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INACCURATE INFORMATION

An open letter from Gene Sharp to President Hugo Chavez

June 12, 2007

President Hugo Chavez
Caracas, Venezuela

Dear Mr. President,

I have viewed and listened to your address on Sunday June 3, 2007. I fear that someone has provided you with inaccurate information about myself and the Albert Einstein Institution that found its way into your speech.

Unfortunately, for those persons who are familiar with my life and work and that of the Albert Einstein Institution, these inaccuracies, unless corrected, will cast doubts on your credibility. A responsibility for those errors also lies with the person or persons who were the source of information provided to you.

I have read an article by a Frenchman that may be a source of some of your statements. It contains numerous factual errors about myself, other individuals, and the Albert Einstein Institution. Accurate information could have been obtained if your aides had consulted our website at www.aeinstein.org and asked others more familiar with our work.

The Albert Einstein Institution is a small nonprofit institution for research, policy analyses, and education on the nature and generic potential of pragmatic nonviolent action in relation to the problems of oppression, injustices, war, and genocide.

Nonviolent action is a technique for conducting conflicts, as is military warfare, parliamentary government, and guerrilla warfare. This technique uses psychological, social, economic, and political methods, and has been used for a

variety of objectives, both “good” and “bad” ones. It has been used both to change governments and to support governments against attacks.

The Albert Einstein Institution neither creates conflicts, nor becomes a participant in a conflict once one exists. Nor does it take ideological sides in conflicts. It simply conducts research, generic policy studies, and education.

Neither I personally, nor the Albert Einstein Institution, have ever received funding or direction from the CIA. When writing my 1968 doctoral dissertation for Oxford University, I did in the 1960s indirectly receive partial financial support from the Department of Defense from a grant to a Harvard University professor, as acknowledged in my Preface to *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

Financial support for our academic and strategic studies of nonviolent action as a substitute for violence has been at times adequate but over many years has been highly uncertain and extremely paltry. The Institution is funded mostly by small individual private donations and foundation grants. We have received no government funding ever.

Our work has not been backed by powerful political or economic interests in the United States or internationally.

Indeed, one of the consequences of widespread use of the nonviolent technique tends to be the diffusion of effective power among populations that have previously been relatively powerless, and therefore subject to oppression and injustices.

In making available knowledge of nonviolent action, the Albert Einstein Institution never tells people what to do in their own situations and countries. Our scholarly work is basic, and our policy explorations are generic. That is, these analyses do not focus on specific countries or conflicts. These explorations may be of interest and of potential use as an alternative to violence wherever the people of a society feels a need for them.

In my personal view, groups that seek significant social reform and change would benefit and be more successful if they used nonviolent struggle in place of violence or expanded government controls. Violence and government controls can become oppressive, and the government that uses them may be subject to a coup d'état to reverse its efforts to achieve greater justice.

Some people may use nonviolent action with motives or objectives that many of us would not favor. For the overall society, that is still preferable to their use of violence for those same undesirable purposes.

You certainly know that over the years major positive social changes have sometimes been blocked by coups d'état against movements and governments that were attempting to produce greater social and economic justice.

Strategic nonviolent action can be applied to block and defeat such coups. If you suspect that your own government could become the victim of an attempted overthrow by a coup d'état, whether by internal forces or with international intelligence instigation or manipulation, then advance preparations and plans to block an anti-democratic coup would be very wise.

One of our analyses might be of serious interest to you and your government is an advanced study of the coup d'état. It includes concrete steps that can be taken by governments and civil institutions to block coups d'état. It is authored by myself and Bruce Jenkins, titled "The Anti-Coup" (63 pp.), and published in Boston by the Albert Einstein Institution in 2003. It can be sent to whatever address you designate, and is also available in electronic format on our website (www.aeinstein.org).

I hope that you will find time to explore the relevance of nonviolent struggle for the development of a more just society. A major pioneer in this exploration in the post-Gandhi years in India was the great Indian socialist Rammanohar Lohia. Some of the work by him and his colleagues is described in the book *India Afire* by Harris Wofford and his wife, published in the US in the 1950s.

I hope you will find a way to correct the fictional account of my life and work on which your aides have drawn. Thank you for this.

Good wishes,

Gene Sharp