process".

The CNE President called for respect of the law and critiqued the stance of the politicians who are "generating false expectations" in their supporters by implying that the results of the election will be reversed by an extended audit of the nation's voting machines.

## IN THE REALM OF IMPOSSIBILITY

According to a calculation made by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) on Friday, the probability of a change in Venezuela's presidential election results as a result of an audit is less than 1 in 25 thousand trillion.

The Washington-based think tank esteemed that the plausibility of an election reversal is "practically impossible" in light of the verifications already completed by the electoral authorities on the same day as the election.

"When the polls closed, a random sample of 54 percent of all the machines (20,825 out of 39,303) was chosen, and a manual tally was made of the paper receipts. This "hot audit" was done on site, in the presence of the observers from both campaigns, as well as witnesses from the community. There were no reports from witnesses or election officials on site of discrepancies between the machine totals and the hand count", the nonprofit stated.



Given the large sample already carried out on election night, the chance of finding machine errors large enough to reverse the election outcome are, for all intents and purposes, non-existent.

"The results are pretty much intuitive", said CEPR Co-Director Mark Weisbrot of the calculation.

"With a sample that huge verified during the April 14th 'hot audit', if there were any discrepancies between the machine count and the paper ballots, it would have shown up somewhere. But it didn't", he added.

Likelihood of a change notwithstanding, the CNE agreed to audit the remaining ballot boxes upon the request of Capriles and the opposition leadership.

After initially expressing his conformity with the commission's decision, the conservative candidate retracted his satisfaction and has demanded further revisions of the electoral system.

On Saturday, Lucena highlighted the fact that based on Venezuelan constitutional law, the character of the new contestations presented by the MUD coalition must be submitted to the nation's Supreme Court and not the electoral authorities.

Nevertheless, the CNE President pointed out a series of incongruities with the opposition claims and the dubious evidence of fraud being presented by the Capriles' camp to justify a total recount of the April 14th ballots.

"Someone who makes a complaint of this magnitude, needs to provide a minimum of proof to show that these claims really go against established norms and in that way demonstrate their veracity", she said.

Instead, Lucena argued, the evidence brought forth by the opposition leadership "does not show in a clear and precise way what the actions are that supposedly violated [electoral] norms".

To back her remarks, the head of the CNE referenced a series of documents presented to the commission by the Capriles campaign, which display incomplete and contradictory information.

This includes low-quality photos lacking context, circumstantial claims based on numerical conjecture, and the referencing of problems associated with voting machines that the opposition itself has admitted to being solved immediately upon their discovery.

In addition to the unsubstantiated accusations, Lucena affirmed that the CNE had conceded to more than a dozen demands of the opposition camp both before and after the election because such petitions were "reasonable and inside the parameters of the law, with the spirit of generat-

ing a favorable [electoral] environment".

Yet, these modifications, which incorporated greater oversight into the voting process from the political organizations, have been ignored by the conservative factions leading the campaign against the election results.

Lucena stated that overall there have been "18 auditing processes, which right



now are being silenced and not recognized" by the opposition.

"With this refusal to recognize [CNE adjustments], there is a desire to damage the electoral process", she declared.

## OPPOSITION REMAINS DEFIANT

In response to the CNE's announcement on Friday, Capriles' attacked the head of the electoral commission, claiming that Lucena "takes her orders from the PSUV".

"We will keep fighting for the truth!" the opposition leader wrote via his Twitter account on Saturday.

"We are going to do everything that we have said. We'll exhaust every proceeding and take this case to the world!" he added.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro took exception to the public affronts to Lucena, who also had her home assaulted during the violence unleashed by the extreme right-wing after April 14th's election.

"They attack Tibisay Lucena, an honest, decent and up-standing woman. I could say that Tibisay Lucena is one of the most qualified people in electoral systems in all of Latin America and the Caribbean and quite possibly one of the most advanced electoral experts in the world", he declared.

For her part, the CNE President encouraged the defeated Capriles to take his allegations of fraud to the Venezuelan Supreme Court, the legal home for such an accusation, and called upon the people of the country to respect the work of the nation's electoral authorities.

"To all Venezuelans we say this: The time has come to be sensible, to appeal to reason and to respect the constitution and the law. It is the inescapable obligation of every citizen of this country to contribute to the maintenance of national peace and to construct coexistence in society. Let's continue to carry out true democracy", she said.



# Venezuela's Maduro launches Government of the Street in Zulia



## Great Housing Mission celebrates second anniversary

T/ Paul Dobson  
P/ Presidential Press

The Great Housing Mission (Gran Mision Vivienda Venezuela, GMVV) celebrated two years of extraordinary progress and revolutionary advancement this week. The two years since this public housing program began have changed not only the face of Venezuela, but also the lives of millions in very real terms.

Exactly two years from its official launch on April 30, 2011 by President Hugo Chavez, the program now boasts 374,781 houses/apartments built and provided to families most in need, benefiting approximately 1.5 million citizens.

The program was launched by Chavez with the goal of “not leaving even a single Venezuelan family without a secure, stable, dignified home”, and under the slogan of “to live life really living”. It came after decades of under-investment in the housing sector by previous governments, and after flooding in 2010 left roughly 30,000 families without homes.

The housing program has well surpassed all construction figures previously recorded by prior Venezuelan administrations, with an emphasis on “dignified” housing. “The drama of housing has no solution in capitalism”, stated Chavez in 2011. “Here we are going to solve it with socialism and more socialism”.

The program has become a flagship of the Bolivarian Revolution and evidences how the Venezuelan government fulfills the promises it makes to its people.

The Great Housing Mission aimed to build 350,000 homes before the end of 2012, and recorded 153,000 completed homes in 2011 and 200,000 more during 2012. Its current goal is

380,000 more for 2013 alone, and 3 million in total before 2019.

The program is based on a registry of people in need of homes or home improvement, in which 3.7 million Venezuelans have signed up for new homes or small repairs in their current residences. The constructed homes are between 2 and 4 bedrooms in size, and may be built by private or public construction firms.

Of the 374,781 homes currently completed and given to families with corresponding title deeds, it is estimated that 60% have been built by organized communities, principally communal councils, hand in hand with technical expertise from construction firms. In 2011 the construction industry grew by 4.8%, and in 2012 it exploded with 16.8% growth recorded as a direct result of the program.

This week President Maduro re-launched part of the program entitled the Tricolor Neighborhood, which aims to make the small repairs needed in millions of homes, such as repairing roofs, or amplifying current homes for new family members.

“The goal that we have is gigantic”, stated Maduro, who has committed himself to continuing the revolutionary housing program. “It is to convert the shantytowns of Venezuela into dignified neighborhoods”.

In the new communities built under the public housing program, significant reductions in crime have already been recorded. “The idea is to build communities, to build society, to build peaceful areas, so that each neighborhood is an area free from violence, from misery, from bad living conditions, so that they are places where people can live their lives really living well, this is the central objective”.



T/ COI  
P/ Presidential Press

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro initiated a new government strategy to build grassroots democracy and help solve some of the pressing issues facing local communities during a visit to the western state of Zulia last weekend.

The “government of the street”, the recently elected Maduro explained, will be “a government that governs for the people” and is “part of the people”.

“We’re beginning the path towards the construction of a popular government with new methods. This was a great dream of our Comandante [Hugo] Chavez who had already proposed various methods, all of which were successful, in order to consolidate people’s power”, the head of state informed.

To increase public participation in the carrying out and development of government policies, the socialist leader described new organizing strategies, which include citizen auditing of projects, greater inclusion of grassroots movements in the planning and execution of programs, and the creation of Holistic Development Regions (REDI).

Maduro’s comments came during a dialogue held with community members on Sun-

day after visiting a low-income housing factory that produces Petrocasas - homes built with materials from the nation’s oil industry.

The Petrocasa initiative has been an important part of the government’s Housing Venezuela program, which has focused on providing dignified homes to those currently living in impoverished areas.

Founded in 2011, Mission Housing Venezuela has constructed more than 200,000 homes in the South American country during its first two years of existence.

### COMMITMENT TO ZULIA

Continuing his visit on Monday, Maduro met with his cabinet in the Zulian capital of Maracaibo where he outlined measures that will address a number of problems in the border state including electricity shortages and the prevalence of contraband in the region.

The Venezuelan head of state was accompanied by Zulia’s Governor Francisco Arias Cardenas who described the challenges facing the state following the regional government of opposition leader Pablo Perez.

According to Arias Cardenas, the former governor Perez “defended the smugglers” allowing gasoline and other Venezuelan products to leave the country illegally, contributing to shortages in the area.

With the socialist victory of Arias Cardenas in the gubernatorial elections last December, the national government will now be able to enforce its plan to fight contraband.

“Now we can do it”, the governor affirmed on Monday.

In total, more than 70 plans were approved by Maduro during his stay, including the re-launching of an initiative called “Tri-color Barrio” which seeks to convert run down urban areas into thriving neighborhoods.

“We’re going to be building new neighborhoods, fixing homes, and constructing supports for new rooms. In other cases, we’re going to create new houses, access roads, pavement, water services and transportation”, the head of state said.

Maduro also outlined proposals for 46 new sporting facilities, the improvement of The Guajira wind farm that will generate a further 50 Megawatts of power, the investment of \$181 million in an industrial district on the eastern coast of Maracaibo Lake, and the allocation of 285 million bolivars (\$45.2 million) for 6 plastics factories in Zulia.

“We are going to take up our role now more than ever because the work that Chavez let for us to do is gigantic and one giant can only be accompanied by another, which is the Venezuelan people”, Maduro said.



# US Citizen arrested in Venezuela in connection with destabilization plans

T/ Adam Marshall  
www.venezuelanalysis.com

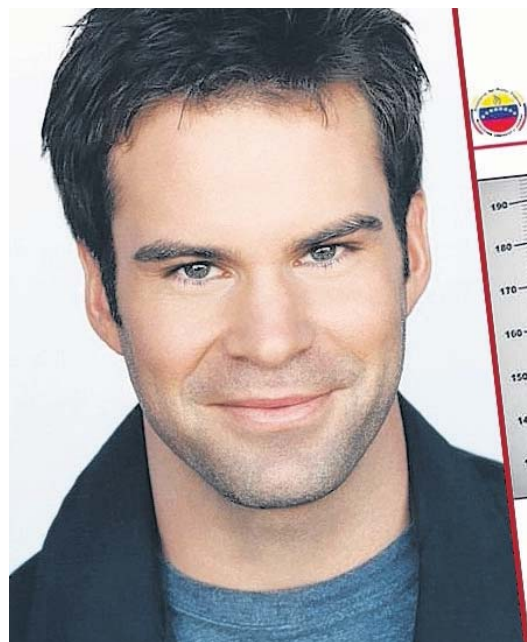
Venezuelan security forces have arrested a US national in connection with an alleged plot to “violently destabilize the country” following the April elections, Minister for Internal Affairs, Miguel Torres announced last week.

Speaking before the Venezuelan press, Torres presented a series of slides outlining opposition plans to “not recognize” the election results, “generate a spiral of violence” in order “to destabilize and discredit the government”, creating the conditions for a “civil war” leading to “foreign intervention”.

Termed by the authorities the “April Connection”, the plot came to the attention of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Sebin) at the end of 2012, the minister said.

The detainee was identified as Timothy Hallet Tracy, a 35-year old male from Michigan, USA. Tracy is suspected by the authorities of channeling money to right wing opposition youth groups in the country.

“Hallet started forming very close relationships with the young opponents who are in an operation called ‘sovereignty’ ... We saw how this man could also infiltrate revolutionary groups to earn their protec-



tion, but he was intimately connected with the extreme right”, Torres said.

“Judging from the way this gentleman behaved, we presume that he belongs to some intelligence organization, because he is trained and he knows how to infiltrate, and how to handle sources and security information”, Torres continued.

Since his arrest, US media sources have quoted family and friends of Tracy denying that he is a spy. The sources quoted insist that he is a filmmaker who was in Venezuela to shoot a documentary about the “political divide” in the country.

“They don’t have a CIA agent in custody. They don’t have a journalist in custody. They have a kid with a camera”, said Aengus James, a friend and associate of Tracy’s in Hollywood, California. “He does not really know what he’s doing”, he added.

## VIDEO EVIDENCE

The minister also presented two videos he said were obtained during investigations into the plot. The first one shows a group of young people talking about money and seemingly referring to their involvement in violent acts.

“To activate Santa Cruz and Miranda we need a billion dollars”, said one of the youngsters, clearly using drugs at the time. “No way... why would you need so much money?” asks another. “Could we have raised four states without the 100 million bolivars?” responds the first rhetorically.

The second video shows Antonio Rivero, a retired army general giving tactical advice to young protesters in Caracas on April 15th.

“They can remove the stones, bottles, sticks from you etc etc... like a shield, the old-fashioned way...but yes, stay cohesive, in-

tegrated, united. Don’t try to disperse... if you disperse, collapse”, Rivero is heard saying in the video.

At the end of the video Rivero tells the protesters to “keep everything you do under the directionality of Capriles”.

These revelations come the day after Venezuelan Attorney General, Luisa Ortega Diaz, informed that the violent events which took place on April 15-16, after the general election, left 9 dead and 78 injured.

In a press conference last Wednesday she explained how the events originated as a result of “irresponsible calls” by some political actors to act against people and institutions in the country.

“On April 14, the elections to elect the president of the republic were held in Venezuela, and after the governing body (National Electoral Council) issued the results, there were calls made through some media and networks like Twitter and others, by direct and subliminal messages, encouraging citizens to take street actions; hostile actions and contrary to the law, which led a sector of the public to attack another sector of the population”, Ortega Diaz recalled.

After rejecting the forthcoming CNE election audit as a “joke”, Capriles called on his supporters to march again on May 1 to “challenge the election” he claims was “stolen”.

Bolivarian Socialist Workers’ Central general coordinator Carlos Lopez told media that over half a million Chavistas would march on May Day, and expressed fears that the opposition intends to create violence.

## Venezuelan audit can’t find any different result in presidential election, statistical analysis shows

T/ Center for Economic and Policy Research

A statistical analysis by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) has shown that if Venezuelan opposition claims that Nicolas Maduro’s victory was obtained by fraud were true, it is practically impossible to have obtained the result that was found in an audit of 53% of electronic voting machines that took place on the evening of Venezuela’s April 14th elections. The odds of this occurring would be far less than one in 25 thousand trillion.

“The US government must know this, too”, said CEPR

Co-Director Mark Weisbrot, economist and co-author of a forthcoming paper with economist and computer scientist David Rosnick. “So it is difficult to explain why they are refusing to recognize the elected president – in opposition to all of the countries in Latin America and most of the world”.

The results of Venezuela’s April 14th presidential election returned 7,575,506 votes for Nicolas Maduro, and 7,302,641 votes for challenger Henrique Capriles Radonski. This is a difference of 272,865 votes, or 1.8 percent of the two-way total between the candidates.

In this election, voters express their preference by press-

ing a computer touch-screen, which then prints out a paper receipt of their vote. The voter then checks to make sure that the receipt was the same as her choice, and deposits the paper receipt in a sealed box.

When the polls closed, a random sample of 53 percent (another one percent was audited the following day) of all the machines (20,825 out of 39,303) was chosen, and a manual tally was made of the paper receipts. This “hot audit” was done on site, in the presence of the observers from both campaigns, as well as witnesses from the community. There were no reports from witnesses or election officials on site of discrepancies

between the machine totals and the hand count.

Immediately after the election results were announced on the night of April 14th, the Venezuelan opposition demanded a full “recount” of all of the voting machines’ paper receipts and subsequently called for an audit – or manual count – of the 46% of the sealed boxes containing the paper receipts that had not yet been audited. After the Venezuelan Electoral Council’s (CNE’s) decision to grant their request, on April 18th, the main opposition party came up with a series of new demands suggesting that they did not believe that a full audit would provide evidence of any significant fraud. On April 26th they announced that they would “boycott” the audit that they had requested the previous week.

What if it were true that there were enough mismatches in the 39,303 machines to have given Maduro a 50.8 percent majority, when Capriles had been the true winner? CEPR calculated that the probability of getting the results of the first audit would then have been less than one in 25 thousand trillion.

“The results are pretty much intuitive”, said Weisbrot. “With a sample that huge verified during the April 14th ‘hot audit,’ if there were any discrepancies between the machine count and the paper ballots, it would have shown up somewhere. But it didn’t”.

It is therefore practically impossible that an audit of the remaining 46 percent of ballot boxes could find enough discrepancies to reverse the result of the election.



T/COI  
P/Presidential Press

In his first trip abroad as his country's newly-elected President, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro led a high-ranking delegation to Cuba over the weekend to discuss ongoing cooperation agreements between the two nations. In Havana alongside top aids, the Venezuelan President met with both Fidel and Raul Castro before ratifying dozens of bilateral agreements initiated by socialist leader Hugo Chavez. Describing relations between the two countries as "more a brotherhood than an alliance", Maduro called for an end to anti-Cuba attacks by the Venezuelan opposition.

#### NOT JUST ANY ALLIANCE

Of historical significance because it marks the first intergovernmental summit held since the untimely death of President Chavez, a close friend of the Cuban Revolution, Maduro's trip to Havana coincided with the 13th Venezuela-Cuba Joint Commission. With Minister of Foreign Affairs Elias Jaua and Minister of Energy and Mines Rafael Ramirez at his side, President Maduro spoke to the participants of six bi-national working groups convened to review ongoing efforts in the fields of health, education, sports, energy, infrastructure, and communication technologies, among others.

According to President Maduro, "this commission serves as proof that Chavez's work is alive and well".

"We came here to tell the people of Latin America and the Caribbean that Cuba and Venezuela will continue working together", Maduro explained.

"The steps we are taking aim in that same direction – unity with Cuba to secure our independence and to advance towards the 21st century socialist revolution underway across the Americas".

Maduro explained that cooperation in the field of health, for example, has resulted in "the construction of 6,712 popular medical clinics, 651 Integral Diagnostic Centers (CDI), 583 rehabilitation centers, and 35 high-tech medical facilities".

"We have also trained some 14,000 Venezuelan medical professionals and are committed to reaching our goal of producing 60,000 integral community doctors by 2019".

"How many thanks must we give for the lives saved, for the love provided by the Barrio Ad-



## Venezuelan President makes first official visit to Cuba

entro social mission, the 32,000 brave, valiant, and caring Cuban medical professionals spread out across Venezuela's urban slums and rural areas?" Maduro asked.

"Within the paradigm of traditional cooperation agreements no calculation exists to measure the value of such efforts. This is a strategic, historic alliance that transcends time", he added.

"Beyond the concrete projects that motivate each one of our delegations and benefit our respective peoples, this joint commission brings together two struggles".

"More than an alliance", Maduro affirmed, "this is a brotherhood".

Cuban President Raul Castro also addressed those gathered at the intergovernmental summit, reiterating his country's commitment to the Bolivarian Revolution.

According to President Castro, Cuba maintains what he called "an unbreakable will to continue its cooperation with Venezuela expressed by the thousands of compatriots willing to share our fate with the brave people of Venezuela".

Nearly 40,000 Cuban professionals are currently contributing to the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, the vast majority



of which serve in the Barrio Adentro medical mission.

According to Castro, "the greatest homage that we Cubans can pay to the memory of Hugo Chavez is to struggle tirelessly and make each day more fully integral, make our work in the social missions more efficient, meet our shared economic objectives, and fulfill our role in all of the widely diverse collaborative relations underway to benefit our peoples".

The intergovernmental meeting resulted in the signing of 51 agreements aimed at strengthening efforts underway since Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro first launched bilateral support back in 2000.

Media reports affirm this year's agreements include in-

vestments of somewhere between \$US 1 and 2 billion.

Speaking to reporters, the Cuban President emphasized the sovereign nature of the accords, explaining that every one of the agreements serves to advance "both Venezuela's Plan of the Homeland for 2013-2019 and Cuba's Economic and Social Policies of the Revolution and (Communist) Party for 2012-2016". As is often the case, private media attacked the trip on grounds that Cuba is somehow dependent on Venezuelan aid and that Havana somehow controls Caracas' foreign policy.

While AFP affirmed "the deal is Cuba's biggest source of cash, well ahead of money sent home by expatriate Cubans, tourism

or exports of nickel, tobacco and drugs", Reuters wrote that Maduro's "visit appeared aimed in part at allaying Cuban worries about post-Chavez relations with the oil-rich South American nation that is Cuba's biggest ally and benefactor".

#### STRUGGLING AGAINST XENOPHOBIA

As part of his brief trip to the island nation, President Maduro also committed his administration to fighting against xenophobic attacks perpetrated by members of the Venezuelan right. Speaking specifically about attacks on Cuban medical facilities and Colombian nationals, Maduro promised to formally report said incidents to the international community.

"Foreign Minister Elias Jaua is working on a report", Maduro explained, "which we will take to international human rights organizations across the globe...We plan to submit videos, documents, and other proof of the Venezuelan right's fascist xenophobic ideology".

Days after the April 14th election, for example, opposition spokesman Nelson Bocaranda sent out a baseless Twitter message claiming that ballot boxes were being stored in popular clinics staffed by unidentified "Cubans".

The message led to numerous violent attacks on Cuban-staffed clinics nationwide.

Referring to post-election violence that left nine people killed, including two children, Maduro affirmed that "luckily, our people came out in time".

"Sadly", he explained, "we lost men and women, people who gave their lives, all that they had, to protect our popular medical clinics".

In addition to the attacks on socialist Cuba, the Venezuelan opposition also used the 2013 presidential campaign to attack Maduro for his supposed ties to neighboring Colombia.

As if Colombian heritage was somehow undesirable, Maduro explained, "the opposition claimed my mother is Colombian, calling me a 'Colombian dog' and other things".

"We will unmask them on the battlefield of ideas", he said, "we will clarify the true meaning of human rights in this world so that everyone knows of the threat that currently exists in Venezuela. No one, anywhere, no matter what their ideology is, should be encouraged by these fascist groupings and their obsession with destroying Chavez's life's work, his Bolivarian Revolution".



# Venezuela celebrates 10 years of MercaL



T/ Ryan Mallett-Outtrim  
P/ Agencies

A decade after its founding, Mission MercaL has distributed over 12 million tons of subsidized food to more than 10 million people.

On April 23rd, President Nicolas Maduro congratulated

the mission, tweeting “MER-CAL turns 10 today, congratulations to everyone...”

“It will be a week of celebration”, he announced.

The mission officially launched on April 24, 2003. The previous year, a capital strike resulted in food shortages as distributors and privately

owned supermarkets across the country closed their doors.

At the time, then President Hugo Chavez stated that by cutting Venezuelans off from basic foodstuffs, “the imperialists...the Venezuelan oligarchy and...those who were supporting the aggression against Venezuela” had tried to defeat the

Bolivarian Revolution “with hunger”.

“[We learned] that we did not have a pound or a grain of anything, of food reserves. Before any natural, political or social disaster, Venezuela did not have...food reserves”, he stated.

“Eleven years ago the irresponsible opposition and large [private] food processors had total control of all distribution networks”, MercaL President and Minister for Food Felix Osorio said last month.

At its launch, the mission comprised of just three distribution sites and two warehouses, and sold just over 60 tons of food per day. By the end of 2003, approximately 5000 Venezuelans were regularly benefiting from the mission, and the following year the program was moving over 4000 tons of food everyday.

Within three years, MercaL was distributing from more than 10,000 outlets, mostly concentrated in poor neighborhoods.

MercaL now sells its subsidized food products from outlets ranging from the sprawling, warehouse style “supermercals”, to small stores similar to neighborhood bodegas (corner stores).

The mission also boasts roaming stalls and soup kitchens.

As part of the week-long celebration of MercaL’s success, last Saturday Osorio spoke publicly in Maracaibo of importance of the mission.

He stated that since 2003, MercaL “has continued to bring food to the people who need it”.

Moreover, he explained that MercaL also provides food to other government and community institutions and programs, including prisons, Integral Diagnosis Centers, school food programs, soup kitchens, hospitals and others.

“It’s amazing how we have made progress; we have spread across the country”, he said.

MercaL’s vice president, Ronald Rivas also spoke on Saturday.

Rivas stated that the government subsidized products sold in MercaL outlets offer “significant saving[s] and strengthen the purchasing power of the poorest sectors [of Venezuelan society]”.

However, MercaL isn’t just for the poorest Venezuelans; the mission has benefited the equivalent of nearly a third of Venezuela’s population, according to Osorio. Yet despite its stated goal of becoming financially self-sufficient, the mission is still heavily dependent on government funding.

Rivas stated that the mission still has more to achieve, and will continue to grow to address the needs of the population.

He said, “This is a reflection of a government that protects and serves the needs of the people, and in this new stage of the revolution... President Maduro will continue to deepen [the mission]”.

## Venezuelan human rights NGOs condemn violence, political intolerance

T/ COI  
P/ Agencies

An amalgamation of Venezuelan human rights organizations and social justice collectives voiced their condemnation of the political violence that occurred in the country after opposition political leaders refused to recognize the electoral victory of Nicolas Maduro in April 14th’s presidential elections.

In a written statement released last week, groups including the Latin American Foundation for Human Rights and Social Development, the Feminist Spider, and the Cimarron Movement expressed their “absolute rejection” of the acts, which led to the death of 10 Venezuelan citizens and the injury of at least 61.

“Human rights belong to the people... nobody can privatize, restrict, disarticulate or distort them”, reads the declaration,

which also states the organizations’ “most heartfelt words of condolences and solidarity to the families of the victims of the recent acts of violence” which have resulted from political intolerance in the OPEC member state.

In calling for the nation’s authorities to prosecute those responsible for the deaths in mid April, the coalition appealed to the Venezuelan people to “fortify the democratic values that adhere to [institutionalism] and constitutional order” as well as those of respect and peace “that should prevail over any circumstance or disagreement.

### MINISTER CHALLENGES NGO

The release of last week’s document follows

on the heels of a controversial report made public by the Venezuelan human rights organization PROVEA, which challenged the veracity of government accounts regarding the post-election violence.

The NGO decried what it termed “the political use” of the acts and called into question

government accounts of the burning of a number of community health clinics where Cuban doctors provide free care to Venezuelan residents.

On April 18th a press release entitled “PROVEA corroborates falseness in reports of CDIs [community health clinics] in the country”, claimed that there had been no evidence to support allegations that the clinics had suffered any attacks by opposition sectors.

Venezuelan Communication Minister Ernesto Villegas responded to the NGOs findings by pointing out the biased nature of PROVEA’s stance and the mediocrity of its research methods which failed to investigate the crimes first-hand.

“To prove or disprove the information provided by the government and citizens... [PROVEA] should have visited the places where it happened, compile testimonies and other evidence.

None of this happened, demonstrating an inexcusable lack of professionalism on behalf of PROVEA”, the minister wrote in a communiqué.

In challenging the director of the organization to a televised debate, Villegas also criticized PROVEA for jumping to exonerate the opposition without investigating or taking up the cause of those killed in the protests.

“PROVEA makes this denouncement against the government without having before condemned the murders that occurred as a result of the opposition protests”, he wrote, adding that such an omission reflects a political strategy of the Venezuelan opposition “more than the defense of human rights.”

While the Director of PROVEA, Marino Alvarado, originally accepted the Venezuelan Communications Minister’s invitation to debate the topic, no date specifying the broadcast has been confirmed.







## In Revolution, the disabled have a voice

T/ Jody McIntyre  
P/ Agencies

The corridors are always packed in the Metropolitan Council of Popular Power for People with Disabilities, situated in a building just down the street from Plaza Diego Ibarra in Caracas. Wheelchairs come and go, sometimes squeezing to the side in order to let another person pass first. In a small area just behind the front door, which is frequently opened and closed as new visitors come inside, Jose Suarez is leaning back in his chair, relaxed, chatting with a friend. It seemed to contrast with the tension I had witnessed on the streets outside, in the days following Nicolas Maduro's Presidential election victory on April 14th.

"Firstly, yes I voted", says Jose, turning his attention in my direction. "I voted this time and on October 7th as well. Really, it is right that we all have, and especially people with disabilities. But more than a right, it's a commitment that we have to the nation.

As disabled people, we are proud of this process. The Bolivarian process has put us into the public light, recognized us as human beings and included us in the political base".

Since my arrival in Venezuela just over seven months ago, I

have often been struck by the visibility of disabled people, particularly in Caracas. I am walking towards Plaza Bolivar on a warm afternoon when I notice Ramon, a blind man, being helped along the path by a member of staff from the Metro. Perhaps helping travellers with disabilities is a matter of due course inside stations for Metro workers in many countries, but here they had already walked some distance from the nearest Capitolio stop. When the Metro worker leaves, I speak with Ramon. He too, is eager to affirm that he is "with the process", but suggests that the recognition Jose had mentioned still has a long way to go.

"The problem is that the law still doesn't have its enforcement. There a group of articles [from the 2006 Law for People with Disabilities] concerning our rights, but those carrying the most weight are 28 and 38. These are what we are discussing now, but we need unity on the matter.

Nevertheless, the government has a huge capacity for construction. They have achieved what no government has achieved. They have given what no government has given. Maduro should take charge of this affair. But, we are asking for political participation. We want to have disabled people at the front of the Municipal Councils, but also in the [National] Assembly! I would like to

see representatives for disabled people in the PSUV. That level of political participation still hasn't arrived for us. Participation and protagonism!"

The question of political representation is an important one, and a concern shared not only by Ramon. Back at the Metropolitan Council, Luis Roja, a leading figure of the organization, says that he is proud of their independence from the government, but that something more is needed.

"It seems that first our rights were originally passed onto the Ministry of Health, as if we have illnesses, but we are not sick. It's an important distinction we should make. We're not just a small group, we are hundreds of thousands, and we are asking Maduro to create a specific government ministry for people with disabilities. That is something which needs to happen!

The first thing we have in mind is the law. Article 28 stipulates that public institutions must employ disabled people as at least 5% of their workforce. This means that disabled people are leaving their houses; we are going out to sustain our families".

Former opposition candidate Henrique Capriles spent much of his pre-election campaign promising that he would keep benefits and misiones for disabled people in place, although

his subsequent refusal to accept the results of the elections, even after they were audited, has thrown into doubt his ability to co-operate with democratic institutions. Capriles promised that he would deliver the "change" that Venezuela needed, but many disabled citizens, to the contrary, see Capriles as a symbol of the old political forces which ignored them for so long. I ask Jose Suarez for his opinion on the violent events which followed the opposition's refusal to accept the results. Capriles made a speech just one hour after they were announced, calling for his supporters to "show the world [their] rage".

"It will always be like this", says Jose. They are never going to feel satisfied because they lost. It doesn't matter if they are Presidential, Municipal or Parish elections. They are always going to be screaming and crying, specifically because of Henrique Capriles Radonski. Capriles is not going to accept the results, because he comes from a part of society that had become accustomed to using such tactics and getting their own way. They don't understand that in the last fourteen years, things have changed. If the majority of people say Nicolas Maduro is the President now, then Nicolas Maduro is the President.

A few of the leaders of the opposition want to deceive their followers because they can't believe they have suffered yet another loss to the revolution, but, thanks to God, they are a minority, even amongst their supporters. But also we should say that we have a conscious, revolutionary people who are mentally and ideologically prepared".

"Why are we revolutionaries?" asks Luis, rhetorically. "Because we were excluded from society in the years before. The por ahora was an awakening for people with disabilities. The governments of the Fourth Republic had a badly-named law for people with "incapacities". Just with the name of that law, they assassinated our rights as human beings. So the por ahora served as something of an internal revolution amongst people with disabilities".

"Before Hugo Chavez, I never voted. They had a political system like sharing out a cake", affirms Jose. "What the revolution has provided is a space for disabled people, a space for us to project our voices. The process hasn't given me a house, or a car. I work, but the process didn't give me a job. But I know people, friends and family, humble people in need of those things, who have benefited greatly".

I meet Alexander as he is travelling from one line of the Metro to another in his electric wheelchair, holding on to the sides of the escalators for stability.

"Before, we never had any support", he tells me. "We didn't have a base. I voted because we want a free country.

The opposition don't have a choice, because our rights are in law now. The law applies to everyone. But Capriles wouldn't even remember us".

Recent weeks have been a time of reflection for disabled people here, as they have for many Venezuelans. The struggle remains for disabled people not only to be visible in society, but to lead the narrative on the fulfilment of their rights as citizens. But even more than laws or articles, it is a self-respect that disabled people stride with today. The road is a long one, but the wheelchair tracks are being marked into the earth.

"We don't shut the doors to anyone here", says Luis. I ask him what his position is at the Council. As we talk, people come and go, discussing and joking with each other, often contributing to Luis' responses to my questions with their own thoughts and suggestions.

Luis smiles. "I'm just another one."



T/ Saul Landau & Nelson P. Valdes

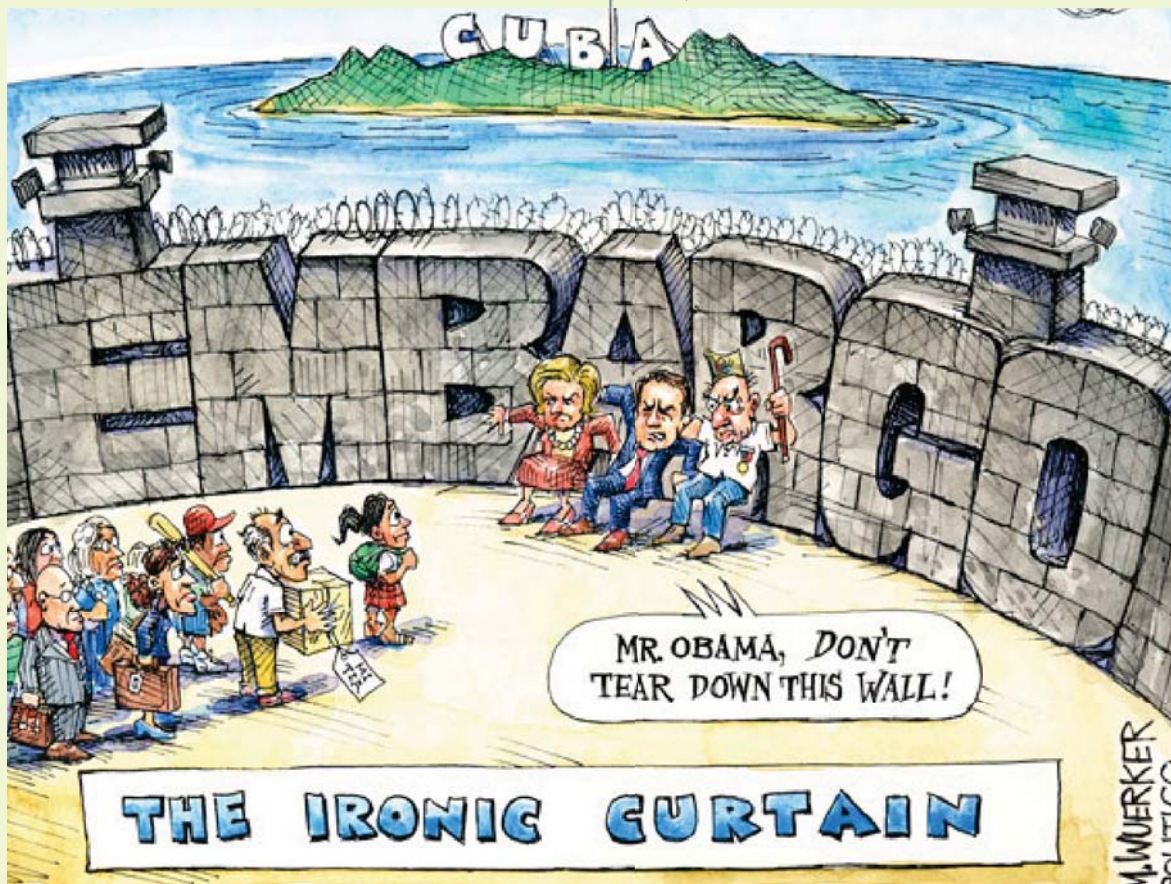
In their 54-year-old effort to bring down Cuba's revolutionary government and restore obedience in our Caribbean neighbor, US officials have compiled a spectacular record of failure, overshadowed only by the determination to persist in their pursuit of wrongheaded policies, further damaging US interests.

In the 1990s, Washington began to define terrorism as the new peril on the security horizon. President Clinton deemed it reasonable to make informal arrangements with other countries, even Cuba, trying to achieve anti-terrorist goals.

Indeed, Cuban intelligence agencies fed antiterrorist data to the FBI because they assumed the Bureau shared the same dread as their US counterparts about the death and chaos that would result from allowing terrorists to pursue their goals. But, in September 1998, the FBI Bureau Chief in Miami perpetrated an act of security illogic. He ordered his FBI agents to arrest the Cuban intelligence agents who had supplied the Bureau with important data about terrorists operating in Florida.

Havana had sent these men to south Florida to penetrate and stop violent Cuban exile groups whose members had planted bombs in Cuban tourist hotels and clubs, killing a tourist and wounding scores of others. US authorities knew of the activities the Cuban agents pursued for six years, and did not act against them because the US government did not see these agents as a threat to US security. They were not seeking classified or strategic US documents, but rather focused on spying on rightwing Cuban terrorists in US soil. Indeed, the Cuban agents pointed the Bureau in the direction of hidden arms caches in Miami and an explosive-laden boat docked on the Miami River.

In June 1998, when relations between Cuba and the US had begun to improve, Havana shared with the Justice Department even more information obtained by its agents. But, Clinton also confronted Congressional investigations related to his comportment with Monica Lewinsky. This helped lead to disarray inside the Justice department. During July and August 1998, right



Opinion

54 Years of stupidity and counting

## Cuba policy: fruitless, mean and cruel

wing Cuban American Members of Congress began pressuring Washington to arrest the known Cuban agents. The extremist exiles feared that anti-terrorist cooperation between the two countries might lead to the arrest of the exile terrorists, also their friends and colleagues, and even contribute to a normalization of relations. But Attorney General Janet Reno planned to run for high office in Florida and did not want to antagonize organized Cuban voters in Florida, so she allowed the change in policy to take place.

The right wing exiles exercised enough influence to get Hector Pesquera appointed as the new Bureau chief in south Florida. Pesquera, a rightwing Puerto Rican with a mediocre FBI record, but close ties to violent Cuban exiles, destroyed the country-to-country cooperative effort. Within a week of his appointment, he ordered the arrest of the Cuban informants – five of the Cuban agents refused to either flee to Cuba or arrange for

a plea bargain. So, the FBI allowed Miami-based exile terrorists to continue plotting violence against the island. The powerful members of the Cuban settler colony in Miami used the power of the US federal police to prosecute Cuban anti-terrorist agents (punish Cuba) and in the process torpedo possible rapprochement between the neighbors; and also destroy joint anti-terrorism operations. By manipulating US government institutions, the Cuban enclave's elite superseded the larger needs of the American people by replacing anti-terrorism with their own narrow interests.

The Justice Department charged two of the Five Cuban agents with murder, or conspiracy to shoot down two Cuban exile planes (both pilots and copilots died) that entered Cuban air space in February 1996. At the time the pilots of the three exile planes announced publicly their intention to go into Cuban air space, making known the date and time of the flights.

The Cuban agents, however, got charged with conspiracy to spy despite the fact that the US government formally and by consent received the results of their spy work on terrorism in south Florida! General James Clapper, then director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and now director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, testified at their trial that he saw no evidence to conclude the Cuban agents were seeking classified or strategic US documents or plans. They did not conspire to commit espionage. The US mass media continues to incorrectly refer to them as "convicted spies".

The Cuban Five (now four since Rene Gonzalez was freed on parole, but must remain in the United States until the end of his probation period), located in different US prisons for almost 15 years, became victims of vengeance, inspired by Miami-based right wing Cuban exiles, combined with a strong dash of meanness and cruelty,

which continues long after the Cuban men survived long months of solitary confinement. The Justice Department has systematically denied these men basic privileges enjoyed by other inmates.

The most recent example of heartlessness occurred on April 7, when activist-actor Danny Glover traveled from his home in San Francisco by air and then rented a car to Victorville, California, where Gerardo Hernandez survives in the Federal Maximum Security Prison. After visiting Gerardo nine times, Danny assumed he would undergo the usual passage – fill out the form, go through x-ray machine, get patted-down, and then get escorted into the Visitor Room. But the desk guard at the prison said Danny's visit had not been authorized (after nine previous visits) and he could not see Gerardo. A supervisor affirmed the desk guard's statement. Meanness and malice!

For 14 plus years the US government had also refused to grant a visa to Gerardo's wife. During that time she has not been able to visit him. It's not just the anti-Castro lobby that pushes this petty, vengeful policy. Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder run the federal prisons.

What's wrong with the basic sense of humanity of those who make such decisions? Imagine if Cuba responded with equal cruelty to Alan Gross, the man convicted in Cuba for carrying out US subversion for USAID. US government officials would scream as would the media. But Cuba did not respond to this inhumanity by carrying out inhumane acts. Gross, confined in a Cuban military hospital cell, receives adequate medical care and frequent visits. He has access to the telephone and communicates with his family who also visit him. Gross promoted a policy of "regime change" in Cuba while Gerardo's findings promoted US security.

Washington has forced 52 plus years of broken relations on Cuba, combined with a tough embargo to punish Cuba's people. Indeed, US presidents have tried to dislodge Cuba's government in every way short of direct military invasion. Fruitless, stupid, mean and cruel policies simply do not work in our national interest!