

Presentation of the book

Apartheid in the XXI Century

Information
Technology
at the
Service
of Political
Discrimination
in Venezuela



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"Your vote is secret, your signature is not". More than a campaign slogan this was the threat the Venezuelan government brandished in 2004 against those who wished to sign a petition requesting a presidential recall referendum. In spite of the fact that the possibility to hold a referendum to recall all publicly elected government officials - including the President of the Republic - is contemplated in Article 72 of the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution, on October 16, 2003, during the signatures' gathering process, the President stated: "Those who sign against Chávez are not really signing against Chávez ...they are signing against the homeland, the future, and will go on record for history".

The President and his government fulfilled that threat. The exclusion of those who signed, as documented in this book, has been carried out with the collaboration of all branches of government. This book tells the story of a novel crime that violates Venezuela's Constitution and fundamental human rights and dignity.

In November 2003, in spite of the countless obstacles put forth by a National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral, CNE) clearly partial to the Executive (many signa-



(based on participation and leadership by the people), combined with the most advanced information technology, begot a monster out of George Orwell's 1984 novel. The information apartheid of the XXI Century was born in Venezuela.

How could a congressman obtain the confidential information voters had consigned with the National Electoral Council? As the documents here presented will reveal, it was President Hugo Chávez himself who instructed the president of the CNE, through a letter dated January 20, 2004, to hand over to Congressman Luis Tascón the list of signatures with their confidential data. In those days the congressman from the government's party, the MVR, was a

tories had to sign up to 4 times) 3,448,747 signatures were gathered to request the Presidential Recall Referendum. These signatures represented 29% of the electorate, above the 20% established by the Constitution. No one in his/her right mind could have even suspected that the full list of signatures, with the names and identification card numbers of the signatories, would be published on the internet by a pro-government congressman, to be used as a weapon of political discrimination. Paradoxically, a constitution participativa and protagónica

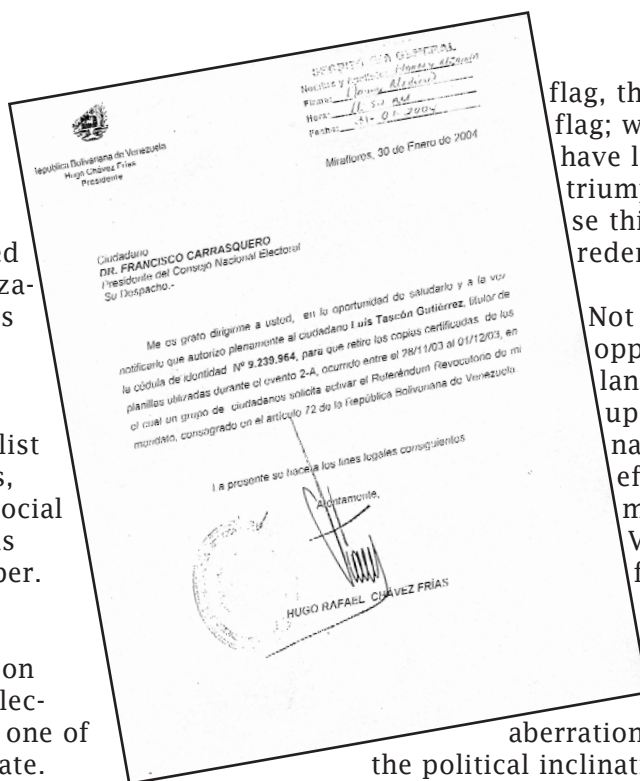
member of the Comando Ayacucho, a group created to campaign for the president during the recall referendum process.

Later, that information was enriched with data from other public organizations to produce other lists, such as the infamous Maisanta list, which comprises most of the 16 million Venezuelans registered in the Permanent Electoral Register. This list contains their electoral preferences, participation in the government's social programs and personal data such as name, address and telephone number.

The report issued by the European Union's Electoral Observation Mission following the 2005 congressional elections, refers to the Maisanta list as one of the causes of the high abstention rate.

The testimonials of the victims of the Tascón list and of the other many lists it spawned are included in this book. In our grass-roots gathering of documentation we learned that the lists are many. They multiply because they are the tangible expression of a regime that makes political dissent a crime.

These lists exist because division and segregation are systematic policies of the Venezuelan government. On February 20, 2003, one and a half years before the Recall Referendum, President Chávez, referring to the opposition, said: "...We stand on moral grounds, they do not; we have a



flag, they do not, they are not worthy of our flag; we have a homeland, we have dreams, we have love, they have hate, and love will triumph over hate. God is on our side because this is God's way, the path to peoples' redemption..."

Not only does the President divest the opposition of the nation's flag, the homeland and any moral standing, he also calls upon God to be his ally in the revolutionary process. It is not easy to evaluate the effect of the President's segregationist message on each and every one of Venezuela's 26 million people. The manifestations of this division have become dangerously embedded in the country's everyday life. In this book we wish to ring an alarm bell in this regard. In March 2006, very few considered it an

aberration the use of the Maisanta list to identify the political inclinations of the members of the committee responsible for selecting the new members of the National Electoral Council. The committee's members' political leanings were published in the press to confirm that the great majority of the CNE's new members were pro-government, as they had not signed the petition for a presidential recall referendum.

In this book we bear proof of several other lists besides the Tascón and Maisanta list that have been drawn by different governmental bodies in order to segregate people. To this effect, several levels of categorizations have been devised: "hard core chavista", "light chavista", "hard core opponent"

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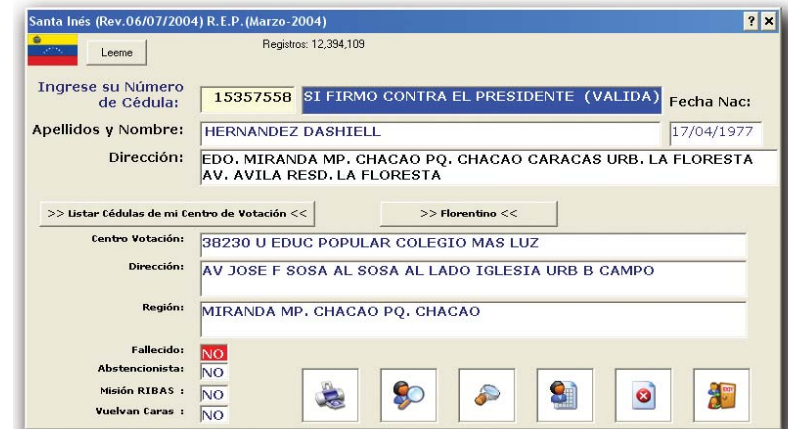
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“take a look and let the faces come out, there it is, www.luistascon.com, click there”

Hugo Chávez
 Presidente de la República
 Febrero 15, 2004

and "light opponent". Among the many lists, we mention the lists drawn within the Deposit Guarantee and Banking Insurance Fund (FOGADE), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Institute of Scientific and Technological Research, the Caroní Electric Company. All of them have been exhibited in offices and elevators, labeling the signatories of the referendum as traitors. As the many testimonials included in the book indicate, these lists are used on a daily basis to grant or deny public contracts, fire employees and workers, delay the delivery of official documents or refuse access to the government's social programs. Today a simple computer with any of these data in a hospital, school, ministry, public enterprise, registry office or court is enough to affect the life of thousands of Venezuelans.

As public opinion against these practices mounted, in April 2005, President Hugo Chávez publicly called for the "burying" of the list published by the pro-government congressman Luis Tascón, since it had "already fulfilled its purpose". This presidential statement reveals clearly that the list was originally published with a political objective that he himself had promoted. On February 15, 2004, Chávez, in one of his television broadcasts, had urged the people to "take a look and let the faces come out, there it is, www.luistascon.com, click there".



Maisanta List

con.com, click there". With the list on cyberspace and in thousand of disks, there was no way to bury the list, let alone the practices that government officials made of it.

The book comprises twelve chapters and a prologue written by the well known Venezuelan historian and diplomat Simón Alberto Consalvi. The first chapter describes how Venezuela - traditionally described as Latin America's most stable demo-

cracy - descended into the most serious political confrontation and radicalization in its modern history. The events of April 2002 and the general strike of December 2002-January 2003 convinced many in society that a democratic and constitutional solution was needed to address the country's problems. That initiative led to the political agreement to carry out a Presidential Recall Referendum. The story of thousands of Venezuelans who organized themselves to insure this democratic outcome is told briefly in the first chapter.

The second chapter examines how Venezuelans were taken by surprise by political discrimination and the information apartheid. After more than forty years of democracy, Venezuelans witnessed with disbelief the wall of intolerance and division that was being built between them; only because they chose exercise a constitutional right. Chapters 3 to 11 describe what happened within Petróleos de Venezuela, the Metro de Caracas, the health sector, the education sector, the Deposit Guarantee and Banking Insurance Fund (FOGADE), the National Electoral Council (CNE), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military. Each of these chapters describes the hardships suffered by those signatories of the Presidential Recall Referendum who worked in these governmental offices. They also include testimonials of the victims of such discrimination, together with quotes from high public officials - ministers, vice-ministers and directors - that reveal their complicity in different acts of discrimination against those who signed in favor of the Referendum. Finally, Chapter XII presents the statement issued by the Inter American Human Rights Commission on the novel practice of political discrimination in Venezuela.

This book does not review all the cases of segregation and intolerance in Venezuela. It could not possibly do so.



Luis Tascón
living the
Electoral
National
Council

Discrimination occurs on a daily basis throughout the country. According to the Federation of Public Sector Employees (FUDEUNEP), discrimination has occurred in at least 27 public sector bodies: people fired, harassed or moved for having signed. None of these victims of discrimination has found justice in Venezuela's courts of law. Because of this, they have had to appeal to the International Labor Organization (ILO) and to the Inter American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC), as the Commission's 2006 report highlights. The IAHRC "expresses its concern regarding the existence of a tendency to intimidate, harass and stigmatize people and organizations that voice their disa-

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"I remember having signed an official request to the National Electoral Council requesting copies of the signed forms submitted by the opposition"

Hugo Chávez
Presidente de la República
Aló Presidente Nro. 180



greement with government policies or officials". According to the report, discrimination also affects those who have not signed the Presidential Recall Referendum, but dare to disagree with government policies.

We cannot leave out from this brief presentation the impact discrimination has had on the electoral process. The fear of cyber lists in a country where the voting system is totally automatic and complemented by fingerprint detecting machines, is threatening the right to vote.

Allow me to conclude with my opening sentence: "Your vote is secret, your signature is not". As long as political discrimination is exercised as state policy, no new referendum will ever be possible again for fear of being added to yet another list. To this we must add the general mistrust of the electoral institution, whose foundations of legitimacy, the secret ballot and abidance of results, whoever may win the elections, is being questioned.

This book is intended as a testimony for history and as a tribute to the millions of heroes who succeeded in overcoming their most intimate fears. It is also a tribute to those who, for different reasons, had to keep silent and endure the darkest of prisons: the indignity of being forced to live renouncing one's own convictions.