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Venezuela's Opposition: Setting the Stage for Violence?

In recent months, Venezuela's powerful opposition has repeatedly suggested that violence is a viable solution to the country's political problems. *While the government of President Hugo Chávez has stated firmly that it will respect and adhere to the rule of law, the opposition has not followed suit.* Some of the recent statements made by opposition leaders including a former president, a leader of the 2002 coup, and military officials, are included below. These statements clearly indicate of the delicate nature of the situation:

On July 25, 2004, opposition leader and former President Carlos Andres Perez, who currently lives in the U.S., told Venezuela's El Nacional newspaper: "...[D]emonstrations don't topple governments... We can't abandon the streets. We must be in the streets, but not with dancing and idiocies like that... There will be violence...I am working to get Chavez out. Violence will permit his ouster. It is the only path we have... I am part of that battalion. As it sounds, it should be understood. I am part of this battalion...Chavez should die like a dog, that is what he deserves, begging the pardon of those noble animals..."

--"CAP rechaza el pasado y se considera el futuro: 'El 15 de agosto no se resolverá nada,'" by Ramon Hernandez, El Nacional, 25 de Julio de 2004

This was not the first time the former President has called for violence. On May 6, Perez told a Colombian radio journalist, "We are inclined to remove him from power, but we are convinced that the way to do that is not through peaceful means, but by force . . . all peaceful means to remove Chávez have been exhausted." Perez, who lives in exile in the United States, said that "there will be blood spilled."

--"Carlos Andrés Pérez insta a sacara Chávez por la fuerza" Associated Press, 6 May 2004

In an April 9 interview with the Miami Herald, retired General Felipe Rodríguez stated that his clandestine group, known as the Freedom Commandos, "are working to provoke a military-civilian uprising...[They] allegedly comprise 10-person cells spread across Venezuela."

--"Fugitive plots removal of Chávez" By Phil Gunson, The Miami Herald, 9 April 2004

On April 28 opposition leader Enrique Mendoza told reporters that if there is no recall referendum, "The whole world will see a people fighting in the streets..."

--"Venezuela Opposition Will Confirm 1M Names In Recall Push" Associated Press, 28 April 2004

On Saturday March 28, 2004 coup leader Carlos Ortega told a rally in Miami, "I will return to Venezuela. . . in secret, to fight for the liberation of Venezuela."

--"Un líder anuncia regreso clandestino a Venezuela" By Casto Ocando, El Nuevo Herald, 28 March 2004

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.