

Venezuela Mourns President Hugo Chavez



In this photo released by Miraflores Press Office, Venezuela's acting president Nicolas Maduro, Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosa Murillo mourn next to Hugo Chavez's coffin, Caracas, Venezuela, March 8, 2013.

From VOA Learning English, this is IN THE NEWS in Special English.

Venezuelans are remembering President Hugo Chavez, who died after a heart attack earlier this week. The president had not been seen in public since December.

For the past two years, Hugo Chavez battled pelvic cancer. He returned to Venezuela last month following medical treatment in Cuba. He was unable to attend swearing-in ceremonies for another term in office in January.

On Tuesday, Venezuelan Vice President Nicolas Maduro announced the death of President Chavez.

"We're going to miss him until the last day of our lives but we carry on his legacy here and we will carry it on with strength. May our people know that the democratic, revolutionary, anti-imperialist and socialist legacy of our Comandante is carried on with firmness, with absolute loyalty."

Mr. Maduro said the leader's body will be treated so people can see it for

many years to come. He accused Venezuela's enemies of attacking the president with cancer. He did not say how that could have been done.

Hugo Chavez dreamed of playing major league baseball in the United States, but instead chose to join the Venezuelan army. He was jailed in 1992 for leading an unsuccessful attempt to oust then-president Carlos Andres Perez.

In 1998, Hugo Chavez was himself elected president after promising to end poverty and corruption.

To help finance social programs, he nationalized, or seized control of, major businesses, including oil companies. Millions of Venezuelans loved him for using the country's oil wealth to provide low-cost food, free medical care and other programs. However, the United States and much of Latin America criticized President Chavez for his social policies and for nationalizing companies. They also disapproved of his ties with Cuba, Iran and Libya.

Mr. Maduro will lead Venezuela until new elections are held.

Observers are wondering what will happen to relations between Venezuela and the United States in the coming months. After the Venezuelan leader's death, President Obama said the United States was re-confirming its support for the Venezuelan people. President Chavez repeatedly accused the United States of working against his socialist revolution. In 2002, the Bush administration supported an effort to oust the Venezuelan leader. The overthrow attempt failed.

Over the years, Venezuela has remained a major supplier of oil to the United States. It also provides free heating oil to poor Americans through a non-profit group.

Philip Brenner is with American University in Washington. He says relations between the nations would be better if the United States recognized Venezuela's actions and not symbolic speech.

"I think the important thing to remember about Venezuela is that they have never even threatened to cut off our oil. Venezuela has done nothing to actually harm U.S. interests except to challenge U.S. dominance."

Shortly after the death of President Chavez, Vice President Maduro announced the expulsion of two American diplomats. He said they were planning to weaken the Venezuelan government. The United States has rejected his claim.