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ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

TELEPHONE: (202) 225-5021

July 12, 2004

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The Honorable Hugo R. Chávez Frías  
President  
The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela  
Caracas, Venezuela

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our serious concerns regarding actions taken by the Venezuelan Government against *Súmame*, a Venezuelan civic organization. It has come to our attention that *Súmame* and its leaders are under investigation and have been formally charged with "conspiracy." As we understand what appear to be the charges, *Súmame* and its leaders are somehow accused of conspiracy for having received funds from the National Endowment for Democracy ("NED") and, by implication of having accepted these funds, working to overthrow your Administration. We believe that the leveling of these charges against *Súmame* represents a troubling abuse of power and is an attempt to curb, for political purposes, constitutionally protected activities.

As you know, Article 72 of the Constitution of Venezuela provides citizens with the right to participate in a recall referendum on the mandate of political officials if certain conditions are met. The implementation of this constitutional provision was addressed on May 29, 2003, in an agreement which was witnessed by the Carter Center and the Organization of American States, when representatives of the Venezuelan government and the opposition agreed to respect the right of citizens to petition for recall referenda of elected officials. Thus, consistent with the Venezuelan Constitution and the agreement reached by the principal stakeholders, *Súmame*, in November 2003 and May 2004, mobilized a nationwide-citizen campaign. It is our belief that *Súmame's* actions, which in small part have been financially supported by the NED, simply have helped Venezuelan citizens participate in a constitutional process that has been endorsed by the international community and your Government to resolve peacefully the political impasse which afflicts Venezuela.

Letter from the Committee on International Relations  
United States House of Representatives  
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We also feel compelled to comment on the insinuation by some that the NED is conspiring to overthrow the democratically elected leader of Venezuela. These allegations are baseless. The NED is a private, not-for-profit, non-partisan organization which is headquartered in the United States and funded primarily through U.S. taxpayers' monies due to the strong bi-partisan respect that it enjoys. Since its creation in 1983 as an organization which is independent of the United States Government, the NED has made hundreds of grants each year to support pro-democracy groups which are often across the political spectrum in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union. In Venezuela, the NED since 1993 has been assisting organizations, like the *Escuela de Vecinos* and *Centro al Servicio de la Acción Popular*, to strengthen democracy in the country. *Súmate*, and the other 12 Venezuelan organizations which currently receive NED assistance, are a continuation of this honorable tradition. Descriptions of all of NED's grants, including the ones made to Venezuelan organizations, have been available online for public inspection for many years.

Mr. President, you are to be commended for allowing the recall referendum to proceed pursuant to the Venezuelan Constitution. However, the charges which have been leveled against *Súmate* and its leaders for facilitating the realization of this constitutional process seem to us to be unwarranted and politically motivated. Such quasi-legal actions are inconsistent with the hemispheric commitment to democracy and the ideals which are contained in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. We respectfully urge you to reconsider your Administration's positions with regard to *Súmate* and enable this organization, its leaders, and the thousands of your nation's citizens who have joined *Súmate's* efforts to continue to work consistently with the constitutional process and the laws of Venezuela.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Most cordially,



HENRY HYDE  
Chairman  
Committee on International Relations



TOM LANTOS  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on International Relations



DOUG BEREUTER  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Europe



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere