



VENEZUELAN NEWS

17 Jan. 2014 / N° 10

VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT NICOLAS MADURO HAS ORDERED A RESTRUCTURING OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS RELATED TO THE ECONOMY AND CONSUMER PROTECTION DURING HIS STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

16/01/2014 Venezuelanalysis.com – Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro has ordered a restructuring of public institutions related to the economy and consumer protection during a speech to the nation.

The shake-up came less than a week after Maduro reshuffled his cabinet, appointing new ministers in the areas of labour, industry, education, higher education, sport, youth and the chief of staff.

During the annual state of the nation address delivered to the National Assembly (AN) yesterday, Maduro also warned he would use an “iron fist” to deliver harsher penalties for “sabotage and speculation”.

“We fully understand what...it's going to be cost to make the Venezuelan economy fortified and sustainable in promoting jobs, diversification of our productive enterprises in providing value to our goods and in socializing the means of production,” Maduro stated during the address.

This was his first state of the nation speech since being elected last April.

The president issued a defiant warning to his opponents, to not underestimate him. “For those that underestimate me from the left and the extreme right, I say that I’m a socialist and I know what I’m doing,” he stated.

The president also defied predictions that he would devalue the bolivar currency, stating that the current fixed exchange rate will be kept in place for a “long time forward”. “Venezuela has sufficient resources to keep the foreign exchange [rate] at [Bs] 6.30 to the dollar,” Maduro stated.

“We will continue fighting [the currency black-market]...Sicad will fulfill its function,” he said, referring to the Complimentary System of Foreign Currency Acquirement (Sicad). Established last year, Sicad holds foreign currency auctions for individuals and businesses, selling dollars at a higher rate than the fixed exchange value.





Sicad was originally intended to operate parallel to the Foreign Exchange Administration Commission (Cadivi), which used to be the main government body that regulated the distribution of foreign currency. However, yesterday Maduro announced that Cadivi will be merged with the recently announced National Centre of Exterior Commerce. He also named Commerce Minister Alejandro Fleming as the head of the new centre.

The public banking ministry has also been folded into the finance ministry, which will now be headed by current Minister of Public Banking Rodolfo Marco. Marco replaces Nelson Merentes, who had been moved from the BCV in April. Merentes was widely viewed as more market-friendly than his predecessor. At the time, Merentes had been urged by Maduro to produce “achieve single digit inflation” within three years. Merentes will now resume his former position heading the BCV. Last year Venezuela's annual inflation rate was around 56%.

Maduro called on Marco to oversee the construction of “a new financial model that can allow for all these investments that we need, that will allow the expansion of a financial system at the service of the country”. Along with heading the banking ministry, Marco has also previously managed the state-owned Banco de Venezuela.

Institutions for the protection of consumers merge

The Institute for the Defence of the People's Access to Goods and Services (Indepabis) and the National Superintendency for Fair Costs and Prices (Sundecop) will also be merged into a single institution, to be headed by Minister for Women and Gender Equality Andreina Tarazon.

Since being taken over by Eduardo Saman last June, Indepabis has undertaken a nationwide crackdown on price gouging and violations of price controls. Saman was appointed with a mandate to clean up Indepabis to after an alleged extortion ring was discovered operating within the institution. However, in July Saman had some of his authority revoked after he dismissed a number of Indepabis regional heads.

Speculation

Despite describing Venezuela's economic growth in 2013 as “very successful”, Maduro stated that he intends to deepen reform to counter what he describes as an “economic war”. Venezuela's economy grew by 1.4% in the first three quarters of 2013.

However, Maduro stated that 99% of businesses inspected by authorities last year were inappropriately pricing goods, with “no economic explanation”.

The next law Maduro says he intends to pass with his decree powers will cap businesses' profit margins to 30%. The law will be drafted in the coming days, according to the president.





Maduro was handed presidential decree powers under the Enabling Law by the National Assembly last November.

A statement released by the National Assembly following the enacting of the Enabling Law said that Maduro had been empowered to pass legislation to “fight corruption, usury, money laundering and the economic war unleashed in recent times against the country by the national oligarchy”. “While the government makes a big effort to guarantee the quality of some services and the availability of products, the mafias speculate with other products and even medicines,” he stated.

Maduro pledged to continue to use his decree powers to counter “both abuse and outrages” of the economy in 2014, and stated he would put price gougers “behind bars” with tougher penalties for “sabotage and speculation”.

“With the economic war the bourgeoisie have shown a cruelty that is comparable only to the acts of 2002,” Maduro stated, referring to shortages of consumer goods ranging from milk to cooking oil and toilet paper. “How can you describe someone who hides formula milk for babies [from supermarket shelves]? We cannot create a new euphemism for that,” he stated. “That person must be described as a criminal,” Maduro said.

“There won’t be any forgiveness to those who keep robbing the people...they’re speculating with food and medicine,” he said.

Investment Plan

Along with promising to chastise businesses that act inappropriately, Maduro also stated his government aims to coax foreign investors to Venezuela. According to Maduro, the government's plan will focus on promoting investment in 11 key areas, including: petroleum, petrochemicals, construction, industry, agriculture, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, textiles, mining and communication.

“I call to all national and international entrepreneurs who are investing in Venezuela,” he said.

Some incentives will be provided to investors, though Maduro didn't go into details.

He also stated Bs 25.5 billion would be invested in public works nationwide in the coming years.





Media and Security

In yet another announcement during the speech, Maduro called for a national review of the country's media landscape. The president accused the private media of promoting “guns, drugs, violence and betrayal”.

Minister for Communication and Information Delcy Rodríguez along with the board of the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) were ordered to undertake an official review, while the president also called for a public debate on the media and violence.

“I think there needs to be an honest, open discussion, open debate,” he stated.

Earlier this week the president slammed Venezuela's media for turning former Miss Venezuela Monica Spear's murder into a “show”.

Maduro also stated he would strengthen his government's anti-crime and anti-violence initiatives, including the Safe Homeland Plan. “I call upon young men to be able to challenge and demolish the culture of violence, drugs, individualism, hatred and greed,” he stated. He also urged all governors and mayors to back the Safe Homeland Plan, regardless of political affiliation.

“We have to be building peace for communities, families; peace grounded in values of respect for life, coexistence, social peace based on a new culture that overcomes the negative values of the culture of death, greed, ambition and wealth that are given to us by the great national and international media,” Maduro said.

“We'll build a culture of work, overcome consumerism as social deviance and cast a solid foundation for socialism of the 21st Century,” he said.

Maduro also devoted a portion of his speech to reflecting on last year.

“2013 was a year of love, loyalty and victory over pain and difficulties. We turned grief into strength and life in joy,” Maduro stated.

Referring to the April and December elections, Maduro stated that “democracy is only meaningful if it meets the needs of the people and not the accumulation of wealth”.

The president pointed to the death of his predecessor Hugo Chavez as a low point in the year, but emphasized that the Bolivarian Revolution would continue nonetheless.





"The enemies of Hugo Chavez were wrong, the great revolution did not vanish [when Chavez died]," he stated.

VENEZUELA WILLING TO RESUME DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

Caracas, 15/1/2014 (MPPRE).-"Venezuela wants to have fluid relations based on mutual respect with the U.S. Government. We are ready and prepared to sit down at any conversations table to discuss bilateral issues and see if at some point we can achieve an optimal point for positive relations with the US Government". Said President Nicolas Maduro, during the presentation of his state of the Nation address and recalled that at the beginning of June, 2013 in the sidelines of the 43 Assembly General of the Organization of American States (OAS) - the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Elías Jaua, held a cordial and candid meeting with the American Secretary of State, John Kerry, where he expressed the disposition of the homeland of Bolívar to achieve an optimal point of positive relationships with the US.

"Situations like the refusal of over flight of our aircraft over Puerto Rico by the Government of Washington should not happen anymore." Enough of these at times childish persecutions and harassments. The U.S. Government must reflect and understand once and for all that thanks to Chavez' Bolivarian revolution Venezuela is an independent and sovereign country," he said.

He acknowledged the work of Russia, China and other peoples, for rearing the independent voice to stop the war against Syria by the President and Peace Nobel, Barack Obama, citing an alleged use of chemical weapons in the Arab nation. He also recalled that he sent a letter to his American counterpart to come out with the banner of peace.

"It is Venezuela that tends the hand and a smile today, as a dignified, independent, and proud Venezuela. Whoever we shake hands with should know that here we are independent, and never again will be a colony of anybody", he underlined"

PRESIDENT MADURO ANNOUNCES MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE

10th January 2014 (Venezuelanalysis.com) – Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro has appointed several new ministers to his cabinet in a bid to “renovate” his government. New ministers have been appointed for the areas of Labour, Industry, Education, Higher Education, Sport, Youth and the Chief of Staff.

Maduro confirmed yesterday that all ministers had offered their posts to him for his consideration, and that the appointments were part of “the renovation of this government in the year that is beginning”.

The new labour minister is Jesus Martinez, a former union activist and co-founder of the “Jesus Rivero” Bolivarian Workers’ University. He also helped draft the country’s new Labour Law, implemented in May last year.





Maduro said Martinez's task was to focus on "educating the working class in the construction of socialism".

Former Chief of Staff Wilmer Barrientos is now industries minister, with Maduro ordering that he "give a push to investment and the economic development of Venezuela".

Likewise, the new higher education minister, Ricardo Menendez (who was the industries minister), was asked to "align Bolivarian university education with the great needs of Venezuela's scientific and technological development".

President Maduro appointed former professional baseball player and mayoral candidate Alvaro "El Potro" Alvarez to be the sport minister, with the mission to make sport an "instrument of peace".

The other new ministers were Hector Rodriguez (education), Victor Clark (youth), and Hugo Cabezas (chief of staff).

The reshuffle comes as government policy focuses more greatly on the issue of citizen security following the murder of former Miss Venezuela Monica Spears and her ex-husband Thomas Henry Berry on Monday.

The murders caused a national reaction and have led to renewed attention on violent crime in Venezuela. According to United Nations statistics from 2011, the country's homicide rate is among among the highest in the Americas.

Yesterday Maduro appointed new heads to the intelligence service (Sebin), military counter-intelligence, and the presidential guard. On Wednesday he also designated a new chief of the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) and a new rector to the National Experimental University of Security (UNES), which trains the PNB.

In a speech broadcast nationally yesterday afternoon the Venezuelan head of state said that a new citizen security plan, which he called a Plan for National Pacification, would be ready for implementation by 8 February.

He also called on police, authorities and social organizations to redouble efforts to guarantee citizen security.

"Police forces need to have maximum police discipline, military discipline. Maximum discipline, maximum cohesion, maximum effort, maximum dedication," Maduro said.



He continued, “This is about bringing peace to homes, communities, cities, towns; to all Venezuela”.

Justice and interior affairs minister Miguel Rodriguez Torres also reported yesterday that regulations for the implementation of the disarmament law passed last summer had been drafted and were ready for the president’s attention. The Disarmament Commission of the National Assembly hopes to discuss and publish the regulations within 90 days.

VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT CREATES SOCIAL MISSION FOR STREET ANIMALS

7/1/14 Venezuelanalysis.com – The national government formally created the Mission Nevado on 30 December after a push by animal rights and environmental groups for greater assistance for street animals.

Due to a lack of strict rules on the sterilization of pets, street dogs are common in Venezuela. The mission will also provide support for volunteers organized into Nevado collectives, campaign against maltreatment of animals, organize sterilization operations, create a public hospital for pets, and campaign for more humanitarian policies in relation to the caring of animals.

Former President Hugo Chavez also called for the creation of the mission in 2009, arguing that “solidarity with animals” was important, and “such sensitivity needs to be developed. The ability to love is infinite...without such values, everything would be a lie”.

Before that, in 2007, Venezuelan artist Omar Cruz proposed a format for the mission. At the time, he suggested “a network of assistance dedicated to collecting street dogs, curing them, feeding them, training them, and offering them up for adoption”.

Andreina Avellaneda, a spokesperson for Mission Nevado, said to public press that volunteers have already expressed their desire to form part of the program. Avellaneda also said that the mission aimed to address issues like bullfighting, and increase general awareness of animal rights and needs.

The mission is also already looking to modify the Law for the Protection of Domestic, Free, and Captive Fauna, which was passed in 2010. Avellaneda said the mission would organize working groups to hear proposals from communities and organizations around the country.

“The law benefits humans more than animals, it has articles that could be incorrectly interpreted,” she said.





Endrina Calderon, a member of the national coordination of the mission and also of the collective in Merida, said the first task of the collective would be to consolidate the group, then carry out a census to see how many dogs and cats are living in the street.

The mission is named after the dog “Nevado”, who spontaneously accompanied the funeral procession of Hugo Chavez last year for the full twelve kilometers. The National Guard adopted the dog and called him Nevado after the dog which accompanied Simon Bolivar from the Admirable Campaign in 1813 to the Carabobo Battle in 1821. Children also gave Chavez a dog of the same breed, also called Nevado, in 2003 in Merida.

VENEZUELA: YOUR DESTINATION

The Gateway to South America, Venezuela offers tourists a great number of crystal-water exotic beaches, where the sky mixes with the huge Caribbean Sea and the golden sands to create the perfect harmony with the radiant tropical sun.

A land of contrasts where you can touch the sky while watching the Andes and their over-fifteen-thousand-foot-high peaks, walk through the plains as great as their flora and fauna, go through sand dunes ending in the sea or return to the origins of this land by exploring the amazing Venezuelan tropical forest, where you can find the highest waterfall of the planet, Kerepakupai Vena or Angel Falls.

In every corner of Venezuela there is a mix of flavors, rhythm, joy, history, traditions and hospitality of people with a captivating smile. All roads take to Venezuela, so you have to come along.

<http://www.venezuelaturismo.gob.ve/en/principal.php>

