

Chávez: Property won't be seized

In his weekly television and radio program, President Hugo Chávez denied that his government would seize the private property of Venezuelans.

The Miami Herald
Jan. 29, 2007

CARACAS - President Hugo Chávez denied Sunday that his left-leaning government would seize private property -- such as second homes or expensive cars -- from the wealthy and called on Venezuelans not to fear his accelerated push toward socialism.

"Nobody should allow themselves to be imbued with fear. If anybody should be scared, we should be scared of capitalism, which destroys society, people and the planet," said Chávez, speaking during his weekly television and radio program *Hello President*.

But Chávez also warned political opponents that "nothing would stop" the progress of what he calls "21st-century socialism," saying a majority of Venezuelans want to gradually move away from capitalism.

Many wealthy and middle-class Venezuelans opposed to Chávez fear the former paratroop commander could seize second homes, yachts or other assets as he advances his Bolivarian Revolution -- a political movement named after South American independence hero Simón Bolívar.

Chávez denied that he is following the example of Cuban leader Fidel Castro by attempting to steer oil-rich Venezuela toward Cuba-style communism, as many government critics allege.

"Those who say that I'm following Fidel's guidelines have no idea what historic processes are," said Chávez, adding that his government sees Castro as a "moral, ideological and political reference."

SOCIALIST IDEALS

During a live broadcast from a cattle ranch on the outskirts of San Carlos, a small city along the sun-baked plains of central Venezuela, Chávez inaugurated a series of "socialist formation centers," where he said Venezuelans will study socialist ideals while undergoing job training.

"As Christ said, socialism extols love between us," said Chávez, urging Venezuelans of all social classes and political leanings to embrace "the socialism that we are going to create with all our efforts, our minds, our hands and our hearts."

As workers on a 740-acre farm milked cows and showed Chávez how they produce cheese, the president asked them about their daily lives, warned against the evils of capitalism and called on them to forge socialism through the creation of a "new man."

Opponents claim Venezuela is slowly sinking into authoritarianism under Chávez, whom they accuse of seeking to establish himself as a lifelong leader like Castro.

"The nature of 21st-century socialism is autocratic, a variant of military populism in which there is a one-dimensional vision of the economy, participation and political organization," opposition politician William Davila said.

Chávez rejects allegations that he is a threat to democracy, but the leftist leader has raised concerns by saying he wants to continue governing Venezuela until 2021 or longer and proposing a constitutional reform that would allow indefinite reelection.

Venezuela's Constitution, drafted in 1999 by an all-powerful assembly packed with Chávez's political allies, currently allows for two consecutive presidential terms.

Chávez said the constitutional reform should also include legislation permitting the suspension or removal of city mayors and state governors who fail to fulfill promises to their constituents.

Chávez also criticized Mexico President Felipe Calderón. He said Calderón was jeopardizing his country's future by forging strong ties with Washington.

Speaking during his weekly television and radio program *"Hello President,"* Chávez said Calderón was following in the footsteps of former Mexican President Vicente Fox by making Mexico "subordinate to (U.S.) imperialism and world capitalism."

"It appears this little gentleman is going down the same path," said Chávez.

'PUPPY OF THE EMPIRE'

Mexico and Venezuela withdrew their ambassadors in 2005 after Chávez called Fox a "puppy of the empire," referring to the U.S., because of Fox's support for the U.S.-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas. Relations between the two nations have been left at the level of business attaches since then.

Calderón, of the conservative National Action Party, replaced Fox after beating leftist rival Andrés Manuel López Obrador by a thin margin.

Chávez repeatedly voiced his support for López Obrador during the campaign. Calderón, a political conservative, portrayed López Obrador as an extremist and compared him to Chávez.

Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa on Sunday said Calderón has tried to reach out to Chávez.