

# Venezuelans in Florida show support for their relatives overseas

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Valentina Pilonieta Vera, 23, wears a gag over her mouth, with the word "Censored" written on it, as she attends a demonstration in Doral, Fla. Dozens of Venezuelans gathered near a street corner to show their support for protesters in the South American country. Photo: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee

DORAL, Fla. — On Saturday afternoon thousands of people gathered in a Doral, Fla., park. They were there in support of anti-government protests taking place in Venezuela.

Those protests in Venezuela have been led by college students. Protesters are calling for the resignation of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. And they are demanding freedom for jailed protesters.

Venezuelan protesters blame their government for many problems: rising prices, lack of food and poor public services.

The event in Doral's J.C. Bermudez Park was named "S.O.S. Venezuela." It was one of more than 155 rallies held in cities around the world. Many who gathered in Doral blamed President Maduro for widespread crime, lack of food and lack of freedom. They carried signs asking the world to help their homeland.

## **"I Want My Kids To Know The Country I Knew ..."**

"I'm here because we are tired of the government we have," said Maria Archer. A Venezuelan, Archer has lived in the United States for 15 years.

"It is a government that represses the people," she said. It "does not allow freedom of expression." And, she believes, it is responsible for a lack of food and other things. The world, she said, must help "us in ridding Venezuela of this government."

"I was born and raised in Venezuela," said Blanca Aleman, 44. Aleman now lives in Weston, Fla. "I love my country and I want my kids to know the country I knew, not what it is now."

Aleman's 18-year-old son Marc Burnard was able to accompany her. Her parents and brother, however, are still back in Venezuela.

"My brother is very worried," Aleman said. "He has kids in college and he just wants to get out."

The rally attracted as many as 4,000 people.

Carlos Tagliafica was one of many South Florida volunteers at the park. He said the rallies were intended to support students in Venezuela. College students have been leading many of the protests there.

Over the past two weeks, protests in Venezuela have led to fighting and deaths. Government supporters have also started protesting. At least 10 deaths have been reported since Feb. 12.

## **"... Not What It Is Now"**

The protests are the biggest since Maduro replaced President Hugo Chavez. Chavez died last year.

Protest leader Leopoldo Lopez has been jailed. His arrest has sparked anger among his supporters.

In Doral, people joined together in chants, songs, and even prayer. Most were dressed in white.

"It's horrible," Caracas native Veronica Arocha said of the situation in Venezuela.

Arocha, 31, now lives in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. But she keeps in touch with her family back home. She said both food and medicine are scarce in Venezuela. Her brother can't find the medicine he needs.

"My brother is a Type I diabetic," she said. "He can't find insulin."

Most at the rally were Venezuelan. But people from other Latin American countries were there as well.

Cuban-born Berardo Barrero, 57, explained what had made him show up.

"You have to stand up for the right to liberty in all countries," he said.

Another Cuban at the Doral rally was Ramon Saul Sanchez.

"I'm here to lend solidarity to the Venezuelan people," Sanchez said.

## **Facebook, A "Friend" To The Cause**

Latin Americans from other countries were present as well. Those countries included Argentina, Peru and Nicaragua.

"It's great," said Venezuelan Andrea Taglia Ferro, 29, speaking of the support from other Latin Americans. "Our situation is touching them."

She added that the Internet has helped raise awareness.

People are "getting involved thanks to Facebook," Taglia Ferro said.

Most protesters agreed that only one thing could make things better: having new leaders.

"The country is sinking," said Enrique Chacon, 45. Chacon was visiting from San Cristobal, Venezuela. He attended the rally with his brother, sister-in-law, nephew and niece.

"They have to let other people manage the country," Chacon said. "They have done everything wrong."