

ECUADOR

After win, Ecuador's Correa seeks Congress' closure

President Rafael Correa called for new elections and the elimination of Congress after claiming a victory in a constitutional assembly vote Sunday.

The Miami Herald
Oct. 02, 2007

QUITO --

Ecuador's leftist president on Monday called for new elections and the closure of Congress, buoyed by a vote that apparently gave his supporters a majority in a special assembly to overhaul the constitution.

President Rafael Correa says the new constitution will take power away from Ecuador's traditional political elite and pave the way for socialism, though he has not detailed his plans.

Taking a page from the playbook of leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, Correa asked the assembly to dissolve Congress and call elections for all offices, including his own. Chávez, Washington's most outspoken critic in Latin America, was first elected in 1998, and again in 2000 and 2006 under a new charter.

Correa, a 44-year-old former economy minister, won 72 of the 130 assembly's seats in Sunday's vote, according to a quick count by a local citizens' group. A simple majority would let his new political movement control the content of the draft constitution.

"It's the clearest, most conclusive victory in Latin America," Correa said Monday. Complete official results are expected to take at least 20 days.

Correa steamrolled over his foes to push through the election of an assembly that will have the power to dismiss any elected official, plunging the South American nation into a political crisis that led to the firing of more than half of the legislature in March.

On the campaign trail last year, Correa made overhauling the constitution his central issue, saying it is necessary to eliminate the power of traditional political parties which he blames for corruption and chronic instability. Correa is Ecuador's eighth president in a decade.

"There is an old power that's being knocked down," Correa said. "If they're scared, they should take a Valium."

Correa's opponents accuse him of seeking to inflate his own power, noting that he proposes letting presidents serve two consecutive four-year terms instead of the single term allowed now.

Correa denies he plans to maintain himself in power indefinitely, and said Sunday that his supporters would hold talks with any party interested in achieving a consensus on reforms.