

Organizers Abandon Plan for Mass Farewell to Uruguay's Mujica



Montevideo, January 15 (RHC-EFE) -- An effort via social networks to organize a massive send-off for Uruguay's President Jose Mujica when he leaves office next month has been canceled in deference to the head of state's wishes, organizers said Wednesday.

Some 15,000 people had signed up on Facebook to gather in Montevideo's Independence Square at sundown on February 28th for the lowering of the flag flying over the presidential palace.

The ceremony, traditionally attended by throngs of officials and diplomats, ends with the presentation of the flag to the outgoing president. On Sunday, Mujica asked the people behind the Facebook initiative to hold off, saying that the focus should be on the start of the new administration of President-elect Tabare Vazquez.

"Considering our president's request, we who have called on people to attend the ceremony... find ourselves obliged to respect his desires," organizer Haydee Garcia said on Facebook. Rejecting the planned tribute to himself, Mujica said the

inauguration of his successor was not a time "to look backward to the past, but forward to the future. We need to put all our efforts there."

"Now with so much Twitter and hashtags and all that, I will create an address so people can tell me where they live and I can locate them," Mujica said in a television interview. "I prefer small gatherings."

Mujica, 79, is a former Tupamaro guerrilla who spent more than a decade in prison under the 1973-1985 military regime. As president, he has won international admiration for his modest lifestyle and forthrightness, and for promoting measures such as the legalization of marijuana.

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