

# **S. Fla. Venezuelans: Chavez incites anti-Semitism**

**Some local Venezuelans are worried about their family members back home after President Hugo Chávez makes remarks considered anti-Semitic.**

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Some Venezuelans in Broward are incensed about recent remarks by President Hugo Chávez, who accused Israel of conducting its own Holocaust against Palestinians and the people of Lebanon.

"They [the Israelis] are doing what Hitler did against the Jews," Chávez said in an interview with the Al Jazeera news agency broadcast Friday from Dubai.

During his Sunday radio program, Chávez accused Israel of committing a "new Holocaust" with the help of the United States, which he described as a "terrorist" country.

The comments are just the latest wound to the Venezuelan exile community in South Florida and across the country. Many moved to the United States because they didn't want to live under Chávez's rule, and now fear their country will be more divided, with Chávez alienating its Jewish community.

"What he said does not represent what the majority of Venezuelans feel," said Alirio Parra, 49, outside Café Canela, a Venezuelan restaurant in Weston on Wednesday. "I am ashamed of our leaders."

Chávez is trying to move the spotlight from Venezuela's internal problems such as crime and poverty, said Parra, a former pilot for the country's national oil company. Plus, the leader wants to cozy up to his anti-American allies like Iran, Cuba and North Korea, Parra said.

Alejandro Mizrahi, who is Jewish and from Caracas, is worried about his family in Venezuela.

Anti-Jewish graffiti is showing up on walls in Caracas, he said. Protests against Jews have already taken place, said Mizrahi, now a Weston resident.

"It is terrible," said Mizrahi, 50. "I didn't think that in the year 2006 there would be discrimination against Jews in Venezuela."

Family members are worried that Chávez's words and actions will incite violence against Jews and Jewish organizations in Venezuela, Mizrahi said.

Fellow Venezuelan Beni Brik has lived in Plantation for almost three years, and said he now must regard the United States as his permanent home.

"I see the return [to Venezuela] more difficult," said Brik, 50. "The politics have turned totalitarian."

Last week, Chávez pulled Venezuela's top diplomat out of Tel Aviv, and Israel withdrew its ambassador in Caracas.

Religious intolerance has never been a problem in the country, Brik said. It's always been a peaceful country, and he is frustrated that Chavez is inciting anti-Semitism.

The Jewish community in Venezuela is estimated at nearly 20,000 people.

"We are not an army," Brik said. "We are citizens."

"We are Venezuelan citizens of Jewish faith," he said. "We want the same rights as any other Venezuelan citizen."