

United Nations Officials Hail 'strong leadership', dedication of late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez

March 13, 2013

UN Dept. of Public Information

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2013/ga11345.doc.htm>

Speakers Praise Leader's Advocacy on Behalf of World's Poorest People; Assembly also Adopts Resolution on United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and General Assembly President Vuk Jeremić joined delegates from around the world today in hailing the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Frías for his strong leadership, commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and advocacy on behalf of the world's poorest.

“President Chávez was one of those leaders who made a difference in his country, the region and the world,” Mr. Ban said during a General Assembly meeting to honour the late President, who died of cancer on 5 March at the age of 58. The Assembly also observed a minute of silence.

Secretary-General Ban lauded Mr. Chávez for giving a voice to the world's most vulnerable people, providing crucial aid to Haiti after its devastating 2010 earthquake, contributing to peace talks in Colombia between that country's Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces, and providing a decisive impetus for regional integration in Latin America.

Progress in that area was clear, as illustrated by the Permanent Observer status granted to the Union of South American Nations, known as UNASUR, in 2011, Mr. Ban said. As regional integration progressed, Mr. Chávez's role in promoting unity in Latin America and the Caribbean would be remembered.

Mr. Jeremić praised Mr. Chávez's commitment to social justice and improving the lives of Venezuelans. Under his leadership, Venezuela had made great strides in fulfilling the Millennium Goals and its poverty rate had dropped from over 70 per cent at the end of the twentieth century to around 20 per cent today. “He was a man who came from humble beginnings [...] this helped him better understand and feel the pain and privations of ordinary Venezuelans,” he said.

President Chávez was a strong proponent for revitalizing the United Nations and a vocal advocate of the global South. His effort to deepen Latin American integration led to the establishment or strengthening of organizations such as Petrosur, Petrocaribe, Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, UNASUR and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, he said.

Elías Jaua Milano, Venezuela's Minister for Foreign Affairs, speaking on behalf of interim President Nicolás Maduro Moros, said Mr. Chávez was a humanist and a "transcendental man" who dedicated his life to advancing the Simon Bolivar revolution. Coming to office in 1999 by popular vote, Mr. Chavez was re-elected three times, surviving three coups d'état and several assassination attempts by imperialists. "He died victorious," he said, stressing that "the struggle lives on!"

Under the late President's leadership, Venezuela broke free of the reigns of the "imperialist North", moved towards a free-trade agreement in the Americas and adopted a sovereign, independent foreign policy, Mr. Jaua Milano said. Mr. Chávez was a great force in the region, spearheading creation of the South America-Africa Cooperation Forum, the South America-Arab Forum and Petrocaribe, as well as strengthening the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). At the United Nations, he had helped strengthen the Group of 77 developing countries and China and the Non-Aligned Movement empower socialism and break the "Washington consensus."

The late leader also told the world it could not remain insensitive to the harsh plight of the Palestinians, and that Palestinian statehood and full United Nations membership was a historic debt of the Organization, Mr. Jaua Milano said. The United Nations and international financial institutions must be revamped to truly represent all of the world's people and to halt the exploitation of nature and people of the South. In 2006, Mr. Chávez stressed the need to enlarge the Security Council, strengthen the General Assembly and give the South a greater voice in both.

Mr. Jaua Milano credited Mr. Chávez with reducing extreme poverty in Venezuela to 6 per cent, eradicating hunger and illiteracy, protecting the environment and providing universal access to information and communications technology — leaving a "benchmark" for the world's oppressed people. Far-right groups attempting to disrupt the tranquillity of Venezuelan society would not prevail. The Venezuelan people alone would decide on 14 April 2013, Election Day, who would be Venezuela's next president. Mr. Jaua Milano expressed confidence that they would ratify the 1999 Constitution — presented by Mr. Chávez during the 7 October 2012 elections.

The representative of Chad, speaking on behalf of the African Group, bowed before the memory of “this worthy son” of Venezuela, whose passing was painfully premature. Still, Mr. Chavez’s leadership and service in international affairs would not be futile. History would remember him as an advocate of the poor and would live on the lives of millions of Africans. The bond between Venezuela and Africa was very strong, as illustrated by the myriad of partnerships Mr. Chávez inspired to help better the lives of ordinary people.

The representative of Qatar, speaking on behalf of the Asia-Pacific States, cited World Bank data, which stated the benefits Chávez’s leadership had on Venezuela’s citizens’ access to education and poverty reduction. Mr. Chávez stood by his commitment to give citizens vital health care and energy services and advocated for oppressed people worldwide. The fact that so many people attended his funeral showed how much he would be missed by his dear friends and colleagues and that his memory would live on.

The representative of Saint Lucia, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, described Mr. Chávez as a man of “enormous character and vision”. His bold and imaginative measures had met the formidable challenges of development which were caused by high energy costs. Mr. Chávez believed his country’s resources were to be shared to promote his people’s collective development and that of the region as a whole. One of his major successes was the widening of public participation in the socioeconomic and democratic space.

Fiji’s representative, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said Mr. Chávez’s voice predated the world’s vision and under his vision Venezuela moved towards prosperity. The late leader, shaped by his own experience growing up poor, was unafraid to achieve his goals of providing housing, education and health care. “He reminded us that real progress could only be sustainable if benefits would be accrued by all and not just the privileged,” the representative said, saying Chávez’s moral values for social justice would serve as a source of inspiration.

Iran’s representative, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said Mr. Chávez would be remembered as a friend of the Movement and for putting into place policies that would improve the lives of millions of people as well as for his commitment to a just world order that would best respect international law, sovereignty, equal rights of States and self-determination of people.

Cuba’s representative, speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, hailed Mr. Chávez’s untiring dedication to eradicating poverty and

inequality and his tireless work to achieve a united, safe and more equal Latin America and Caribbean region. The late leader would be remembered as an honest, bold and clear-sighted revolutionary who “reincarnated Bolivar to complete his work”. Hugo Chávez died undefeated; he acted in the face of imperialism and always defended the world’s most marginalized. Cuba would remain eternally loyal to Mr. Chávez’s vision and carry on to his ideals in solidarity.

The representative of Peru, speaking on behalf of UNASUR, expressed deepest grief of the passing of the “champion” of the unity and integration of South America. He assured the Assembly that Mr. Chávez would live on in the collective memory of the people as a symbol of a generation of statesmen who promoted unity.

The representative of Guyana, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said Mr. Chávez’s vision of bringing together the region’s people was driven by his deep sense of concern for the well-being of its most disadvantaged citizens. Mr. Chávez’s advocacy for South-South cooperation and self-reliance was a bold and determined appeal for sustainable development and economic prosperity in developing countries. It challenged leaders to combat inequality and injustice at the individual, national, regional and international levels and work for the common good. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, Union of South American Nations, PetroCaribe, and Petrosur served as testimony to his work. Chávez left an “indelible” imprint on Latin America and the Caribbean.

The representative of Bolivia, speaking on behalf of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, praised Mr. Chávez’s willingness to speak out for social justice, put his heart and soul into the service of liberating people, and, along with Fidel Castro, fight imperialism and unilateralism. The world was a better place today because of Mr. Chávez. “He knew that poverty is the first enemy to be defeated... the world must learn from him,” the representative said, noting that Mr. Chavez was the driving force behind creation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, the Bank of the South, and South-South cooperation in medicine and education.

The representative of Uruguay, speaking on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), hailed Mr. Chávez as the founder of the modern democratic State of Venezuela, a main player in Latin American integration, an irreplaceable figure of the twenty-first century, and as one of what Bertolt Brecht called “the indispensable ones”. Mr. Chávez worked to make the world a fairer place for all humanity, free of domination and oppression. Achieving those goals was an imperative.

Egypt's representative said the Arab world would never forget Ms. Chávez's principled positions on and solidarity with Palestine and the occupied Arab territories. Echoing those sentiments, Syria's representative praised Mr. Chávez's stance on the Occupied Syrian Golan and support for the Syrian Government and people, for whom his passing was a great loss.

Also paying tribute to Mr. Chávez today were representatives of Moldova (on behalf of Eastern European States), Finland (on behalf of the Western European and other States), Chile, Seychelles, Argentina, El Salvador, Belarus and Brazil.

Following the tribute to Mr. Chávez, the Assembly decided to change the designation of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP, adopting by consensus a draft resolution to that effect.

After that action, the representatives of Brazil and Viet Nam lauded the change, saying the new designation, called for by the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development — “Rio+20” — would better reflect the body's universal character and make it more inclusive. Brazil's representative noted with concern, however, that the decision had been submitted directly to the Assembly plenary without discussion of the Governing Council's report by the Economic and Social Council or the Second Committee (Economic and Financial).

Indonesia's representative also noted her delegation's concerns about procedural matters had led to the Assembly's consideration of the matter. She also stressed that it was her delegation's view that the Assembly could not “pick and choose” the decisions it took regarding the UNEP Governing Council that had emanated from the Rio+20 conference.