

Venezuela Strengthens Ties with Central America

By [Global Research](#)

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Following a three-day whirlwind tour of Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, Venezuela's President Chavez returned today with strengthened ties between Venezuela and these Central American countries. During his trip, Chavez issued more statements on the troubled relationship between Venezuela and Colombia.

Chavez's first stop, on Monday, was Guatemala, where he attended the swearing in ceremony of the recently elected Guatemalan President, Alvaro Colom. Following a meeting with Colom, Chavez said that the two presidents had agreed to prepare a cooperation project in the areas of energy and social policy.

Next, Chavez travelled to Honduras, which was his first trip to this Central American country. There he met with President José Manuel Zelaya, who had invited him when the two met at the swearing in ceremony of Argentina's recently elected President Cristina Fernandez.

During their meeting, Chavez and Zelaya agreed that Honduras should join Petrocaribe, the energy association that Venezuela started in 2004 for Caribbean nations. Members of Petrocaribe may purchase Venezuelan oil with generous financing arrangements, whereby they pay off a portion of their oil bills over a 25-year period at 1% interest, among other benefits.

During his visit to Honduras, Chavez announced that on December 27 of last year, Venezuela forgave Honduras's entire debt to Venezuela, of \$30 million, which it has owed since the 1980's. "We would be insensitive if we were to demand repayment for this debt," said Chavez.

Zelaya described Chavez as a "great man" who is the "most dignified" and "brave" representative of Simon Bolivar in the 21st century.

While in Honduras Chavez also received a plaque in recognition for Venezuela's Mission Miracle, which has provided free eye surgery to over a thousand Hondurans.

Chavez's next stop was Nicaragua, where he arrived Tuesday night, to meet with President Daniel Ortega, and the two first had a meeting with leaders from eleven of Nicaragua's chambers of commerce.

As part of Nicaragua's membership in the regional association known as ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for Our America), Chavez announced that Nicaragua will soon be receiving electric power generators, from Cuba. These generators will generate 60 megawatts of power, in addition to the 60 megawatts that the generators produce that were delivered in 2007. By the end of 2008 another 120 megawatts of power generation will be delivered to

Nicaragua.

During his meeting with Daniel Ortega, President Chavez proposed that a new association of Caribbean nations ought to be launched for the production and commercialization of food in the region, which could be called "Alcaribe" or Alimentos del Caribe (Food of the Caribbean).

Chavez Condemns FARC Kidnappings, Calls for FARC Recognition

In the course of his meeting with Ortega and Nicaraguan businesses, Chavez read aloud a press report about a complaint of Colombia's foreign minister, that Venezuela is intervening in Colombia's internal affairs. According to the report, by calling on Colombia and other countries to recognize the Colombian guerrilla forces as insurgent armies and not as terrorists.

Chavez responded by saying that he would continue to issue a call for the recognition of the Colombian FARC and ELN guerrilla forces because this is the only way that peace will be achieved in Colombia and that "Venezuela is suffering much from this conflict [in Colombia]."

A recognition of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), explained Chavez, would mean that the FARC would have to abide by the Geneva protocols, which means that kidnappings and terrorist attacks would be automatically condemned.

Chavez reiterated his own condemnation, which he first made last week, of the FARC's actions that go against human dignity, such as "kidnappings and any terrorist acts." However, the Colombian conflict will not be resolved through violence, emphasized Chavez. "They [the Colombian government] have not been able to do so in 60 years [of the conflict] and they will not be able to do so in another 600 years, just as I do not believe that the guerilla will be able to take power by force of arms," said Chavez.

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