



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

## *Fact Sheet:* **The Internet in Venezuela**

### **Background**

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A website affiliated to the opposition published fictitious reports of the assassination of Diosdado Cabello (a senior minister of public works and housing and also in charge of communications) and Mario Silva (a well known VTV journalist and presenter of the popular programme La Hojilla). Noticiero Digital reported that Diosdado Cabello had been shot dead on the Guarenas-Caracas motorway by a 15-strong armed commando and that Mario Silva had also been “gunned down” the following day. The website left the stories on the online for two days and eventually admitted that the reports were false.<sup>1</sup>

### **Reaction of the Venezuelan government**

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President Chavez condemned the spreading of false rumours and the irresponsibility of Noticiero Digital and requested that the General Attorney, Luisa Ortega, investigate and apply the law. “A false rumor is spreading, and it’s wrong, saying that we are going to limit internet access, that we are going to control it. It’s false. We have a central strategy and it’s none other than transferring power to the people, and the first and most important power is knowledge”<sup>2</sup>. At no time did the Venezuelan government

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<sup>1</sup> Venezuela de Television,  
<http://www.vtv.gob.ve/noticias-nacionales/31817>  
(13th March, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> Venezuelanalysis: “Internet Revolution in Venezuela”  
<http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/5221> (26th March, 2010)

announce that it was going to control the internet. President Chavez did state that “the Internet cannot be something open where anything is said and done”, and said that he was in agreement with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who recently expressed a similar sentiment. The President’s response in the National Assembly can be viewed here:  
<http://www.vtv.gob.ve/noticias-nacionales/31817>

### **International media response**

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International press agencies and major world newspapers, such as the New York Times, El País and The Guardian misrepresented the response of the Venezuelan government to the Noticiero Digital scandal. A Reuters headline claimed “Venezuela’s Chavez calls for internet controls”<sup>3</sup> and downplayed the seriousness and malicious nature of the Noticiero Digital reports.

### **Attitude of international governments to the internet**

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The internet is regularly subject to controls in many countries particularly the US. Content such as pornography is strictly regulated, and criminal acts or incitement to commit such

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<sup>3</sup> Reuters: “Venezuela’s Chavez calls for internet controls”  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62D05I20100314> (13th March, 2010)



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acts is completely prohibited, even on blogs, chats and informal, anonymous forums.

### Cases:

- Steven Joseph Christopher was arrested by the US Secret Service for threatening to assassinate President Obama in a chat forum on a website about UFOs and aliens. Christopher was charged with violating a US law that prohibits threatening to kill a president or president-elect of the United States, carrying a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 USD fine.<sup>4</sup> The US Congress has also debated a law that would give the US President emergency control over the Internet in the event of a “cybersecurity emergency”.
- In Colombia, a student was recently imprisoned for writing on Facebook that he would kill the President’s son<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Internet Revolution in Venezuela**

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Despite criticisms that the Venezuelan government is seeking to limit internet access, President Chavez recently inaugurated 24 new infocenters bringing the total to more than 688 across the country<sup>6</sup>. Infocenters are

government-sponsored computer centres in impoverished neighbourhoods that offer free internet access, IT services and training courses to the local residents. Infomobile, a truck containing the same resources as the Infocentre, travels to remote areas in the Amazon and the Andes to provide internet access. Another initiative, Infopoints, provides free computer facilities and internet access to public areas such as schools, government buildings. National Plan for Technology Literacy (PNAT)<sup>7</sup>.

Access to telecommunications increased by 6% in 2010. Before President Chavez’s election only 3% of the population had access to the internet. This has increased to 33% thanks to inclusive policies.

### Infocentres awarded UNESCO prize

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, the Infocentros Foundation was awarded the UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize in recognition of its work providing universal access to information and communication technologies to traditionally excluded sectors.<sup>8</sup>

The jury and attendants praised the structure and mass scope that the Infocentros project has had. Nancy Zambrano, President of the Infocentros Foundation, also highlighted the role of Infocentros in supporting participatory democracy and added that centres across Venezuela received almost 11 million visits in 2010.

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<sup>4</sup> Reuters: “Man charged with threatening Obama on website”

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE50G07920090117> (16th January, 2010)

<sup>5</sup>Colombia Passport: “Student arrested for threatening the son of the President using Facebook”

<http://colombiapassport.com/2009/12/04/student-arrested-for-threatening-the-son-of-the-president-using-facebook/> (4<sup>th</sup> December, 2009)

<sup>6</sup> Venezuelanalysis: “Internet Revolution in Venezuela”

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<http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/5221> (26th March, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Venezuelanalysis: “Venezuela: 21st Century Technology for 21st Century Socialism”

<http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4383> (21st April, 2009)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.avn.info.ve/node/37877>



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Canaima Project

The Canaima Project distributes free laptop computers to primary school children to incorporate information technology into the curriculum. The Canaima Program began in mid-2009 as part of an oil trading agreement between Venezuela and Portugal. While in Portugal in October 2010, President Chávez announced the purchase of an additional 1.5 million Canaima computers as well as plans to install a Canaima production plant in La Carlota in the state of Miranda<sup>9</sup>. 520,000 computers were distributed in 2010 and there are plans to distribute a further 500,000 in 2011.<sup>10</sup> A total of 875,000 children already own a Canaima laptop.

18 January, 2011

For more news and information about Venezuela, please visit our website:  
[www.embavenez-uk.org](http://www.embavenez-uk.org)

**Facts and figures**

- 688 Infocentres across the country
- 11 million dollars has been earmarked to build a further 200 infocentres
- 38% of internet access is via the Infocentres
- 8 million internet users
- 77% of Venezuelans have full access to the internet
- 600,000 people have taken computer literacy courses provided by the government free of charge
- In 2011 500,000 small laptops will be distributed to elementary school children by the Ministry of Education through the Canaima Project.
- 875,000 children already own Canaima laptops

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.minci.gob.ve/noticias\\_-\\_prensa/28/202769/](http://www.minci.gob.ve/noticias_-_prensa/28/202769/)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=20&t=142854>