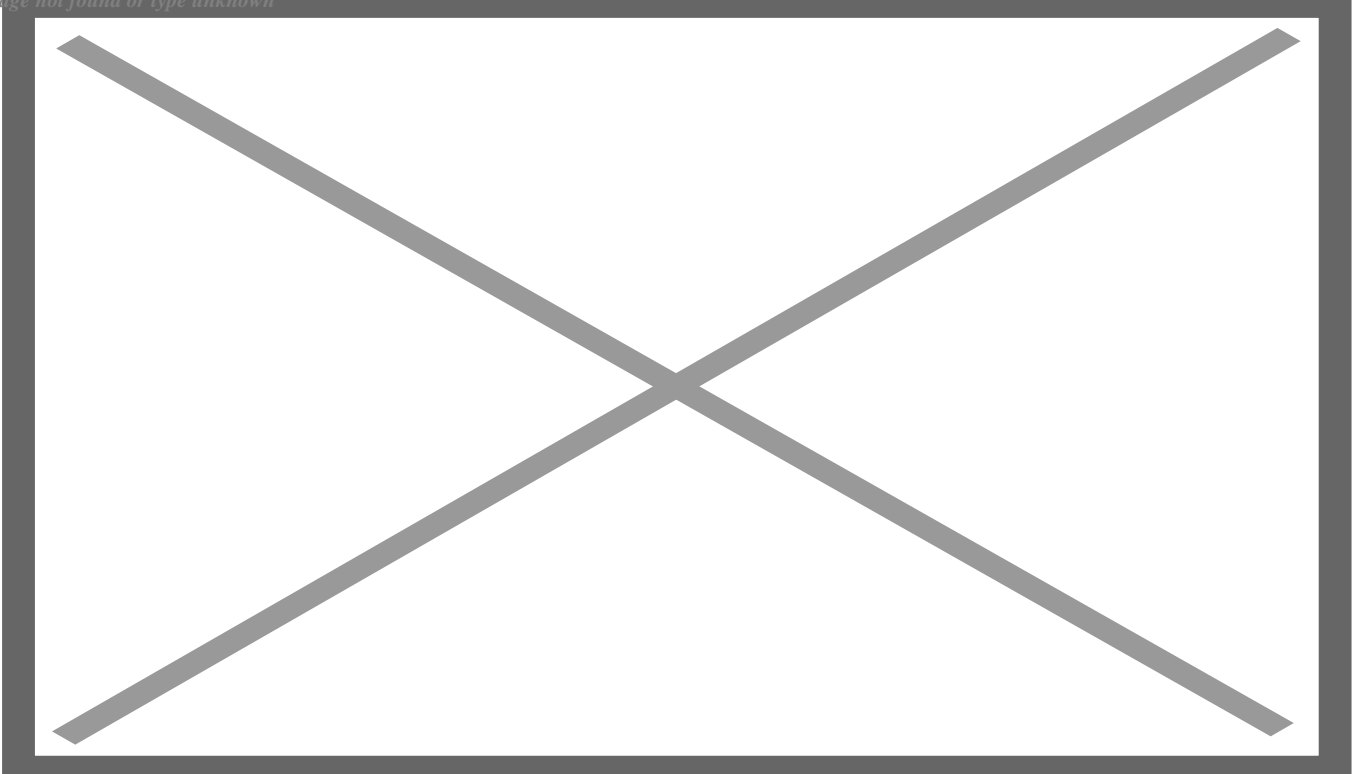


More than a president... a friend

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By María Josefina Arce

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Chávez marked a before and after in the South American nation. His arrival in 1999 to the presidency was a hope for every Venezuelan, especially for the most vulnerable, forgotten for decades and who from that moment on saw their rights guaranteed.

"Here I am standing firm. Send me the people, I will know how to obey. I am a soldier of the people, you are my boss", he proclaimed and fulfilled it. With his strong commitment and tireless work, he began to change the panorama throughout Venezuela, with various social programs focused on the people.

Health, education, food and housing, among others, covered these initiatives, which are still present and have been consolidated. These missions have had a great impact by making it possible for the population to have access to social goods and services.

They have been an invaluable mechanism of social justice, which since their inception have responded to the demands of a good part of Venezuelans who were in a situation of poverty.

In the health sector, the Barrio Adentro Mission overcame the exclusionary model in this area, by bringing primary health care to all citizens, even to those living in remote regions.

In education, Robinson I was aimed at providing literacy and Sucre made it possible for many to study in the country's universities and improve their options in life. In fact, since the triumph of the Bolivarian Revolution, which continues and deepens under the administration of President Nicolás Maduro, 42 centers of higher education have been created.

Let us not forget that under Chávez's mandate, in 2005, UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, declared Venezuela as a "Territory Free of Illiteracy".

These social programs also include culture, science and sports, and several were born to attend specific sectors of society, such as Negra Hipólita, focused on helping children and adults in street situations, as well as pregnant women, people with handicapping conditions and the elderly living in poverty.

But Venezuela also gained international prestige. His voice in defense of the people began to be heard. Chávez advocated in the various international forums for the most humble and the respect for the sovereignty and independence of nations.

Chavez was a fighter for justice, peace, solidarity and understanding, and above all for the well being of his compatriots. Ten years have passed since his physical disappearance, but his strength and fortitude are in the memory of Venezuelans, for whom more than a President, he was a friend, a brother.

Ten years have passed and the people do not forget this man who left a great legacy, who fought for the inclusion of all Venezuelans, to improve their living conditions, to make his beloved Venezuela a better country for all.

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