

**Open letter to the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela  
on the arrest of Dr. Oswaldo Alvarez Paz**

Prague, March 31, 2010

We, the undersigned former delegates of the Forum 2000 Conferences, held annually in Prague since 1997, observe with astonishment and concern the arrest last week in Venezuela of the former Governor of Zulia state, former President of the Chamber of Deputies and former presidential candidate, Dr. Oswaldo Alvarez Paz (67).

Many of us met Dr. Alvarez Paz during the Forum 2000 Annual Conference “Openness and Fundamentalism in the XXI Century”, held in October 2008, and we know him as an honourable person with democratic principles. On that occasion, Dr. Alvarez Paz alerted us to the persecution which the opponents of President Hugo Chavez constantly suffer, as well as the decline of democracy in his country during the last decade. His arrest on March 22<sup>nd</sup> is a clear evidence of the credibility of his testimony.

Dr. Alvarez Paz commented during the talk show “Alo Ciudadano”, broadcast by the private TV Channel Globovisión, on a resolution passed by the National Court of Spain (Audiencia Nacional de España) about the alleged relation between the Venezuelan government, the Colombian guerilla group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Spanish terrorist group ETA and he called for this fact to be investigated. He was subsequently arrested on charges of conspiracy, spreading of false information and incitement of hatred, charges which could lead to up to 15 years in prison.

The arrest of Dr. Alvarez Paz is important evidence of the use of the legal system to persecute those who criticize the government of President Hugo Chavez. It also corroborates the reports published by international organizations and institutions like the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch or Freedom House about the increasing deterioration of political liberties in Venezuela.

We ask the Venezuelan authorities to release Dr. Oswaldo Alvarez Paz immediately. We also call for the effective return of constitutional guarantees in Venezuela, the defence of the principles established in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, and we confirm our commitment to monitoring the weak state of freedom of expression and democratic governability in Venezuela.

Signed by:

*Václav Havel*, Former President, Czech Republic  
*Patricia Adams*, Economist and Executive Director of Probe International, Canada  
*Akyaaba Addai-Sebo*, Consultant on Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Transformation,  
United Kingdom

*Farish Ahmad-Noor*, Political Scientist and Historian, Singapore/Malaysia  
*Robert Amsterdam*, Attorney, Canada  
*Zygmunt Bauman*, Sociologist and Philosopher, Poland  
*Francisco Bermúdez*, Former Minister of National Defense, Guatemala  
*Jan Bubeník*, Founder of Bubenik Partners, Czech Republic  
*Humberto Celli*, Former President of the Latin American Parliament, Venezuela  
*Oksana Chelysheva*, PEN Center Writer, Finland/Russia  
*Doris Donnelly*, Director, The Cardinal Suenens Center, John Carroll University, USA  
*Michel Dubost*, Bishop, Diocese Evry-Corbeil-Essonnes, France  
*Carlos González Sháněl*, Political Analyst and Journalist, Czech Republic  
*Riprand Graf V. U. Z. Arco-Zinneberg*, Founder and Chairman, American Asset Corporation, USA  
*Garry Kasparov*, Political Activist, Russia  
*Mikhail Kasyanov*, Former Prime Minister, Russia  
*Don McKinnon*, Former Secretary General of Commonwealth, New Zealand  
*Javier Loaiza*, Consultant and Political Analyst, Colombia  
*Sergey Lukashovsky*, Director, Museum and Social Center of Andrey Sakharov, Russia  
*Carlos Alberto Montaner*, Political Analyst, Spain/Cuba  
*Ashis Nandy*, Political Psychologist and Sociologist of Science, India  
*José Noguera*, Economist, Venezuela  
*Michael Novak*, Theologian and Political Scientist, USA  
*Alexander Podrabinek*, Journalist and Human Rights Activist, Russia  
*Sigrid Rausing*, Founder, Sigrid Rausing Trust, United Kingdom  
*Ivo Šilhavý*, Diplomat, Czech Republic  
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