

**N° UD 1305**

Washington, D.C., July 22, 2010

The Honorable George LeMieux  
Senator  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C.-

Senator LeMieux,

I read your letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton dated July 21 and wanted to respond to the claims you made regarding the state of democracy and human rights in Venezuela. Contrary to what you state, democracy and human rights in Venezuela remain strong and well-protected, and there is no need for intervention by the U.S., the Organization of American States (OAS), or any other agency or institution.

With regards to the incidents you cited, I would like to offer the following clarifications:

- Judge Maria Lourdes Afiuni was ordered detained not by President Hugo Chavez, but rather by the Venezuelan Attorney General. Her detention was based in part on claims that she illegally allowed a banker accused of serious financial crimes to go free. Once released from pre-trial detention, the banker escaped to the U.S., where he remains a fugitive of Venezuela's justice system.
- The February 2010 report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights was partial and biased, and Venezuela has refused to cooperate with the commission as its current executive director endorsed the illegal 2002 coup against President Chavez.
- Oswaldo Alvarez Paz is free, and has remained openly critical of the Venezuelan government.
- Neither Guillermo Zuloaga nor Nelson Mezarhane is being sought for their ownership of television broadcaster Globovision. Rather, they stand accused of serious financial crimes related to other business interests – a car dealership for Mr. Zuloaga and a bank for Mr. Mezarhane. Neither of the two can stand behind the protections offered by right to a free press when their alleged crimes have absolutely nothing to do with their role at Globovision.

Though different in structure from the U.S., Venezuela remains a vibrant democracy. Since 1998, Venezuela has held 14 national elections, all of which have been internationally monitored and certified. The parliamentary elections on September 26 will proceed as scheduled, and both pro-government and opposition parties and candidates will be participating. The media remains overwhelmingly privately owned and completely free to report and editorialize, which they do without reservation.

On top of the consistent gains and expansions in Venezuela's democratic system and institutions, the country has made notable advances in the fight against poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. From 1999 to 2009, extreme poverty fell from 20.2 percent to seven percent, while poverty dropped from 42 percent to 21 percent. Over the last decade, \$330 billion, or 60 percent of all revenues, have gone towards vital social programs. These advances are regularly overlooked in the U.S., but within Venezuela they are recognized as vital components in the transformation from a country of voters to a country of citizens.

There is no need to have the Inter-American Democratic Charter 'invoked' against Venezuela. In fact, that you propose such a move indicates that you still seem to view the region as the U.S.'s 'backyard' and regional organizations like the OAS as a ministry of the colonies that should blindly acquiesce to U.S. demands.

If you have any questions or concerns about Venezuela, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bernardo Alvarez Herrera', written in a cursive style.

**Bernardo Álvarez Herrera**  
**Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the**  
**United States of America**

**Cc:** Secretary of State Hillary Clinton  
Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK)  
Senator John Ensign (R-NV)  
Senator James Inhofe (R-OK)  
Senatore Mike Johanns (R-NE)  
Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT)  
Senator James E. Risch (R-ID)