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AMBASSADOR JESUS ARNALDO PEREZ

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Speech of Jesús Arnaldo Pérez, Foreign Minister of the Bolivarian Republic
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Mr. President, distinguished Heads of States and Governments, Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

There are moments we can describe as historical turning points, when nations and peoples must decide where they stand. This is one of these moments, when history will judge us as leaders and examine if we were democratic leaders that represented the will of our peoples.

It is clear that the people of the world are taking a stand, against neo-liberal economics and war. They are fighting against those who would impose their will by military and economic force. They are resisting those who would undermine and even overthrow the basic principles that founded the United Nations itself. In this regard, Venezuela firmly affirms the call of the Secretary General Kofi Annan, that all the nations that proclaim the rule of law in their territory, also respect it abroad.

Esteemed colleagues, as you know, the majority of the peoples and governments of the world took a stand against the illegal war in Iraq. In this context, Venezuela re-affirms the words of President Rodríguez Zapatero, that "Peace is a task that demands more courage, more determination and more heroism than war.

The begging question for us now is— are we building a world of real democracy equality and justice or a world led by tyranny of the rich and powerful?

The people of Venezuela were faced with such a decision last month with a referendum on the Presidency. In fact, in the last six years Venezuelans have

participated in eight democratic procedures: referendums, plebiscites and elections. The 1999 Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela allows for a mid-term recall referendum on the President's and elected official's term in office. Hence, on August 15th, Citizens of Venezuela clearly exercised their constitutional right and confirmed the President, Hugo Chavez Frias and the Bolivarian democratic transformation process, in a historic referendum, never before practiced in the history of world.

Since the eve of the new millennium we have witnessed tremendous dissent from citizens of the world against neo-liberalism and war.

By the late 80's Venezuela was feeling the affects of structural adjustment. It was met with a popular uprising that paralyzed the country, etching it into our popular memory. This resistance, popularly known as "El Caracazo", was perhaps the first protest against neo-liberalism. The poor took control of the capital, Caracas, as well as cities across the country to demonstrate their discontent with the increasing poverty of the masses and disproportionate income distribution of our oil rich nation. The ruling government of the day, responded by sending in the Armed Forces to suppress it, killing thousands of people. This was a painfully tragic moment for the people of Venezuela. However, this event provided the necessary consciousness, the political awakening of the people, giving voice to the fight against capitalist led neo-liberalism.

Over the next decade, we witnessed massive protests against the World Trade Organization, and other neo-liberal economic activities in Chipas, Davos Seattle, Prague, Quebec City, Genoa, and Cancun. Wherever the architects of neo-liberalism gathered, they were met with massive challenges on the streets.

Equally we witnessed the desperate actions of the brave South Korean farmer that gave his life in Cancun to call attention to the plight of his fellow farmers in the brink of disaster throughout the world.

The war on Iraq only strengthened these global protests. On February 15, 2003, an estimated 30 million (Guardian, UK) people marched in protest and disbelief; unwilling to stand idly by as once again the world's screams fell on deaf ears, as not so smart bombs fell on little children, they did not know why. If we combine the anti-globalization protests with the anti war demonstrations, you will find a global rebellion of revolutionary proportions.

My fellow leaders, have we no eyes and ears? Can we not see the suffering? Can we not hear the whispers of the poor, the disfranchised victims, and the desolate— above the profiteering arms industry? Why are we unable to stop this insanity? Can we afford to exempt ourselves from bearing this responsibility?

According to the United Nations Development Project 44% of Latin Americans live below the poverty line (and other estimates put that percentage even higher). The Latin American reality is not specific to the region; most of the world population is currently living in poverty. Yet the region provides a particularly poignant example, for it represents the 'laboratory' of the neo-liberal project. Structural adjustment, as prescribed by the 'Washington Consensus', came early to Latin America, and its application here became the model for the neo-liberalization of 'Communist Bloc' countries in the 1990s.

But as the initial site of neo-liberalism's devastating experiment, Latin America was also the first explosive site of anti-neo-liberal rebellion.

Last March, the UNDP released a report on the state of Latin American democracy dominated by this startling revelation: more than half of Latin Americans would prefer a dictatorship over democracy if an authoritarian regime would solve their economic problems.

A second report, released this past August by the private firm Latinbarometro, came to a similarly depressing conclusion—with one noticeable exception: between 1996-2004 support for democracy has actually grown in Venezuela, much more than any other country in Venezuela.

Could it be that there is a direct correlation between this data and Venezuela's pursuit of an alternative viable market democracy?

The Nobel Prize winning economist, Amartya Sen, affirms that democracy is the best remedy to eliminate hunger. In Venezuela, and under the leadership of President Hugo Chavez Frias, this goal is being pursued giving power to the poor. To reduce poverty, it is necessary to improve democracy. There is no other way.

What the UNDP report reveals is Latin Americans' have steadily lost faith in a model of democracy inherently limited to representation and the political sphere. It is a model that has entirely ignored the economic, social, and participatory facets of democracy. Therefore, it has failed profoundly in reflecting the popular will. As Simon Bolivar our visionary Liberator advocated two centuries ago "the best democracy is one that provides the highest degree of happiness, stability, and social security for its people".

A few days ago, President Lula of Brazil chaired a hugely successful meeting of world leaders on the theme of "Combating Hunger and Poverty." This wonderful initiative co-sponsored by Presidents Chirac, Lagos Rodriguez Zapatero, expressed our common vision to fight against global poverty and social injustice to guarantee the security and development of both North and South.

To that end we recognize the need to go beyond the Official Development Aid fund. Venezuela's contribution to the "Combating Hunger and Poverty" project represents a genuine attempt at placing the tools of development in the hands of those most in need. What this means in theoretical terms is a revolutionary shift

from 'food aid' to 'food sovereignty'. We are not limiting ourselves to helping to feed the poor; rather, we are committed to helping the poor feed themselves.

Food Sovereignty in Venezuela has a clear emphasis on small producers in the form of community-run cooperatives; for, while large producers are important to the Venezuelan economy. A far-reaching land reform has already transferred over 2 million hectares of land to small-producers. And we have a strong commitment to the creation of a World Seed Bank in our country to protect our heritage seeds from the violent encroachments of transgenic and genetically modified crops. In this regard we have recently created a Ministry of Food and Nutrition to guarantee this fundamental right.

Venezuela fully supports the initiatives underway "strengthening the United Nations". Since we are ardent supporters of multilateralism and democratic participation we support greater participation and leadership of southern countries at the UN and particularly in the Security Council. In this regard we support the candidacy of Brazil as a permanent member of the extended Council.

ECOSOC

Venezuela aspires to join the ECOSOC for the period 2005-2007. Our presence at ECOSOC will help to promote globally the ideas and social justice we are trying to reach at home. To achieve this objective and to reach the goals of the Millennium, we think it necessary that the countries that have the resources make a proportional financial effort.

Venezuela has committed 2 billion dollars in social programs this year and we recently help establish an OPEC fund in the value of hundred million to combat Desertification and Drought. We contribution by the OPEC members reflects our commitment to our brothers and' sisters in Africa to which Venezuela made its commitment particularly in Benin and Mozambique.

United Nations was born out of a world traumatized by the atrocities of World War II, yet full of hope for human dignity.

Fifty —five years later it appears that we have lost our direction, when we observe that the will of the General Assembly is not respected.

Had we courage, we will be advancing the original goals of the United Nations.

Those original goals would not only make another world possible but would be essential for human progress.

Thank you.