

Disaster Diplomacy in Bolivia

Compiled by Ben Wisner bwisner@igc.org
11 March 2007



Excerpt from “Chavez launches biting US attack” BBC on line 11 March 2007

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6438753.stm>

"Those who want to go directly to hell, they can follow capitalism," Mr Chavez said in the town of *Trinidad in Bolivia*. "And those of us who want to build heaven here on earth, we will follow socialism," he added.

“Recent floods in the town left thousands of homeless and their livestock drowned.”

“Venezuela's aid package of \$15m (11.4m euros) outweighed the sum offered by the US tenfold.”

“The country also sent in aid workers who attended their president's speech on the airport runway.”

“During his visit, Mr Chavez also pledged more than \$1bn (£0.5bn; 0.76bn euros) for oil projects and community radio stations in the country.”

“Mr Bush spent Saturday in Uruguay where he spoke of the US care for the "human condition" and its "quiet, effective diplomacy".

[Italic & emphasis is Ben's. Note disaster diplomacy at work during Chavez' visit to Trinidad, Bolivia!]

Trinidad is location of Chavez' visit (see below):



Source: <http://www.boliviaweb.com/cities/>

Images of flooding:

http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Newsroom/NewImages/images.php3?img_id=17576

& “Heavy rains across South America created a flood disaster across central Bolivia in late February and early March 2007. More than 40 people had been killed in the flooding, which also drove tens of thousands from their homes. Food crops and livestock were destroyed and the threat of water-borne diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, and tetanus escalated, causing the government to declare a national disaster in the eastern part of the country.”

“This pair of images from the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer ([ASTER](#)) on NASA’s [Terra](#) satellite shows dramatic flooding west of the small city of Trinidad, which is located in Beni Department. On March 5, 2007 (top), the city (hidden by cloud just outside the right edge of the scene) is almost completely cut off from the outside world by pools of flood water, which appear dark blue (or nearly black). The images are made with a combination of visible and infrared light observed by ASTER. In this type of image, vegetation is red, bare ground, such as the road that cuts across the images, is tan, and clouds are bluish-white. On March 5, the main road into Trinidad is completely underwater.”

“...More than 30 percent of the population of Beni Department had been affected by the flooding, including more than 14,000 people forced into emergency shelters.”

From Christian Aid “Worst flooding in 25 years”:

<http://lite.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/218275/117320237340.htm>

Image of Chavez in Trinidad, Bolivia <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/pictures/DMM15.htm>

Economic face of flooding: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N03170194.htm>

“The worst flooding in 25 years in Bolivia has forced South America's poorest nation to cut its forecast for economic growth this year by one percentage point, Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera said.

‘We had estimated 7 percent growth this year. This disaster has slashed that figure to 6 percent,’ Garcia Linera said late on Friday after arriving in the flood-hit city of Trinidad in the lowlands of northeastern Bolivia.

Bolivia's economy -- dominated by natural gas, mining and agriculture -- grew 4.5 percent in 2006, according to preliminary data. Average growth has been 4 percent over the past 20 years.

President Evo Morales had aimed for 7 percent growth this year, the most robust in more than two decades, through an ambitious government investment program.

The country posted its biggest ever budget surplus last year after Morales nationalized the energy industry.”

Human face of flooding: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/sosaus/117310726678.htm>

“The situation is critical and everyone is very worried. This land is a tropical climate with temperatures exceeding 30 degrees Celsius, which is now surrounded by a lot of water due to the floods. The water is already contaminated by human waste due to the large concentration of people. There is a danger of major water- and vector-borne diseases breaking out and spreading, primarily gastrointestinal diseases, but also dengue and mayaro, a parasitical virus transmitted by mosquitoes and characterized by high fever and an aching body.”

Another aspect of disaster diplomacy: blaming rich countries for climate change and hence for larger floods <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N02459518.htm>

“As poor people from Bolivia's Andes to its Amazon lowlands are battered by devastating floods, President Evo Morales is blaming pollution from wealthy nations, and some experts say he has a point.”

“The floods, droughts and hailstorms that have pounded South America's poorest country for three months were triggered by El Nino, a weather phenomenon believed to be aggravated by global warming, climate experts say.”

...

“Last month, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that the world's poor, who are the least responsible for global warming, suffer the most from climate change. Poor countries are the lowest emitters of the greenhouse gases blamed for extreme weather, but they have the most to lose under predicted changes in weather patterns, experts say.”

“The United States produces 25 percent of global greenhouse gases but has not signed the Kyoto Protocol, by which countries agreed to curb carbon dioxide emissions.”

“In Bolivia, the governor of Beni, Ernesto Suarez, says he is worried about food supplies after floods killed 22,000 heads of cattle and wiped out an estimated \$115 million worth of livestock, crops and infrastructure.”

“Around Beni's capital, Trinidad, 19,000 evacuees from flooded shantytowns are living in temporary shelters vulnerable to dengue and dysentery outbreaks.”

“In the highlands, El Nino weather destroyed staple crops of Aymara Indians and in the agricultural heartland of Santa Cruz, it annihilated huge swaths of soy, Bolivia's main export crop.”