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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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23 May 2008

VEN102850.E

Venezuela: Movement to Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS); its leadership, number of members; current status and treatment by authorities; whether Leopoldo Puchi is MAS secretary general (2005-2008)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Movement to Socialism, whose name is also translated as Movement towards Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS), is a democratic socialist party that was established in 1969 (*World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties* 2006, 1496) or in 1971 (*Political Parties of the World* 2005, 651; *PHW 2008* 2008, 1474). Various sources noted that in 1998, despite internal disagreement amongst its leadership, MAS decided to support Hugo Chavez during the presidential election (*Political Parties of the World* 2005, 651; *PHW 2008* 2008, 1474; *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties* 2006, 1496). After the 1998 elections however, MAS "became increasingly critical of the government's refusal to negotiate with its opponents" (*ibid.*). The relationship between MAS and Chavez's ruling Fifth Republic Movement (Movimiento Quinta Republica, MVR) party began to falter in 2001 when President Chavez announced that he was considering declaring a state of emergency and assuming emergency powers (*Political Parties of the World* 2005, 651; *PHW 2008* 2008, 1474). In 2001, Chavez reportedly requested MAS to leave the ruling coalition (*ibid.*; *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties* 2006, 1496).

Sources reported slightly contrasting information about MAS following its separation from Chavez. According to *Political Parties of the World*, the "official MAS party moved into the CD [Democratic Coordinator (Coordinadora Democrática)] opposition alliance..." (2005, 651). On the other hand, the *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties* reported that in 2002, "MAS formally split, with one section of the party (MAS Oficial or Official MAS) opting to support the MVR in the legislature and another forming part of the opposition" (2006, 1496).

In 16 May 2008 correspondence, a University of Notre Dame professor specializing in Venezuelan politics explained the situation as follows:

The MAS is one of the principal opposition parties in Venezuela. In 1998, it was allied with current President Hugo Chavez Frias. However, soon afterwards a few of its leaders went into the opposition, and most of the rest of the party followed in 2002. Most of the MAS boycotted the 2005 national elections for the National Assembly, and therefore has no deputies representing it. (The few MAS leaders who ran failed to win seats.) As a consequence, it will have to gather signatures in a petition in order to re-establish its registration if it wishes to participate in the next legislative elections. MAS backed opposition presidential candidate Manuel Rosales in 2006. Its membership has been shrinking. I do not have access to the number of members. However, MAS won nearly 11 percent of the vote in 1993, nearly 9 percent of the vote in 1998, and 5.12 percent of the vote in 2000.

Regarding the treatment of MAS by authorities, the Professor indicated that:

Selected members of all opposition parties, including MAS, have been targeted by the government and government supporters for various types of persecution, ranging from discrimination in hiring and contracts to beatings and death threats. (16 May 2008)

The United States (US) Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007* also notes that "...official harassment...of the political opposition continued to characterize the human rights situation during the year" (11 Mar. 2008).

Recent sources identify Leopoldo Puchi as MAS secretary general (*PHW 2008* 2008, 1474; Professor 16 May 2008; see also *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 651). According to the Professor, Puchi was secretary general in 2007 (16 May 2008). A January 2008 article in the Venezuela-based newspaper *El Tiempo* mentions that Leopoldo Puchi was MAS secretary general at that time (21 Jan. 2008).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

*Political Handbook of the World 2008 (PHW 2008)*. 2008. "Venezuela." Edited by Arthur S. Banks, Thomas C. Fuller and William R. Overstreet. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

*Political Parties of the World*. 24 January 2005. 6th ed. "Venezuela." Edited by Bogdan Szajkowski. London: John Harper Publishing.

Professor, University of Notre Dame, Indiana. 16 May 2008. Correspondence.

*El Tiempo* [Puerto La Cruz, Anzoategui]. 21 January 2008. Jeralin Carrero Anez. "Para el MAS Chavez fracaso en seguridad y abastecimiento." <<http://www.eltiempo.com.ve/noticias/default.asp?id=137469>> [Accessed 20 May 2008]

United States (US). 11 March 2008. Department of State. "Venezuela." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007*. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100657.htm>> [Accessed 20 May 2008]

*World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties*. 2006. "Venezuela." Vol. III. 4th edition. Edited by Schlager & Weisblatt. New York: Facts On File.

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Two professors specializing in Venezuelan politics did not respond within the time constraints of this Response.

**Publication:** *Europa World Year Book*

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), ElectionGuide, Factiva, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), Political Database of the Americas, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees -- Refworld, Venezuela Analysis, World News Connection (WNC).

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