

The national artifact will be safely returned to the Pemón Indian community in Southeastern Venezuela



CORREO | DEL | ORINOCO

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Law in the service of Social Justice

A new generation of lawyers graduates from the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) destined to work in the service of human needs. Mission Social Justice to be launched in communities throughout the nation.

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Economy Currency Devaluation

Government invests in national production and combats price hikes.

New Energy Conservation measures implemented nationwide

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Social Justice People before profits

No budget cuts for education and healthcare in 2010; medical missions will be reinforced, new advanced clinics inaugurated.

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Haiti: The First Tragedy of the Decade

Venezuela sends food, the US sends troops

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez asked the world to "pledge" for our sister Republic of Haiti, devastated last week by a "horrific earthquake". The Venezuelan Government, at the vanguard of international solidarity, was the first to send humanitarian aid immediately following the disaster.

More than 6000 tons of food, bottled water, medical and sanitary supplies, vaccinations, and over 225,000 barrels of oil have been sent from members of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA). Two Russian IL-76 cargo planes arrived Sunday in Venezuela to join ALBA nations with relief efforts, capable of transporting up to 40 tons of aid each. In the meantime, the Pentagon sent 10,000 troops to militarize the desolate nation.

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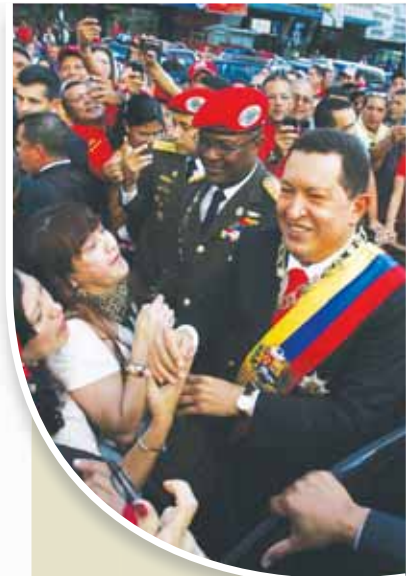


New Regional Currency, The Sucre, will be valued at \$1.25 USD

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez announced the enactment of the Law Approving the United System of Regional Compensation (SUCRE). After reviewing the agreement signed between member countries of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas

(ALBA), a legal instrument regulating the virtual currency was ratified by Venezuela's National Assembly. The virtual currency, which will be used between ALBA countries in substitution of the US dollar, will be first implemented at the end of January in a

transaction involving the export of Venezuelan rice to Cuba. The value of the Sucre will be \$1.25 USD. "The Sucre creates a mechanism to build a new financial architecture, allowing us to end dependence on the dollar in commercial trade."



Minimum Wage in Venezuela Highest in Latin America

President Chávez announced 25% increase during 2010

During his annual address to the nation, President Chávez announced a 10% increase in the minimum wage in March and another 15% increase in September of this year. Minimum wage had been increased by 20% during 2009, despite the world financial crisis, reaching 967.50 Bolivars, approximately \$450 USD, the highest in the region. With the 25% addition, the wage will be 1,224 Bolivars by September, equivalent to \$470 USD under the new currency adjustment, which places the preferential dollar at 2.6 Bolivars. Additionally, public employees get a monthly food and pharmaceutical bonus of several hundred Bolivars. This salary raise evidences the Chávez administration's continued implementation of social policies oriented towards eradicating poverty and raising the standard of living of Venezuelans. Argentina has the second highest minimum wage in Latin America; \$395 USD per month.

The First Tragedy of the Decade

A Pledge for Haiti

On January 12, the world received terrible news. A 7.3 Richter scale earthquake rocked the small Caribbean nation of Haiti, the poorest in the region. The heroic Republic, second in obtaining independence in the continent after the US, today needs the solidarity of all peoples around the world

The country was practically left in ruins. The presidential palace, congressional building, and a large number of schools and hospitals came crashing down. Haitian President René Preval confirmed that two-thirds of the capital city, Port-au-Prince, was destroyed by the earthquake and its after-shocks. Even though the number of fatal victims is still unconfirmed, official estimates count over 100,000 deaths, more than 600,000 injured and 3 million displaced.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

A spokesman for the International Red Cross, Paul Conneally, warned that due to the extreme impoverished conditions already present in Haiti, the population could now suffer one of the worst humanitarian tragedies in history. Haiti is no stranger to the horrors of starvation and natural disasters that constantly plague the Caribbean region. Despite aid relief coming into the country from international organisms, riots and looting have broken out in the capital city, a sign of extreme desperation.

VENEZUELA, FIRST ON THE SCENE

"The first plane that arrived in Haiti was from Venezuela, and then an hour later the Cubans arrived. The help from Venezuela is 200%," exclaimed Lesly David, Counselor from the Haitian Embassy in Caracas. Other nations have joined relief efforts, including the US, Russia, Canada, Bolivia, Germany, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, China, Spain, France and Mexico. French President Nicholas Sarkozy immediately called to relieve Haiti's debt with France. The Obama Administration has given temporary protected status to undocumented Haitians in the U.S., though the measure only extends through the date of the earthquake. After that, any Haitians arriving at US borders



Admst desperation, relief arrives

without proper documentation will be turned away.

The International Red Cross and Inter-American Development Bank have sent money, food, water, volunteer groups, rescue teams, experts and even dogs trained to find people buried in the rubble.

Cuba already had several thousand doctors and medical support on the ground in Haiti working to help the severely impoverished nation. Now, it has sent thousands more to reinforce medical missions and rescue teams.

Venezuela has sent over 100 shipments to Haiti so far, including envoys of doctors and civilian-military personnel from the 51st Battalion and the Simon Bolivar International Rescue Brigade, along with over 6,000 tons of food, water, medical and sanitary supplies. Collections for canned foods, toiletries, bottled water and money have been set up in plazas throughout the country. President Chávez authorized more than 225,000 barrels of oil to be immediately shipped out to the Dominican Republic, for subsequent transport into Haiti. "We will give the Haitian people all the fuel they need to rebuild their country", announced the Venezuelan president during his Sunday show, *Aló Presidente*.

THE WORLD RESPONDS BUT THE US TAKES OVER

Despite the international response, the US military has taken control of the airport in Port-au-Prince and many nations and relief organizations have complained that their shipments of aid have been turned away by US forces. French Secretary of State for Cooperation Alain Joyandet told reporters he had lodged a complaint with Washington over its tight control of the airport, "I have made an official protest to the Americans through the US embassy," he said, after a French plane carrying a field hospital was turned away last Saturday morning.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega warned that the US was using Haiti as an excuse to militarize the Caribbean. "They are manipulating the tragedy and using it to install US troops in Haiti. It's worrisome," he said. President Ortega clarified that he is not against the US cooperating to provide relief in Haiti, "but

it seems as though the military bases they already have in the region aren't enough and they're using the tragedy of the Haitian people to install more."

Admiral Mike Mullen, head of the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs of Staff, confirmed the US was sending 10,000 troops to Haiti, and more could be sent in the following days.

OUR HEART

President Chávez called on US President Obama to send field hospitals and medical teams to Haiti, "instead of armed soldiers". "The priority is saving lives", said the Venezuelan head of state.

"We raise our pledge for Haiti," declared President Chávez. "This is a tragedy that hurts us all deeply", he expressed. "Our heart, our pain, goes out to our sister nation."

T/ Modaira Rubio and
Eva Golinger
P/ Agencies
Caracas

The Truth about Haiti's Suffering

Even in its hour of utter devastation, Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, teaches the rest of the world some valuable truths.

A third of the population of this Caribbean island nation of nine million people is cut off from basic supplies of food, water, medicine or shelter. In the blink of an eye, the earthquake that hit the country has buried a capital city of 3 million people under rubble. The eventual death toll may be between 100,000 - 500,000. Just like that.

Like shutting the proverbial stable door after the horse has bolted, the US and other world powers are sending emergency aid to Haiti. Well intentioned no doubt. But where was the aid and economic development assistance to Haiti - over half the population live on \$1 a day and 80 per cent are poor - in the years before this calamity?

Haiti's poverty leaves its people wide open to this kind of devastation. And make no mistake, Haiti's poverty is not just bad luck or something inherently faulty about its natural resources and people. The country has been kept underdeveloped by decades of political

and economic interference from Washington to ensure that this former slave colony continues to serve as a cheap source of agricultural exports to the US and as a labor sweatshop for American corporations making textiles and other consumer goods.

While Washington spends \$1,000 billion on wars allegedly to combat the threat of terrorism, Haiti's poor - whose country's economy is valued at \$7 billion - show us a sobering perspective on what a real threat to life looks like. We live in a physical world where floods, tsunamis, earthquakes happen. These disasters claim more lives than the threats the US is fixated on and spends more money on. Can you imagine how many lives could have been saved in Haiti's earthquake if a fraction of the money squandered on futile wars had been directed to economic and social development of that country?

Of course, the moral and sensible logic of that idea does not apply in a world dictated by Washington's foreign policy. The imperatives and logic of US-led capitalism require countries like Haiti to be kept in a state of poverty for the sake of cor-

porate profit and require the fixation on illusionary threats to cover up its need to control geopolitical resources. This is the true face of the economic system that Washington and its allies impose on the world. And Haiti has pulled the mask off this ugly face.

The harrowing anguish and suffering of Haiti teaches us something else. Heart-rending reports of streets filled with corpses and blood running from under rubble, children crying for parents, parents digging with their fingers for children, the sound of dying voices pervading the darkness of night. This is the horror of hundreds of thousands of people suddenly engulfed by suffering. Some observers have compared what has happened in Haiti to the aftermath of an atom bomb being dropped. So the next time, Washington spokespeople airily float plans on Sunday morning chat shows to obliterate Iran - that other "serious threat" - we should remember: this is what human suffering on a massive scale looks like.

Finian Cunningham
Global Research

US Military Agression Escalates Against Venezuela in 2010

Recent violations of Venezuelan airspace by US military combat planes and drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) evidence the escalation in provocations against Venezuela and the danger US military presence in the region represents

During a live television broadcast on the evening of January 8, President Hugo Chávez revealed that at approximately 12:55pm earlier that day, a US P3 combat plane took off from the air base in neighboring Curaçao and entered Venezuelan airspace during a 15-minute period. Two Venezuelan F-16 planes intercepted the foreign military aircraft, prepared to escort it outside Venezuelan territory. "When the F-16 planes attempted communication with the US aircraft, it immediately took off towards the north, but later it returned", announced President Chávez. He said that at 1:37pm Venezuelan time, the combat plane returned and flew for about 19 minutes inside Venezuelan territory. "It was escorted out and pressured by our F-16s, we didn't have to bring in the Sukhois", added Chávez.

The Pentagon has denied violation of Venezuelan airspace, yet the Venezuelan military has video and photographic images of the US combat plane incursion yesterday. Venezuela's Foreign Minister, Nicolas Maduro, met with the Charge D'Affairs at the US Embassy in Caracas, John Caulfield, to discuss the matter. But Washington maintained its lack of knowledge of the incident.

Just days earlier, Venezuela's Vice-President Ramón Carrizalez had publicly denounced the intromission of a US military plane also originating from the air base in Curaçao during 2009. The governments of Washington and Holland denied the violation, only recognizing one incursion of a US plane in Venezuelan airspace during 2008. Carrizalez revealed an audio recording between the Venezuelan airport control tower and the US pilot while inside Venezuelan airspace. The pilot stated clearly that he was flying a US Navy military plane stationed at the base in Curaçao. He claimed ignorance as to the



An S-3B Viking taking off from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt

violation of Venezuelan territory, stating he was "unaware" he had entered an unauthorized zone. But the US military plane hadn't just merely crossed a border that some might argue is difficult to visualize. The pilot had flown over a strategic Venezuelan military base on La Orchila, a small island off Venezuela's northern coast, well inside Venezuelan territory.

THIS WAS NOT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT

Since 2008, Washington has been increasing its military and intelligence presence on the small Dutch island of Curaçao, where it maintains a Forward Operating Location (FOL) since 1999. The original contract between Holland and Washington stipulated use of Curaçao for counter-narcotics operations. But since September 11, 2001, Washington began using its military installations around the world to combat "terrorist threats" and threats against US interests, and in some cases, such as in Curaçao and Aruba, violating the terms of previous military agreements that only authorized counter-narcotics or humanitarian missions.

By 2006, US operations from Curaçao were not just US Air Force counter-narcotics missions, but a clear presence of US Navy, Marines, Army, Special Forces and CIA had taken over the tiny Caribbean island. Together, the US military and intelligence community components were conducting joint exercises and operations to combat a "potencial threat in the region". At the same time, the Bush Administration was trying to brand Venezuela as a state sponsor of terrorism, despite the lack of any evidence to back such a dangerous accusation.

The arrival of US aircraft carriers, war ships, combat planes, Black Hawk helicopters, nuclear submarines, and thousands of troops to the waters of Curaçao to participate in "joint exercises" caused alarm in the region. Commander Thomas K. Kiss of the U.S.S. Stout, one of the war ships that docked in Willemstad during Spring 2006, declared to the Curaçao press on April 11, 2006, "... we are the most powerful Naval force in the world and the US will defend its friends in the region under all circumstances."

MILITARY PRESENCE INCREASES

In 2008, the stakes intensified. Washington formally attempted to place Venezuela on the terrorism list, though Congress didn't approve the request because of oil dependence. But in July 2008, the US Naval Fourth Fleet was reactivated after almost 60 years, to "demonstrate US power and force in the region". In 2009, a military agreement between Colombia and Washington was sealed, allowing the Pentagon to occupy and use seven military bases in Colombian territory and any civilian installation necessary. US Air Force documents justifying the agreement and budget requests to improve Colombian military installations underlined the necessity to combat "...the constant threat of ...anti-US governments in the region" and to engage in Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance missions, as well as to improve the US armed forces' capacity to execute "Expeditionary Warfare" in the region.

In December 2009, President Chávez denounced the detection of a US drone plane that

had violated Venezuelan territory from Colombia. "A few days ago, one of these military planes penetrated Venezuela as far as Fort Mara," he stated, referring to a Venezuelan military fort in the State of Zulia, bordering Colombia. The drone was seen by several Venezuelan soldiers who immediately reported the aerial violation to their superiors. President Chávez gave the order to shoot down any drones detected in Venezuelan territory.

The use of drones in US military operations is highly controversial. The MQ-1 Predator UAV, a type of combat drone, has been used over the past year in Afghanistan and Pakistan to assassinate suspect terrorists. The drones are equipped with Hellfire missiles and are capable of hitting ground targets in sensitive areas. Other UAV models are used for espionage and surveillance missions, fully stocked with high-tech camera and video equipment.

T/ Eva Golinger
P/ Agencies
Caracas

Venezuela: Currency Devaluation, two-tiered exchange rate Government to Invest in Production and Combat Price Hikes

After officially devaluing the national currency on Friday, January 8, the Venezuelan government announced a series of measures to increase the country's exports, substitute its imports, boost electricity production and combat price hikes, as purchasing frenzies sprung up in several major cities

From 2003 until now, the government had maintained a fixed exchange rate of 2.15 Bolivars (Bs.) to the dollar and established tight regulations on the dollar supply in order to control capital flight.

Now, the government will exchange dollars at different rates depending on the product imported. For essential products such as foods, health care supplies, and machinery needed to boost national production, the rate will be 2.6 Bs. to the dollar. For non-essential products such as automobiles, telecommunications, chemicals, appliances, textiles, tobacco, alcohol, electronics, international travel and remittances, the rate will be 4.3 Bs. to the dollar.

In a televised interview, then Finance Minister Ali Rodriguez said the devaluation was necessary in order to "create a new economic order to give incentive to national production and steer away from dependence on imports... and move further and further away from oil dependence."

In addition to the currency devaluation, the government announced the creation of three new investment funds; one that will triple the supply of dollars to non-oil exporters, a second that will direct \$2 billion for new producers who can substitute imports, and a third to increase national electricity production and subsidize electricity rates for households that consume below 500 kilowatts.

Also, President Hugo Chavez explained that \$7 billion USD will be transferred from Venezuela's international Development Fund, a state fund for social investments in infrastructure, urban and rural development, and social programs such as free health care.



The Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV) will also intervene directly into the unofficial dollar market

More funds will also be transferred to the Agrarian Revolution Training, Innovation and Support foundation (CIARA) to stimulate urban and semi-urban agriculture.

Chavez reiterated his promise to maintain funding for educational, health, and anti-poverty programs, a promise he originally made –and kept– at the start of the world financial crisis in late 2008.

Rodriguez cited Venezuela's \$35.85 billion USD in international reserves, steady unemployment rate between 6% and 7%, and reduction in accumulated annual inflation from 30.9% in 2008 to 25.1% in 2009 as signs that the country is prepared to withstand the potential negative effects of the currency devaluation.

He contrasted the recent measures with a notorious currency devaluation which led to riots and financial collapse in 1983, saying that the past measures were enacted to cover the government's budget deficit, whereas currently there is no budget deficit and a public investment plan exists to boost production.

"In our case the budget is sufficiently covered, and moreover, we have savings from the price of oil," said Rodri-

guez, referring to the fact that the price of oil has consistently been higher than the government's budget oil price estimate over the past nine months.

COMBATING PRICE HIKES

Meanwhile, in some of Venezuela's largest cities including the capital Caracas, consumers formed long lines outside of stores to buy non-essential items such as electronics and household appliances, the prices of which are expected to rise. Some stores closed their doors, presumably with the intention of marking up the prices on their inventory before re-opening.

President Chavez ordered the National Guard, the tax and customs agency SENIAT, the Ministry of Commerce, and the consumer protection bureau, INDEPABIS, to launch an "offensive" against price gaugers seeking to illegally take advantage of the currency devaluation.

Chavez announced a new national hotline, 0800-RECLAMA, for consumers to report price markups at stores, and said the government will take custody of any company caught speculating.

"At this moment there is no reason to raise the price of anything," said

Chavez. "Nobody should let his or herself be robbed. Report the speculator and we will intervene in any business of any size." Venezuelans have a long history of taking advantage of economic turmoil to raise prices of unregulated consumer products.

Commerce Minister Eduardo Saman said the Ministry "will initiate an exhaustive process of inspection and will apply temporary closures to those who have marked up their prices." So far, several hundred businesses across the country have been fined and/or shut down due to illegal price hikes.

The dollar has not seen significant price fluctuations on the parallel market, although traders have questioned whether the government's measures will create enough incentive to obtain state-issued dollars in order to push the parallel price down, as the government hopes. Prices of consumer products have been largely based on an unregulated, illegal black market dollar, creating huge disparities between cost and retail price.

T/ James Suggett and
Kiraz Janicce
www.venezuelanalysis.com
P/ CO File

Socialist Productivity Bicentennial Fund Created

Support for economic development, substitution of imports

"The fight for independence that started two centuries ago has not ended...and we are here to continue...", exclaimed Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, after signing a decree creating the Socialist Productivity Bicentennial Fund last Wednesday, January 13. Chávez announced that the Fund will have 2.600 million Bolivares (\$1 billion USD) to support cooperatives and small and medium businesses in order to increase national production and substitute imports.

The Fund will finance entrepreneurial initiatives through credits with low interest rates and terms in order to facilitate projects. Efforts to buy necessary products from abroad that enable national production will be coordinated with the State. "If we do it together, we can save on costs, it will be cheaper", said President Chávez. He emphasized that the creation of the Bicentennial Fund is part of the Bolivarian Government's strategy to change the old oil-dependent model for one that diversifies exports of goods and services and converts Venezuela into an industrial power.

"Everything that we import and can produce here, we are going to produce", added Chávez in order to motivate the productive sector of the country. On January 25-26, workshops including different enterprises and productive sectors in the country will take place. "We invite all who wish to plan together a transition to socialism in which private companies not only will continue to exist, but they must exist and work with the State to promote national development. We need to complement each other in order to be the most efficient possible and satisfy the needs of our people", said President Chávez. "We can't just keep depending on oil, we have to break with that model and we have made some advances, but it's been difficult because it's a model that was imposed more than 100 years ago", he explained.

T/ ML
Caracas

Commercial use regulated; Cinemas, restaurants and clubs will maintain their normal hours in shopping centers

Following months of irregular blackouts in some regions of Venezuela, the government has implemented energy saving measures, requiring businesses to submit plans to save 20% of their electricity usage, regulating the usage of advertising lights and billboards, and creating schedules for electricity usage in shopping centers, malls, casinos, and bingo halls.

The initial measures went into effect on December 21, yet additional regulations have been issued in January, including a shortened work day for public employees in order to reduce consumption inside energy-inefficient buildings. The state owned National Electricity Corporation (Corpoelec) is responsible for oversight of the new measures.

Heavy industries using over 5 megawatts, and lighter industries, such as shops, malls and residential areas using over 2 megawatts, will have one month to present Corpoelec with plans to reduce their energy usage by 20%. Corpoelec will conduct inspections and those who fail to comply will have a 20% increase on their electricity bill, and 10% for further non-compliance. The measure includes both public and private industries.

"We're going to appoint inspectors and generate a new process of inspection and accountability so that all the various sectors comply with this conservation plan," said then Minister for Electricity Angel Rodriguez, who recently resigned after a disastrous electricity-rationing plan was poorly executed in Caracas. President Chávez ordered an immediate halt to the 4-hour daily power outages in the capital city after chaos erupted in the streets during the first day. Chávez named former Finance Minister, Ali Rodriguez, also ex chief of Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA, as the new Minister for Electricity during his annual address to the nation last Friday.

ENERGY-SAVING LIGHT BULBS A MUST

One easily implemented energy saving measure prohibits the use of incandescent light bulbs on billboards and advertising signs. The bulbs must

Venezuela implements energy conservation measures



The goal is to reduce consumption by 20% in big shopping centers

There is also an overall need to use electricity more efficiently and raise consciousness about conservation. Electricity consumption in Venezuela is 14% higher than Latin America's average, and demand increased by 7% in 2009

be substituted with energy saving light bulbs. High usage tubes in billboards and other advertising should be substituted for those with less wattage. Illuminated advertising should be turned off after working hours, while billboards on roads can only be illuminated between 8pm and 12am.

NO SHOPPING AFTER 9PM

A third measure limits electricity use in shopping malls, some of the nation's largest consumers of energy, from 11am to 9pm, and in casinos and bingo halls from 6pm to 12am. However, an



The parking lots will work on their normal schedule

agreement was reached, after a meeting between government and business representatives, to maintain normal hours and usage for restaurants, cinemas, parking garages, clubs and other entertainment facilities located inside the shopping centers.

SEVERE DROUGHT, LACK OF INVESTMENT AND OLD BUREAUCRACY RESPONSIBLE
The Electricity Ministry said the

is 14% higher than Latin America's average, and demand increased by 7% in 2009.

Private media outlets and Venezuela's chamber of commerce, Fedecamaras, claimed the conservation measures will "generate unemployment" and "further the recession." Newspaper *El Carabobo* argued that the regulations will negatively impact production and the economy.

Since October, some regions of Venezuela have experienced daily blackouts or rationing, lasting from 30 minutes to two hours, and sometimes more. Over the last two years there have been several major nationwide blackouts, causing panic and concern amongst Venezuelans.

Apart from the droughts, government officials have also blamed decades-old bureaucracy in the Corpoelec management and the lack of sufficient investment in electricity production for the shortages.

Additionally, twenty consecutive quarters of economic growth, increased wages, and greater access to free social services during the Chavez administration, have increased overall consumption of electricity.

In May 2008, Chavez announced a 40% expansion of the country's electricity generation through 42 structural expansion projects. The government also has a plan to replace 74 million incandescent light bulbs with energy saving ones, and so far they have already replaced 5 million.

The government is restricting the import of energy inefficient air conditioners, fridges and freezers. Private companies that invest in their own energy supply will be exempt from sales tax for 5 years and receive preferential access to government-issued dollars.

In 2007, the Chavez administration nationalized Venezuela's 14 regional electricity companies and brought them under the control of Corpoelec. Last October, Chavez created the new Ministry for Electricity.

Further regulatory measures are in store, particularly for the capital city of Caracas. Residents hope the plan will be implemented in an orderly way and not further disrupt the already chaotic metropolis.

T/ Tamara Pearson
www.venezuelanalysis.com
P/ CO File
Mérida

CITGO-Venezuela Heating Oil Program in the U.S. Starts 5th Season in New York City

Venezuela shows solidarity with low-income new Yorkers

The CITGO-Venezuela Heating Oil Program, which helped more than 200,000 households last winter, officially began its 5th consecutive season today. The president and CEO of CITGO Petroleum Corporation, Alejandro Granado, the Chairman of Citizens Programs Corporation, Joseph P. Kennedy II, and the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States, Bernardo Alvarez, launched the 2010 edition of the program in New York City with a celebratory ceremony.

"CITGO is very proud to mark the 5th anniversary of our Heating Oil Program, our flagship social development initiative and expression of solidarity from the government of Venezuela and President Hugo Chávez," Granado said.

"Our program helps thousands of households, tribal communities and shelters in the US each year and is without doubt one of the most important social development initiatives implemented by any large energy corporation in history," he added.



CITGO has more than 12,000 gas stations in the US

The CITGO president and CEO highlighted that approximately 50,000 families and 39 shelters received assistance from the program in New York City alone last year, and pointed out that the need for heating assistance is expected to increase significantly this year.

CITGO has partnered with Citizens Programs Corporation, a non-profit created by Joseph P. Kennedy II during the oil price shocks of the late 1970s.

"Every year, we hear from families who struggle each day to put food on the table and heat

their homes," said Kennedy. "The economic downturn has made the situation even worse. Parents have lost jobs. Families have lost health care along with their employment. More and more people are turning to programs like ours to keep their families warm."

THE SOLIDARITY OF VENEZUELA STANDS ALONE

"We are deeply grateful to CITGO Petroleum and the people of Venezuela for their generosity to Americans in need," expressed Kennedy. "We ask major oil companies and

oil producing nations every year to help our senior citizens and poor make it through winter, and only one company, CITGO Petroleum, and one country, Venezuela, has responded to our appeals."

The CITGO-Venezuela Heating Oil Program came about in the aftermath of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina as a response to the clamor of thousands of low-income people in the US affected by the high price of heating oil in 2005.

This plea triggered an open letter on Oct. 27, 2005 from 12 US Senators, including John Kerry,

Hillary Clinton and Harry Reid. They requested that oil companies step forward to help low-income families affected by the high prices of heating oil.

But only the Venezuelan government-owned company, CITGO, responded to the humanitarian call.

"In the past, Venezuela's oil wealth has only benefited only a few. Over the last 10 years, we have developed a policy that prioritizes investment of industry profits in social needs and development," stated Ambassador Alvarez.

"Just as the government of President Hugo Chávez has made significant gains in the fight against poverty and the promotion of social justice in Venezuela, we hope this program can help needy communities and groups in the US to weather cold winters", Alvarez added.

The CITGO-Venezuela Heating Oil Program is one of the best expressions of the social values of the Chávez government and its good will towards all peoples.

Families interested in receiving free heating oil can call Citizens Programs Corporation at 1-877-JOE-4-OIL (1-877-564-4645) or apply online at www.citizensenergy.com.

T/Citgo Press
Houston

Stolen sacred rock from the Pemón Indian Community will return home

The rock, named Kueka Abuela or Piedra de Jaspe, is a cultural relic belonging to Venezuela. In 1998 it was illegally donated to Germany, and presumably transported to Berlin from the Orinoco River

After the Institute of Cultural Patrimony (IPC), entity charged with preserving cultural artifacts in Venezuela, received several complaints from representatives of the Pemón Indian community regarding the illegal donation of the Kueka Abuela rock, also known as Piedra de Jaspe, to Germany, IPC requested help from the Foreign Ministry to return the sacred rock to the Pemón people.

The rock, a national artifact, was traditionally under the custody of the indigenous communities in the



The Kueka Abuela rock in a Berlin Park

southeastern part of the country. It was illegally extracted from Canaima National Park and was recently seen in the Tiergarten Municipal Park in Berlin, Germany.

IPC's president, Jose Manuel Rodriguez, revealed that in 1998, Hans Peter Plischka, Charge D'Affairs of the Germany Embassy in Venezuela, received the sacred

rock as a "donation" from Hector Hernandez Mujica, then president of the National Parks Institute. "In 2003, we began to investigate and we finally found the sacred rock in Berlin. Soon it will be returned to our country", he added.

The German government has said it had "nothing to do with the situation", and that the rock arrived to

The Pemón Indian community inhabits and takes care of Canaima National Park, also known as the Gran Sabana. A friendly, gentle people that still live in the table-top mountains, the Pemóns have had to adjust to the hundreds of tourists flocking to Canaima to see its vast natural beauty, which includes Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world.

Berlin "thanks" to a German-Austrian named Wolfgang Kraker von Shwarzenfeld, founder of Global Stone. The Venezuelan government will assume all transportation costs to return the Kueka Abuela or Piedra de Jaspe rock to the Gran Sabana region where it belongs.

"There was definitely complicit behavior on the part of the Venezuelan authorities in charge at that time. This is theft of a national artifact, a cultural relic. You can't donate something that doesn't belong to you, this belongs to the people of Venezuela," exclaimed Rodriguez.

The Director of Cultural Affairs of the Germany Foreign Ministry has confirmed the German government will cooperate with the return of the sacred rock to Venezuelan territory.

T/Rosina Romero
P/CO File

Healthcare and Education Still the Priority in Venezuela

Even though the capitalist crisis continues, the government will not touch funds destined for social investment

Despite the world financial crisis, resources for the Social Missions will not be cut back at all. On the contrary, they will be increased, informed Minister and Chief of Staff of the President's Office, Luis Reyes Reyes, who is also Vice-president of the Executive Branch for Social Affairs.

"There are two essential things for the Revolution: healthcare and education. Whatever happens, we will always have resources for healthcare and education. The highways and trains can wait, but people's needs for healthcare and education will be attended to immediately", he promised.

The majority of funding for the social sector "is administered now by the President's Office. We have proposed a growth in Social Missions and this requires additional resources. The President has guaranteed them", he pointed out.

Reyes also indicated that Social Missions such as Robinson and Ribas, both educational programs, will be fortified. "We are strengthening all the missions", he added.



In 2010, all 600 Integral Diagnostic Treatment Centers and rehabilitation centers will be finished

A GOAL OF 35 HIGH-TECH MEDICAL CENTERS

Per Reyes, the balance in the social sector through 2009 is positive, despite the fall in oil prices.

"Although there was a reduction in overall investments, in the social area there was no decrease, but rather an increase", he recalled. "The investment in the social arena is not just in infrastructure but also the improvement of the quality of human

resources, which is very important: improve the condition of the teachers, doctors and cultural and social workers."

The health services sector was reinforced last year through Mission Barrio Adentro. "We did a review of the program so we could improve primary care. But we also revised the advanced care programs in hospitals and the investment plan for Barrio Adentro III", informed Reyes.

The initial results of improving Barrio Adentro III will be seen in the first trimester of 2010, assured Minister Reyes. "We are going to inaugurate new and improved spaces in the principal hospitals throughout the country," he revealed. Several projects involving various assisted and specialized care centers part of Barrio Adentro IV will also be completed.

The goal for the new year is to finish all 600 Integral Diagnostic

Treatment Centers, 600 Integral Rehabilitation Centers and 35 High-Tech Medical Centers originally planned.

Even when the effects of the capitalist crisis began reaching Venezuela, Mission Milagro (which guarantees eye care and surgeries to the poorest populations in Venezuela and Latin America) was not detained one bit. "Mission Milagro facilitated one million eye surgeries. Mission Milagro International continued to operate normally, except during the high alert period of the H1N1 flu epidemic last year," he clarified.

According to Minister Reyes, in the first semester of 2010, 65% of the work in hospitals should be completed. As for the education sector, Reyes underlined that in 2009, "the rehabilitation of 1,200 education centers began".

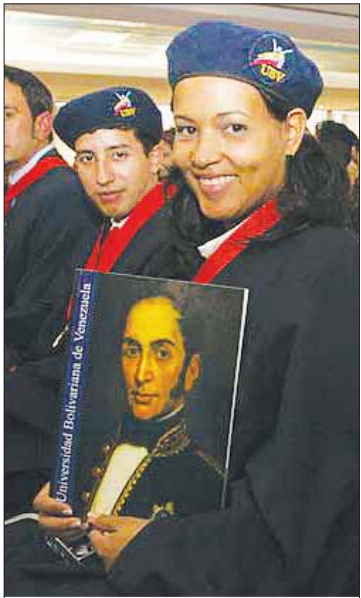
In 2010, he announced, "we will inaugurate a lot of new infrastructure. During the first trimester of 2010 we are going to advance the second phase of the Simón Bolívar Plan, which includes the construction of new schools and the rehabilitation of others." Good news for the nation's school system.

T/Vanessa Davies
P/ CO file
Caracas

Law in the service of social justice

The first class of lawyers graduated on Saturday from the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV), a public institution created by the Chávez Administration in 2003

During the graduation ceremony, President Hugo Chávez announced the establishment of a special fund of 20 million bolívares and the donation of a new building to expand the university's installations. "The new State that we are building gives great importance to this truly historical event", said the Venezuelan President. "More than 700 socialist



A majority of graduates are women

lawyers are graduating and entering the workforce. New actors, new soldiers, true soldiers of the law and of justice", he added.

The 733 law graduates will have the option of entering a cost-free post-graduate training program to become judges. The announcement was made by Luisa Estela Morales, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Justice. "This is a historic act that is responding to newly formed lawyers with ethical and revolutionary principles," she claimed. The program will begin in march at the National Judiciary School and is open to all 733 graduates. Traditionally, only those with international training or political contacts could enter

the judiciary, leaving many excluded entirely from the distinguished legal profession.

During the graduation ceremony, one of the young law graduates, Yanis Araujo, gave the President a proposal to create a social program in the name of justice, Mission Social Justice. The concept was debated in different legal institutions and schools nationwide in order to "bring justice to the people as needed."

Chávez reacted immediately to the idea, approving its creation on the spot. "I like the idea", he said, "although I prefer the name 'Mission Socialist Justice', he added. The program will create a fund and a network of State and

community organizations in order to place lawyers where they are most needed.

Venezuela has been plagued by a corrupt judiciary and legal system for decades. Despite minor reforms, most citizens view justice and law as anomalies in their country. The nation's civil law system, with its rigid codes and unflexible rules that create unnecessary bureaucracy and obstacles for justice-seekers, could also be impacted by a new generation of lawyers whose principal mission is to guarantee justice for all.

T/ EG
P/ CO file
Caracas

EDITORIAL

In times of corporate media control and mass media manipulation of world events, we are very excited to announce the creation of the English language edition of Venezuela's newest, balanced newspaper, the *Correo del Orinoco*. The original *Correo del Orinoco* was founded by Venezuela's liberator, Simón Bolívar on June 27, 1818. It served as a principal source of information during the time of independence and the creation of the Venezuelan Republic. Bolívar encouraged writing and reporting as a form of "artillery", termed by him as the "artillery of ideas".

One hundred ninety one years later, the *Correo del Orinoco* was relaunched as part of the Venezuelan people's effort to combat corporate media misreporting and disinformation campaigns against the Bolivarian Revolution, nationally and internationally. Today, the *Correo del Orinoco* is a widely read and referenced daily paper, reporting on political, social, economic, judicial, cultural and international events of importance to the Venezuelan people, with a balanced and informative tone.

Now, we are happy to announce the launching of the first foreign language version of the *Correo del Orinoco*, a weekly paper in English for distribution nationally and internationally.

Our most important mission is to combat the information blockade against Venezuela and to inform the international community about the incredible events taking place inside Venezuela that rarely receive attention from the corporate media.

The XXI century has brought horrific tragedies, such as 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, coups in Venezuela, Haiti and Honduras, and increasing natural disasters around the world; the latest in Haiti. But these are also times of great change in our societies, with technological advances that bridge our differences and distances, and extraordinary people's movements throughout Latin America, building models of social and economic justice that would make our founders proud.

We hope the *Correo del Orinoco International* does justice to the immensity it represents.

Currency Adjustment: Necessary, but is it Socialist?

There is little doubt, even among some opposition leaders (who normally oppose just about anything the government does), that the recent currency adjustment of the bolivar was economically necessary. It is a matter of basic math to realize that if inflation averaged 22% between 2005 and 2009 and each bolivar thereby lost about 72% of its purchasing power since the last currency adjustment, then maintaining the exchange rate at the same level during this entire period means imports become ever cheaper and Venezuelan-produced exports become ever more expensive in the rest of the world. As a result, unsubsidized domestic production was slowly being killed off and exports could not compete on international markets. The low exchange rate was also unnecessarily subsidizing innumerable imports for the middle and upper classes.

In other words, if Venezuela wants to diversify its economy and export other products besides oil, an adjustment of the currency's exchange rate was absolutely necessary. The accompanying economic measures that create funds for subsidizing production will greatly help the import substitution effort.

The understandable fear now is that this adjustment will mean more inflation and thus less purchasing power, which in theory would go against the socialist principle of improving the population's standard of living.

However, President Chavez is correct to point out that most prices in Venezuela have been adjusted to the bolivar's declining value, even products that were imported at the official exchange rate. The price of imported goods, such as cars, electronics, liquor, etc., increased in step with inflation and the parallel exchange rate, and not with the official exchange rate. For most imported



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goods, adjusting the exchange rate only represents a lowering of profit margins—if importers do not adjust their prices accordingly—and not an unreasonable inflationary push, as the opposition argues.

To rein in inflation, the government perhaps should have temporarily frozen prices instead of issuing vague warnings to businesses that increased prices could face worker takeovers. Temporary price controls could have broken the inflationary spiral in Venezuela, while giving the new exchange rate a better chance to help drive domestic production.

Unfortunately, if the government spends all of the new bolivars that the new exchange rate implies (now that each oil dollar earns the government 4.3 bolivars instead of 2.15), the money supply would increase, which could bring about more inflation due to the increase in currency in circulation that

Temporary price controls could have broken the inflationary spiral in Venezuela, while giving the new exchange rate a better chance to help drive domestic production

doesn't correspond to an increase in goods within the economy.

If the government wants to keep inflation down, it would have to resist the election-year temptation to spend all of its new income within the country. Instead, it probably ought not increase its bolivar expenditures significantly and should use the new dollar resources mainly for imports of goods that cannot be produced within Venezuela.

Keeping inflation down while trying to get the economy out of a recession is a notoriously difficult task. The government is stuck between a rock and a hard place, out of which it can only maneuver with the help of unorthodox measures. One such measure could be the previously mentioned temporary price controls, which bring their own danger of shortages.

Another —more economically democratic, and hence more socialist— measure would be to move away from the dilemma between state pricing and market pricing, towards prices that are negotiated cooperatively between consumers and producers, between communities and factories. Such a long-term project would represent a real move towards participatory or 21st century socialism.

Gregory Wilpert

Gregory Wilpert represents the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation to Venezuela and is a member of the *VenezuelaAnalysis.com* collective.

OPINION PIECES WELCOME!

Please send all submissions to: editor.correoenglish@gmail.com

We recommend:
**New Book
on Venezuela**

VENEZUELA SPEAKS!

VOICES from the GRASSROOTS



Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots is a collection of interviews with activists and participants from across Venezuela's social movements. From community media to land reform; cooperatives to communal councils, from the labor movement to the Afro-Venezuelan network, *Venezuela Speaks!* sheds light on the complex realities within the Bolivarian Revolution. These interviews offer a compelling oral history of Venezuela's democratic revolution, from the bottom up.

Between October 2007 and November 2009, journalists Michael Fox, Carlos Martinez, and JoJo Farrell hit the ground running, conducting interviews of Venezuela's politically active groups and their most ardent spokespeople, who are constantly defining, redefining, and kick starting the revolution in their respective communities.

Editors: Michael Fox, Carlos Martinez and JoJo Farrell
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