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The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

I would like to take this opportunity to respectfully urge you to condemn Hugo Chavez's recent actions against the people of Venezuela and to request that Ambassador Carmen Lomellin, as the U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States (OAS), raise Mr. Chavez's actions as violations of the Inter-American Democratic Charter at the next session of the OAS.

As you know, on January 24th, without any semblance of due process or judicial mediation, Hugo Chavez ordered RCTV television and several other stations off the air. As one of the few remaining television stations critical of Chavez's government, RCTV has been a frequent target of his unabashed assault on media freedom in Venezuela. This most recent incident was just another step in his crusade to stifle any type of public dissent or freedom of speech in that country.

Thousands of students have taken to the streets to protest this action. Unfortunately, rather than listen to their concerns, Chavez's response has been to provoke confrontation and violence. He condoned the use of excessive force by the police against these young students and has encouraged his supporters to confront them, as if the streets of Caracas were a "battlefield." Already two lives have been lost and dozens more have been injured.

The United States must be unequivocal in our rejection of Hugo Chavez's recent actions. Further, the Inter-American Democratic Charter clearly states that "freedom of expression and of the press are essential components of the exercise of democracy." Consequently, it is incumbent upon the OAS to seize this opportunity to support the people of Venezuela and condemn Chavez's actions if it is ever again to regain its role as a purveyor of representative democracy.

With this in mind, and within all applicable rules and guidelines, I would like to again urge you to issue a strong statement condemning Chavez's recent actions and request that Ambassador Lomellin raise these events as a violation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter at the next session of the OAS.

Sincerely,



ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Ranking Member

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, FLORIDA
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER

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