

## ***BWFJ Mourns the Loss of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez***

The Black Workers for Justice joins the Venezuelan people and millions around the world in expressing our deep sadness at the passing of President Hugo Chávez Frías. We extend our profound sympathy to the family of President Chávez and the people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. As he joins the ancestors we are compelled to celebrate his amazing life and contribution to poor and oppressed people in his country and around the globe.

We strongly reject the outlook of the corporate media that views President Chávez through the lens of the US State Department, Venezuelan elites and the former oligarchy and corporations seeking to profit from the wealth that belongs to the people.

From his election in 1998 until his untimely death Hugo Chávez led a movement and a government that has made the needs of workers and the poor a priority. Profits from petroleum have been used to significantly reduce poverty, increase literacy, provide health care to the poor and to provide houses to those who neglected by the elite for decades. Under his leadership popular participation increased not only in elections but through various community councils that have decision making authority, institutions obviously absent in so-called democracies in the North.

### **African descendants Empowered**

His work has moved African descendants from invisibility and the margins of Venezuelan society to a place of greater participation in the building of a new society. African descendants are recognized in the Constitution, counted in the Census and have received special support in improving education for Afro-Venezuelans including support for institutions and inclusion in the curriculum. Afro-Venezuelan diplomatic staff increased, as did the number of Embassies in Africa. President Chávez proudly acknowledged his African and indigenous heritage, suggesting that some of the hatred towards him was related to his “big mouth and curly hair.”

### **Beacon for Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East**

His willingness to stand up to Washington and Wall Street made him a hero and model in the region and around the world. His outspoken commitment to never again allow US imperialism, through its bankers and corporations, to exploit his country's resources or to dictate the type of society they would live in endeared him to millions. Progressive governments in other countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and others were boosted by his resolve to challenge the hegemony of the US. He was responsible for economically and politically fostering regional cooperation as a way of moving away from dependence on the US. We applaud his strong support for the people of Cuba and President Evo Morales of Bolivia in building the movement for Climate Justice led by the Indigenous peoples of Latin America.

### **Aid to People of Color in the US**

When our people were in dire need after Hurricane Katrina the Venezuelan government quickly offered to send supplies, equipment and medical personnel to help. The Bush government refused this help even as they delayed much needed aid to the survivors of the storm. The Venezuelan government has provided heating fuel to struggling communities in the South Bronx, Boston and Mississippi. Venezuelan representatives have developed relationships with Black worker and community organizations. We are reminded by a leading Afro-Latina activist that Chávez can be seen as an African American President: A president with African heritage born and living in the Americas. An African American

president who consistently and forcefully advocated for the poor and previously ignored and despised people of Venezuela.

We are inspired by his life and work and will make sure that Black workers understand his role in the struggle to transform our economic and social systems and to save the planet. We will hold him in esteem like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah and many other freedom fighters from around the African Diaspora.

Even without his physical presence we can still say along with the Venezuelan masses, because of his work and spirit: “Uh, Ah, Chávez no se vas.” “Uh, Ah, Chávez won’t go.”

Long Live Hugo Chávez! Power and Strength to the Venezuelan people! US hands off Venezuela!

###