



## **Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States**

February 4, 2010

Senator Dianne Feinstein, Chair  
Select Committee on Intelligence  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein,

I was disappointed to read the testimony of Mr. Dennis Blair, Director of National Intelligence, before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on the Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community. As in years past, the report is full of politically motivated and cynical accusations against my country.

Let me start by stating that Venezuela is a sovereign country that demands respect for its right to chart its own destiny. Unsubstantiated reports like the one presented by Mr. Blair to the committee you chair were used by the Bush administration to set the stage in the public opinion for the 2002 overthrow of President Hugo Chavez's democratically elected government and to impose politically motivated sanctions against my country that are still in place. That same coup led Congress to investigate the role that U.S. agencies may have played in President Chavez's overthrow.

I would like to use this opportunity to warn you and members of the committee that we are once again seeing attempts to criminalize our government and encourage sectors of the Venezuelan opposition that are looking for undemocratic ways to reach power.

The report states that "President Chavez continues to impose an authoritarian populist political model in Venezuela that undermines democratic institutions."

On the contrary, Venezuela is in the process of extending democracy to all of its people. This includes finding a balance between the state and the market that allows us to guarantee the welfare of our people and overcome the historical wrongs of poverty and inequality.

Over the last decade, Venezuela's ranking on the UN's Human Development Index has risen by 10 spots, as levels of poverty have dropped and access to social services increased. In fact, political participation and consciousness in Venezuela have expanded dramatically over the last decade. These advances have occurred within what we call "Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", a democratic political process centered around fostering the well-being of our people as an alternative to the capitalist model currently in crisis.

The report also states that Venezuela has “curtailed free expression and opposition activities by shutting down independent news outlets, harassing and detaining protestors, and threatening opposition leaders with criminal charges for corruption.” Venezuela has not shut down any independent media outlets, but rather has applied relevant laws and regulations to outlets operating in the country, just like any other democracy. In Venezuela, more than 76 percent of the media on public airwaves is privately owned and operated, and most is controlled by the government’s political opposition. Additionally, more than 184 channels broadcast freely through cable networks.

Anti-government protestors continue enjoying their constitutional rights to peaceful assembly. Moreover, many members of the Venezuelan opposition travel freely around the world promoting their political agenda, including to the U.S., and return to Venezuela to exercise the political rights that the 1999 Constitution grants them.

Contrary to the assessments of the report, criminal charges have been filed against a variety of individuals for charges of corruption, *regardless* of their political affiliations. Venezuela only recently averted a financial crisis when it took steps to stop a number of banks from threatening the integrity of the country’s financial system. Two people charged in this case were very close to government officials. Both were detained and will stand trial for their crimes.

We cannot and will not allow corrupt criminals to hide behind the notion of “political persecution” to avoid facing justice in Venezuela. In that regard, we have recently solicited the cooperation of U.S. authorities to extradite one banker whom has fled Venezuela’s justice system and is currently living in the U.S. with money he stole from Venezuelan taxpayers. By granting some of these fugitives safe haven, the U.S. has politicized the sacred concept of political asylum. It is worth highlighting that over the past few years Venezuela has deported several criminals that were wanted by the U.S.

The report also claims that President Hugo Chavez, along with his counterparts in sister nations in the region, “are likely to oppose nearly every US policy initiative in the region, including the expansion of free trade, counter drug and counterterrorism cooperation, military training, and security initiatives, and even US assistance programs.”

Venezuela engages openly with its regional neighbors through a number of mechanisms, including the Bolivarian Alliance of the People of Our Americas (ALBA), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the South American Common Market (MERCOSUR) and a variety of energy initiatives such as PetroCaribe. These mechanisms allow the countries of the region to better cooperate on issues of mutual concern, particularly in developing strategies to overcome poverty. These alliances do not threaten the U.S. – in fact, a hemisphere more aggressively working together to fight social exclusion is more likely to be stable in the long-run.

On counter-terrorism, Venezuela seeks especially to attack the conditions that allow terrorism to grow, while on counter-drug operations Venezuela believes strongly in shared responsibility approaches that escape the failed military and supply-side based models. It bears mentioning that drug seizures in Venezuela increased by 38 percent after 2005, the year that we ended our cooperation with the DEA.

The U.S. will benefit if it develops a multilateral approach to these important issues and collaborates openly and equally with countries in the region. Of course, these cooperation must flow both ways – since 2005, Venezuela has been waiting for Luis Posada Carriles, a known terrorist living freely in South Florida, to be extradited to Venezuela for his role in the 1976 bombing of a civilian airliner. In the U.S., he has only been accused of lying to immigration officials. This is a travesty of justice.

After reading Mr. Blair's report, one cannot help but wonder what a country like Venezuela has done to the U.S. to justify the cynicism and unsubstantiated accusations its government so irresponsibly lobbs at us. The only answer seems to be that we have refused to "obey" hegemonic prescriptions and have decided to chart our own path towards full democracy and equitable development. We are only a "threat" to those that still see Latin America as part of the U.S.'s "backyard" instead of co-equal regional neighbors. Unfortunately, this report is just a carbon-copy of the Cold War mentality that for too long reigned over U.S. relations with the region, favoring dictatorships and allowing gross human right violations in the name of U.S. interests.

Let me reassure you that, contrary to Mr. Blair's report, there is no "anti-Americanism" in the Government of Venezuela. However, we do reject imperial policies that dictate the kind of development and democracy we should seek. This is why we demand respect for and will defend our sovereignty at any cost.

The report issued by Mr. Blair reproduces the politicized and ideological intelligence script that has accompanied U.S. intervention in the affairs of sovereign nations in this hemisphere for decades. Such reports can be interpreted by some groups in the region as an invitation to explore anti-democratic means to achieve political ends. As Venezuela's ambassador to the U.S., it is my responsibility to alert you and your colleagues in the Senate about our concerns with the intentions of such intelligence reports, which are full of half-truths and false accusations that hamper efforts for understanding among our two countries.

Respectfully,

Bernardo Alvarez Herrera  
Ambassador

Cc: Members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence  
Senator John Kerry, Chair, Foreign Relations Committee, US Senate  
Congressman Eliot Engel, Chair, Subcommittee for the Western Hemisphere,  
US House of Representatives  
Mr. Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence