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Venezuela

Response to Information Request Number:	VEN03005.ZMI/ZNK
Date:	April 28, 2003
Subject:	Venezuela: Information on Threats by Bolivarian Circles
From:	CIS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Venezuela / Journalists / Political opposition / Threats

Query:

Have opponents of the Chavez government been threatened by Bolivarian Circles? If so, have the Bolivarian Circles acted on these threats?

Response:

According to sources available to the RIC, there have been a few reported instances of Bolivarian Circles making threats against groups or individuals, apart from their actions during street protests.

The U.S. Department of State annual human rights report covering 2002 states that members of the political opposition received death threats and were the victims of intimidation by government supporters. With specific regard to the Bolivarian Circles, one instance was cited: COFAVIC, a Caracas NGO that works on behalf of victims of violence, received email and telephone threats beginning in January 2002 from Bolivarian Circles and persons who identified themselves as supporters of President Hugo Chavez. The Attorney General and the Human Rights Ombudsman did not pursue requests by COFAVIC for investigations of such harassment. In May COFAVIC filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR-OAS). The IACHR recommended that the Venezuelan government provide police protection to COFAVIC's offices and director. It also called for the government to investigate COFAVIC's claims and to speak out against the intimidation of human rights organizations (USDOS 2003).

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The BBC reported in June 2002 that Ernesto Alvarenga, a founder of the Bolivarian Circles who left them, began to criticize the Circles and joined the political opposition. Alvarenga said he had received numerous death threats to try to stop him from speaking out against the Circles, and that twice that month bombs had been planted anonymously in his Caracas office. The first bomb did not go off. The second did, but without causing injuries (Morsbach 12 Jun 2002).

The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) and the International Press Institute (IPI), following a September 2002 visit to Venezuela, linked intimidation and death threats against Venezuelan journalists to Bolivarian Circles, but did not cite any specific instances (IFEX 27 Sep 2002).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

Morsbach, Greg. BBC News. "Chavez Accused of Fostering Militia Links" (Caracas, 12 Jun 2002), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/Americas/2038827.stm>.

International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX). "Press Release/Alert: IAPA and IPI Mission Expresses Deep Concern About the Serious Deterioration of Press Freedom in Venezuela" (27 Sep 2002), <http://www.ifex.org/alerts/view.html?id=11307>.

U.S. Department of State (USDOS). COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES FOR 2002. "Venezuela" (Washington, DC: Mar 2003).

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