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## Chavez's Remarks, Toledo's Reaction

by LADB Staff

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Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez raised the ire of the Peruvian government in January with comments on the electoral campaign underway in Peru. Peru's President Alejandro Toledo ordered his ambassador home after Chavez publicly praised and met with nationalist presidential candidate Ollanta Humala of the Partido Nacionalista Peruano (PNP), while attacking Humala's main competitor, Lourdes Flores Nano of the Unidad Nacional (UN) party. Peru alleged that Chavez was "interfering in the internal affairs" of the country, though Toledo later told the press that conflict had been "overcome."

### *Chavez "salutes" Humala, Toledo withdraws ambassador*

Early in January, Chavez said he saluted Humala for his actions in October 2000. "Ollanta recounted to me how...a group of soldiers carried out an act of rebellion in an area where transnational businesses had taken ownership of the wealth of that neighbor nation [Peru]," said Chavez, calling the rebellion a "quijotada," an act worthy of fictional knight Don Quixote. A retired lieutenant-colonel, Humala led a short-lived military uprising of 50 men against former President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) the month before his 10-year government collapsed amid charges of corruption and human rights violations (see NotiSur, 2000-10-06).

Chavez went on to characterize Humala as one of those engaged "in the battle that unites us: nationalism, the rescue of natural resources, the rescue of sovereignty, confronting the threat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), demanding respect for our peoples." Chavez said that shared nationalism was the "savior of sovereignty" against the threat of the Andean Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) with the US, which President Toledo's government signed in Washington in December. Chavez also broke out into song with a verse of Peru's national anthem. "Now, with Evo Morales and Ollanta Humala, we see the indigenous resurgence in recent years," said Chavez, making the comments during a Jan. 4 joint press conference with Morales, then President-elect of Bolivia.

Humala and his wife Nadine were in attendance, sitting in the front row when Chavez pointed them out and praised them. Their presence was an unannounced surprise for the Peruvian press. Peru immediately recalled its ambassador from Venezuela while accusing Chavez of interfering in its internal affairs. "Concerning the declaration made by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, which constitutes interference in the internal affairs of Peru, the government of Peru has recalled for consultation its Ambassador Carlos Urrutia," read a statement posted on the Web site of Peru's Foreign Ministry late Jan. 4.

President Toledo said Chavez was "destabilizing" Latin America by interfering in his neighbors' internal affairs, adopting language the US government has been using for years when referring to Venezuela's chief executive and phrasing similar to what Florida Gov. and first brother Jeb Bush

would use during a Jan. 20 visit to Peru. "Chavez is president of Venezuela, not of Latin America," Toledo said in an interview with Radioprogramas in Lima. "He can have all the petrodollars he wants, but that doesn't give him the right to destabilize the region."

Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel reacted to Toledo's comments on Jan. 11 by calling his presidency a failure. "The Venezuelan government doesn't destabilize, but rather stabilizes the region when it attacks social problems," Rangel said in a statement. "Toledo lacks good judgment, and his political opinions are no doubt undermined by the immense failure of his presidency."

Chavez defended his statements, saying, "The president of Peru was bothered. What am I doing? I wanted to get to know [Humala], I want to hear him, and I listened; six hours we talked. He spoke to me of Gen. [Juan] Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975) of the Peruvian national revolution, of the forgotten and abandoned Indians of Peru." Chavez also said that conservative Christian democrat Lourdes Flores represented the Peruvian oligarchy. Referring at the Jan. 4 press conference to the "otra candidata," meaning Flores, he said she once came to Caracas "to insult me, and I don't even know her." "Why?" asked Chavez. "Because she is the candidate of the oligarchy in Peru that doesn't care for us, the oligarchies don't care for us, the soldiers they've always said we're brutes, a bunch of big gorillas, a bunch of coarse sergeants."

Peru complains of meddling, then says issue "overcome" The text of Peruvian official statements pointed at UN and Organization of American States (OAS) documents that established the sovereign rights of countries to elect political leaders without external interference. "This repeated behavior" by Chavez, said a government communique, "constitutes, once again, an interference in internal affairs that the Peruvian government considers unacceptable and represents an evident violation of international law." But, by Jan. 24, Toledo was saying the incident had been overcome.

"The Venezuela-Peru issue, the Hugo Chavez-Alejandro Toledo issue, is overcome," said Toledo to the press shortly after attending the inauguration of President Morales in Bolivia, along with several other regional presidents. "I am not going to return to speaking about the comments of President Chavez, all is overcome," said Toledo, saying he did not have the opportunity to meet with Chavez in Bolivia. He said that Ambassador Urrutia would be returning to Caracas within days, although the exact date of his return remained undefined as of Jan. 24. This is not the first regional diplomatic spat to have started after Chavez verbally attacked a nearby US-friendly president.

A dispute between Chavez and Mexican President Vicente Fox broke out after the IV Summit of the Americas in November, when Fox and Chavez went to rhetorical blows about differences regarding the advantages of the FTAA (see SourceMex, 2005-11-16). Humala surging in polls Humala has repeatedly denied suggestions that he has accepted campaign funds from Chavez's government, something that would be illegal under Peru's election laws. Both are retired military officers who led uprisings against former governments and both favor redistributive, nationalist economic models. Humala has expressed his admiration for the 1968-1975 leftist dictatorship of Velasco, who led a failed agrarian reform, nationalized many industries, and forged close military ties with the Soviet Union. "You could question his macroeconomics, but Velasco gave dignity to the people who lived in the countryside," Humala has said, referring to Velasco's reforms, which freed rural workers from serf-like conditions on large estates.

Editorial opinion in Peru has inveighed heavily against Humala, with Lima daily *El Comercio* writing that his ideology is a "dangerous and tyrannical hodgepodge." Referring to uprisings that he and his brother Antauro have led (see *NotiSur*, 2005-01-14), *El Comercio* editorial writers said voters should "reject the archaic, racist, and intolerant extremism that Humala's thinking seeks to impose on our country." But editorial cartoonists joked that if the widely unpopular Toledo really wanted to hurt Humala's chances, he should campaign in his favor. In the second half of his presidency, Toledo has suffered from popularity levels that are frequently mired in the single-digit range (see *NotiSur*, 2003-12-12, 2004-02-13, and 2005-08-26).

Chavez, by contrast, enjoys strong popularity across the region, particularly for his stands against the US (see *NotiSur*, 2005-02-18 and 2005-12-02). If that popularity extends through large sectors of the Peruvian voting populace, his opponents may be ill-advised in antagonizing the self-described revolutionary. If one can liken Humala's candidacy to that of Fujimori in 1990, as has been done in multiple press outlets, one might similarly compare Flores' pro-free-trade platform to the platform that first propelled and later helped destroy the 1990 candidacy of Mario Vargas Llosa. Flores has said Peru needs to join Colombia as a free-market counterweight to the populism and anti-American rhetoric of President Chavez and his allies, like Bolivian President Morales.

"The Andean region is full of shadows and darkness. Bolivia and Ecuador are the shadows," Flores said in an interview with *The Miami Herald*. "Venezuela is the darkness. I think Peru and Colombia are the light." Flores said the trade agreement Peru signed with Washington (see *NotiSur*, 2006-01-13) would help her country only if accompanied by domestic social reforms. To protect local farmers from an influx of cheap imported rice and potatoes, she said, her government would make it a priority to convert farms to export crops more in demand on foreign markets items like artichokes, avocados, vegetables, and fruits. "It's the government's moral obligation to compensate the negative effects" of the agreement, she said.

Flores, a civil lawyer in private practice, sat in the Peruvian Congress for 10 years ending in 2000. She ran for president in 2001, but lost to Toledo. Humala had jumped to 28% voter approval in a poll released Jan. 16 by the firm *Apoyo*, with Flores holding 25%, though a poll released a week later found him one point behind her, with 25% planning to vote for him.

Polling analysts conjectured that Chavez's endorsement of the Humala campaign had stalled his ascent in the polls, an ascent that began last June when he held only 5% of the vote. The difference between Flores and Humala, at this time, is much less than the usual margin of error in opinion surveys, putting the two candidates at a statistical dead heat. Neither commands a large enough margin to win the election in the first round, so it appears likely that Flores and Humala will compete in a second round of voting.

Polls currently show Flores winning in a second round, but Humala's climb in opinion surveys has been dramatic. The April 9 race, which looks to be contested by a record-breaking 23 presidential candidates, will also include Valentin Paniagua of the *Frente de Centro*, Rafael Belaunde of Toledo's *Peru Posible* (PP), Susana Villaran with *Concertacion Descentralista*, Martha Chavez of the *Alianza por el Futuro*, Pedro Koechlin of *Con Fuerza Peru*, and former President Alan Garcia (1985-1990)

of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). All of them currently trail Flores and Humala by a significant margin.

### *Fujimori blocked from running*

Former President Fujimori's efforts to enter the race came to a complete end with the Jan. 10 decision by the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE) to bar him from running. Fujimori made an effort to get back into the Peruvian political scene late in 2005 when he flew from self-imposed exile in Tokyo across the Pacific. The ex-president, wanted on several charges of corruption and human rights abuses, flew over Peru and landed in Chile, where he was arrested to face extradition charges (see NotiSur, 2005-11-18). Peruvian prosecutors have since prepared their extradition case for presentation in Chile's courts, while Fujimori's appeals to be released on provisional liberty have been repeatedly denied.

The Congress in Peru has barred him from public office until 2011, a rule that the JNE, Peru's top electoral authority, decided to respect by revoking his application to run this year. Fujimori's supporters sought to register him for the vote on Jan. 6, but had no success, despite subsequent protests and hunger strikes by small bands of his followers.

"Citizen Alberto Fujimori is subject to special disqualification," the JNE said in a legal notice published in Peru's official gazette, El Peruano. A major question in Peru's race is what will happen with the large contingent of pro-Fujimori voters set adrift by the JNE.

-- End --