

# Venezuela gets backing for U.N. council seat

Venezuela got a boost for its bid for a U.N. Security Council seat after the 15-member Caribbean Community said it would not support Guatemala's U.S.-backed candidacy.

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**BASSETERRE, St. Kitts** - Venezuela's firebrand President Hugo Chávez took a major step toward securing a crucial bloc of votes for a seat on the U.N. Security Council Thursday after the 15-member Caribbean Community made it clear they would not support Guatemala's U.S.-backed candidacy.

A formal declaration of CARICOM's support for Venezuela would come later, but leaders of the regional bloc meeting here said Guatemala's long-standing territorial claims against Belize, a CARICOM member, made them oppose its candidacy.

"The very strong view within CARICOM is that the claim that Guatemala continues to make on Belize is unacceptable," said CARICOM Chairman and St. Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Denzil Douglas.

Guatemala is claiming half of Belize as part of a centuries-old dispute.

## TIGHT RACE

Venezuela is locked in a tight race with Guatemala over which country will replace Argentina as a non-permanent Latin American representative on the Security Council for a two-year term that starts next year.

The usually routine process suddenly became a major concern for the Bush administration after Venezuela decided to run on a platform that, according to a Venezuelan brochure for fellow U.N. members, "seeks to find the balance between the hegemonic tendencies, in favor of the interests of the countries of the South."

Washington has long complained that the socialist Chávez is a destabilizing force in Latin America because of his support of radical left-wing groups. Venezuela also has supported Iran's nuclear program and North Korea's missile tests -- both issues that are being debated in the U.N. body.

"Venezuela has shown that it is more concerned with disrupting international events than in working constructively to achieve common goals," said a U.S. State Department document explaining Washington's stand.

CARICOM officials said they would send a delegation to Caracas to clear up some issues relating to Venezuela's relations with the Caribbean, including details of PetroCaribe deal, an arrangement that allows Caribbean nations to buy oil on preferential terms.

But Dominica Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerritt said CARICOM "has decided to support the candidacy of Venezuela." In addition to its issues with Belize, leaders here accuse Guatemala of contributing to the collapse of the Caribbean's banana industry by leading the fight against banana exports to Europe.

Venezuela dispatched former Foreign Minister Roy Chaderton-Matos to meet with CARICOM officials here during their four-day summit.

As for the U.S. lobbying on behalf of Guatemala, Skerritt said Guatemala needed to do its own lobbying. "It is not the U.S. that is seeking a seat on the United Nations," he said. "None of us has seen a representative from Guatemala."

Guatemala has stressed its own merits for obtaining the Security Council post.

Foreign Minister Jorge Briz Abularach, in a phone interview with The Miami Herald, said Guatemala has never sat on the council even though it is a U.N. founding member and has frequently contributed troops to peace operation.

### **OCTOBER ELECTIONS**

According to Briz, Guatemala has secured 90 votes so far. The winner needs two-thirds of the General Assembly votes, or 127, although a smaller number would suffice if fewer votes are cast. The elections are to take place in October.

U.S. State Department officials, who requested anonymity to speak freely on a delicate subject, say Guatemala should be backed by a vast majority of European and Asian democracies.

Guatemala also has the backing of Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Briz said.

Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil already have said they would vote for Venezuela. Venezuela has focused its lobbying for the Security Council seat on less-developed countries in places like Africa.