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## Will New Tribes Mission Personnel Be Evicted from Venezuela?

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Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has announced plans to evict all New Tribes Mission personnel from the South American nation, describing the missionary group as “a true imperialist infiltration that makes me ashamed.”

According to the [BBC](#): “*The New Tribes are leaving Venezuela,*” Mr. Chavez said at a ceremony to present land titles and farming equipment to members of Venezuela’s indigenous population. “*This is an irreversible decision that I have made. We don’t want the New Tribes here. Enough colonialism!*”

*He added that he had yet to sign the expulsion order and was giving New Tribes time to “gather their stuff”. New Tribes, he said, flew in and out of the country without proper permission from the authorities. “These violations of our national sovereignty have to stop,” Mr. Chavez said*

President Chavez, known for his radical political views and his friendship with Cuban dictator Fidel Castro appears to be fulfilling long-feared rumors of a move against Christian missionary groups in Venezuela. The country’s vice president cited support for the move from Venezuelan Roman Catholic leaders including Cardinal [Rosalio] Castillo. Given Roman Catholic concerns about rapid evangelical growth in the region, this may be a means of currying the support of Catholic leaders.

Some believe that Chavez’s move may be timed in order to gain maximum political benefit in the aftermath of comments made by American televangelist Pat Robertson. [Christianity Today](#) reported: *In response to Chavez’s plan to expel NTM, another mission group wrote in a confidential prayer e-mail, “While we believe that Chavez has been planning to expel foreign missionaries for some time, statements like those made by Robertson have provided him with an excuse to do so and might actually justify his actions in the eyes of many Venezuelans who otherwise would have been more ambivalent.”*

[New Tribes Mission](#) released a [statement](#) expressing hope for further dialogue with Venezuelan leaders that might allow NTM personnel to remain in the country:

*The primary concern is for the indigenous people of Venezuela whom our missionaries serve. In addition to religious teaching, our missionaries also minister in areas of humanitarian assistance, community development and literacy. We have the highest regard and respect for the people, laws and country of Venezuela. We hope that President Chavez will reconsider his decision and allow us an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings and misinformation that exists regarding the work of New Tribes Mission in Venezuela. New Tribes Mission is not and has never been connected in any way with any government agencies. Our goal is to serve indigenous people. We are confident that President Chavez wants the best for the people of Venezuela. New Tribes Mission considers it a privilege to have served the indigenous people of Venezuela for the past 59 years. We deeply desire to be able to continue serving them. Please pray that NTM’s leaders in Venezuela will have wisdom as they pursue further dialogue concerning this matter. And pray that our missionaries will know God’s peace in the situation.*

We must pray that God will protect all Christian missionaries and the cause of the Gospel throughout the world. This development should remind us all of the possible international consequences of our statements and actions.

UPDATE: [Venezuela's Electronic News](#) reported Sunday that the governor of Amazonas State has signed an expulsion order that would require NTM personnel to leave. NTM leaders appeared on Venezuelan television to explain what the group is doing in the nation [see [press release](#) from NTM].

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