



Human Rights Foundation
350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 809 • New York, NY 10118
Ph: (212) 246-8486 • Fax: (212) 643-4278
www.humanrightsfoundation.org • info@humanrightsfoundation.org

October 7, 2008

Thor Halvorssen
PRESIDENT

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL

Kenneth Anderson

Vladimir Bukovsky

Palden Gyatso

Garry Kasparov

Mart Laar

Armando Valladares

Álvaro Vargas Llosa

Ramón J. Velásquez

Elie Wiesel

James Q. Wilson

Harry Wu

DIRECTORS AND ADVISORS

Charles Hoeflich

Michael J. Horowitz

Roy Innis

Ron Jacobs

Eduardo Mendoza

Tom G. Palmer

Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr.

Robert A. Sirico

Armando Valladares
CHAIRMAN

Mr. Juan Evo Morales Ayma
President of the Republic of Bolivia
La Paz, Bolivia

Re: Deaths resulting from political conflict and official government statements encouraging violence and threatening the freedom of the press.

Dear President Morales,

The Human Rights Foundation (HRF) addresses you today to express deep concern regarding both the increasing number of deaths resulting from the political conflict that is affecting Bolivia, as well as the repeated statements you—and high officials of your administration—have made inciting more violence, encouraging racial hatred, and threatening the freedom of the press. Such statements lead to a deterioration of the human rights situation in Bolivia.

A stark political polarization exists in Bolivia, as evidenced by the results of the regional autonomy referendums of the last few months and the presidential and gubernatorial recall referendums of August 2008. The regions of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija approved their autonomy statutes with majorities of 86%, 80%, 82%, and 79% respectively; meanwhile, the presidential recall referendum ratified the central government's mandate with a 67% majority, in great part due to strong support in the regions of La Paz, Oruro, Potosi and Cochabamba, which make up 61% of the electorate in Bolivia.

This political polarization has intensified in the last few weeks and has led to an increase in violence. In September alone, 21 people were killed and hundreds were injured. Your administration's response to this crisis has been to call for more violence and to publicly defend armed civilian groups that are targeting cities where the opposition is strong. The invective used by your government to describe the opposition includes degrading and inflammatory language such as "racists," "fascists," "separatists," "traitors," "oligarchs," and "right-wingers."

These constant verbal attacks have also been aimed at the media, thereby indirectly encouraging your supporters to attack members of the press. During the protests regarding the devolution of Hydrocarbons Tax on August 19, several reporters were attacked. Instead of denouncing these actions, you and your administration's spokesperson, Ivan Canelas, accused the PAT and Unitel television networks and the El Mundo Newspaper of being "dirty" and irresponsible." These and other such

comments have led to even more attacks against the media, and, on August 26, the National Press Association (Asociación Nacional de la Prensa) released a statement affirming this link by noting that every time the government verbally attacks the press, government sympathizers physically harass and attack members of the media.

Moreover, President Morales, your repeated arguments calling on your supporters to “do whatever is necessary to defend this process of change” from people you have described as “coup-plotters,” and to be “willing to die for our country and for the people,” incite further political violence while endangering the lives of all Bolivian citizens. Such language sets the conflict within a framework of civil war instead of national reconciliation. Additionally, your disparaging remarks against those who do not share your political views seek to silence different opinions, threatening the right to political participation.

We respectfully remind you that your government should defend the human rights of *every* Bolivian citizen. According to the Bolivian Constitution and the human rights treaties to which Bolivia is a party, the rights to freedom, life and physical integrity, along with freedom of expression, are universal rights and, therefore, must be protected for all people.

Furthermore, President Morales, your verbal assault against the opposition also promotes racial hatred between your supporters of Aymara and Quechua origin and the national minorities in the east, mainly Cambas and Chapacos, who live in the regions that oppose your government (please see the attached report). We have witnessed the expressions of racial hatred against Cambas in the city of El Alto in La Paz, as well as on internet sites that support your government, and we fear these crimes were incited by your recent invective.

HRF agrees with the pronouncements made by HRF-Bolivia stating that the solution to the conflict in Bolivia requires dialogue and not repression, and that, in your capacity as head of the police and the armed forces, it is your responsibility to prevent oppression in order to safeguard the lives and the physical integrity of all Bolivians, regardless of their political preferences.

Similarly, HRF maintains that it is the duty of the political and civil opposition leaders to ensure that any protest or expression of freedom of speech, remain civil and peaceful. These leaders should do everything in their power to prevent violence. HRF has published a report outlining each of the human rights violations denounced in this letter.

Respectfully,



Thor Halvorssen

President



Armando Valladares

Chairman

cc.

The Bolivian Embassy, Washington DC (Mario Gustavo Guzmán Saldaña)
Permanent Mission of Bolivia to the United Nations (Hugo Siles Alvarado)
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Santiago Canton)
The Organization of American States (José Miguel Insulza)

Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Sergio García Ramírez)
International Society for Human Rights (Martin Lessenthin)
European Parliament - Human Rights Unit (Geoffrey Harris)
UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Louise Arbour)
Council of Europe Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Thomas Hammarberg)
Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (Luis Saavedra)
Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation (Ken Coates)
Christian Solidarity Worldwide (David Atkinson)
Comisión Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Nicaragua (Nicolás Bolaños Geyer)
UK Parliament - House of Lords (Lord Avebury)
International Federation for Human Rights (Jimena Reyes)
Human Rights Watch (Jose Miguel Vivanco)
Amnesty International