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MEDIA OUTREACH

Press coverage of Venezuela's democracy strongly influences the public's perception of Venezuela and US foreign policy. It has never been more important to ensure that the press is balanced and fair when covering Venezuela. Here are some tips on how to effectively communicate the positive things happening in Venezuela or to explore factual inaccuracies in the press.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor should address and discuss recent news coverage. Letters can serve two purposes: to offer a counter-perspective backed by factual and personal experience to an unbalanced or inaccurate news piece, or to support positive press coverage.

Tips for Writing an Effective Letter

Adapted from FAIR and Rob Salzman's "Making the News"

- **Respond promptly.** Your letter will have more likelihood of being published if it is time relevant and responding to a news piece. Make sure you cite the article reference.
 - **Keep it short and concise.** Usually newspapers have a 150-200-word limit. The paper reserves the right to edit and shorten your letter to meet its format so it is important to begin your letter with your strongest point.
 - **Personalize it.** Briefly explain why this issue is important to you.
 - **Be polite.** In print, your passion for the issue may be misinterpreted. Never question or challenge a reporter's motives, rather, point out mis-statements and inaccuracies.
 - **Read the letters page.** This will help you get a sense of the kinds of letters the newspaper publishes.
 - **Include all of your information.** For verification purposes you must include your name, phone number, home and email address and your professional position or group affiliation (if it applies to the issue).
 - **Follow-up to see if your letter was received.**
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Below is an example of a letter published in the Washington Post on August 27, 2004 written in response to an inaccurate Op-ed published a week earlier.

**The Washington Post
Respect for Venezuela
Friday, August 27, 2004; Page A20**

In his Aug. 23 op-ed column, "Contained Revolution," Michael Shifter said that Venezuela's performance under President Hugo Chavez has been "dismal."

Throughout Mr. Chavez's time in office, the government has invested in the expansion of education and school lunch programs, health care, and subsidized food, building materials and credit for the poor.

On a recent visit to Caracas, I saw the government-run stores that were built in poor neighborhoods to provide food staples at below-market prices. I also saw the medical facilities and health services that the government provides free of charge.

Mr. Shifter did not mention that economic problems during Mr. Chavez's time in power are partly due to the business-led opposition, which has attempted to sabotage the government through capital flight, disinvestment and business lockouts. After the opposition lost the recent referendum by a large margin, opposition leaders continued their campaign of political destabilization by crying "fraud," though the Carter Center and the Organization of American States found no evidence of voting irregularities.

It's time for the U.S. political establishment to show the democratically elected government of Venezuela the respect that it deserves.

JUSTIN DELACOUR
Albuquerque

Press Release

A press release informs reporters about your event, report or issue. When writing your press release you should envision the news article that you would like to see published.

The Basics on Getting Your Release Read

Adapted from FAIR and Rob Salzman's "Making the News"

- The headline should be catchy and grab the readers attention.
- Include the most important information in the headline. This is the "hook" that will reel the reporter in.
- The headline can be up to four lines, including a sub-heading which should be concise and in bold text.
- Important information should immediately grab the reporters attention because most only take about 30 seconds to determine news relevance.
- Make your most important points in the beginning of the release.

The Format

- In the top left corner, type "For Immediate Release."
- Below this, type the date.
- Contact information should be in the top right corner. Include the name and numbers of the primary organizers.
- Place "###" at the end of your release. This is how journalists mark the end of their news copy.
- If your release is more than one page (should never exceed two), type "MORE" at the end of page one and include a short headline in the upper right-hand corner of the subsequent pages.
- Print your release on your organization's letterhead.

The Distribution

- A press release should be faxed the day before or the morning of your event.
- Fax the release to the appropriate reporter, editor and producer at each news outlet.
- Follow-up directly with the press contact.
- Have extra copies to re-fax. Often busy news rooms misplace paper.

Tips to Get Effective Coverage

- Keep the paragraphs short and concise. They should not be longer than three sentences.
- You can include "bullet" points if there are 3-5 that will grab the reporters attention
- Include an interesting and riveting quote from someone involved
- Include a short summary of your organization in the last paragraph,
- Mention "photo opportunity" if one will be available.
- Follow-up with the reporters after you have sent the release. This is your opportunity to "sell" it as newsworthy and to be the personal contact for the reporter.

Below is an example of a press release that received balanced press coverage and the actual article that was written about the event.

For Immediate Release

August 11, 2004

Contact: Venezuela Information Office, 202-347-8081

Former Democratic Presidential Candidates Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rep. Dennis Kucinich Announce Support for Venezuelan President Chavez

Political Leaders Joined by Actor Edward Asner and Historian Howard Zinn

Washington, DC — Jesse Jackson and Dennis Kucinich were joined by actors, historians and others in sending their support to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, just days before he faces a historic vote on the future of his administration.

Noting the accomplishments of the Chávez administration to improve the lives of Venezuela's impoverished majority, the joint letter expressed the signers' "hope and expectation that, on August 15, you will once again win an electoral mandate from the Venezuelan people to be their president."

Signed by a diverse sampling of well known Americans, including the Reverend Jesse Jackson and Congressman Dennis Kucinich, television star Edward Asner, and best-selling author Howard Zinn, the letter decried the role of the United States government in financing the opposition movement in Venezuela, including participants of a 2002 *coup d'état* that briefly ousted the democratically-elected president from power. The signers pledged to heal the strained relationships between the United States and Venezuela.

Despite Venezuela's vast oil wealth, nearly 80 percent of the country lives below the poverty level. President Chávez has expanded opportunities for all Venezuelans by using oil revenues to finance new schools, health clinics and national nutrition programs catering to the poor majority. In the past year alone, more than one million adults have been taught to read.

The president's term has been marked by fierce opposition from Venezuela's former ruling powers, including the 2002 coup and a national management-led oil strike that crippled the country's economy. This Sunday, the Venezuelan people will vote whether to allow the president to finish his term. Recent polls indicate that the majority of Venezuelans will once again vote in favor of their president.

The American letter is the latest in a series of solidarity statements from well-known figures around the world. In July, a group of 69 Latin American intellectuals, artists, and Nobel laureates signed a letter titled, "If I were a Venezuelan, I would vote for Hugo Chávez."

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The Venezuela Information Office is dedicated to informing the American public about contemporary Venezuela, and receives its funding from the government of Venezuela. Further information is available from the FARA office of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

Media Advisory

A media advisory serves several purposes. It offers reporters the “heads up” to an upcoming event and gives basic logistical information: the who, what, where, when and why. You should always distribute it a few days before the event.

The Basics on Getting Your Advisory Read

- The format is the same as the press release
- Include a catchy headline
- Provide a brief description of the event
- List the scheduled speakers attending
- Include a relevant quote about the event’s subject matter
- Provide contact information
- Mention any “photo opportunities”

The Distribution

- A media advisory should be faxed and followed-up with a phone call 3-5 days before the planned event
- Fax the advisory to the appropriate reporter, editor and producer at each news outlet
- Follow-up directly with the press contact
- Have extra copies to re-fax