



NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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July 2, 2007

Cristina Hernandez
President

Estudiantes Venezolanos en el Exterior - Washington, D. C.
Venezuelan Students Abroad - Washington, D. C.

Dear Ms. Hernandez:

I am disappointed by both the inaccuracies and the unwarranted tone of your letter. Nevertheless, I hope we can work together to reschedule a National Press Club Newsmaker or Forum regarding press freedom in Venezuela.

First, let me explain the inaccuracies.

First and most importantly, your event was not “blithely cancelled”: It was *postponed* after a conversation I had with Mike Doyle, the chair of our Newsmakers Committee. Part of our quality control system at the Press Club involves making sure the Newsmaker Committee chairperson approves the programs that the committee sponsors. In fact, Mike Doyle and Everett Bauman, who had been working with your group, had preliminary discussions about an event on press freedom in Venezuela – and Mike tells me he was clear in telling Mr. Bauman that the Press Club was interested in a balanced forum, not a one-sided panel. Despite that conversation, Mike was unaware of the one-sided nature of this program until late last week and did not approve the event. At this point, it remains unclear how Mr. Bauman moved forward with planning this event without getting committee approval.

Once Mike and I saw the press releases that were sent out regarding the event, it was clear to us that this was not a National Press Club Newsmaker – which is generally one person delivering a point of view – but a forum or panel discussion. While we frequently hold Newsmaker events featuring one person standing in front of a room of reporters and making news, under the NPC’s standard for events it sponsors, any forum with multiple speakers must offer balanced points of view from all sides of this story. This event clearly did not do that. And given that it was only 24 hours before the event that Mike and I talked, we thought it best to take a step back and postpone the event.

We did not postpone this event because of the complaint we received from the Venezuelan embassy, and any implication that we did is an unwarranted assault on the good name of the National Press Club. As president of The National Press Club, I was appalled to hear of the Chavez government’s shutdown of RCTV, and I remain deeply concerned about free press issues in Venezuela. But those concerns are separate from my concerns about this event, which we postponed simply because it did not meet National Press Club standards.

I explained all of this to Mr. Bauman in a telephone conversation late last week but he did not accept any of my explanations. Furthermore, he said your group would be unwilling to be part of a balanced panel that included other points

of view. In the end, nothing constructive came of my conversation with Mr. Bauman, and based on the tone of the conversation and the National Press Club's dealings with Mr. Baumann in recent weeks, I dare say nothing constructive could come of his involvement should we try to reschedule the event.

Given the set of facts I have just outlined, I think the contentious tone of your letter was entirely inappropriate. There was no need for you to write a confrontational letter when a simple phone call to me could have probably resolved this issue.

Nevertheless, I would like us to be able to reschedule this event in keeping with our standards, and to that end, let me suggest two possibilities.

-- This event would qualify as a National Press Club Newsmaker if only one person were speaking. So if Geraldine Alvarez were willing to speak with the press without the back-up of a full panel echoing her views, we would be happy to arrange such an event.

-- We would be willing to sponsor an NPC forum on free press issues in Venezuela in which Ms. Alvarez would be a panelist. But the National Press Club, and certainly not Mr. Bauman, would have to be responsible for arranging the rest of the panel.

I do hope you will consider these proposals and will be able to arrange an event through Mike Doyle, our Newsmakers chairperson. Such an event would be in keeping with the NPC's guidelines for promotion of free expression rather than particular political agendas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jerry Zremski", is placed on a light blue rectangular background.

Jerry Zremski,
President