



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1932-2009, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1932

Resolution urging the President and the United States Congress to take all appropriate actions to help ensure that Venezuela protects its Jewish citizens and their freedom of religious practice.

By Council Members Koppell, Nelson, James, Felder, Brewer, Fidler, Comrie, Gennaro, Palma, Sanders Jr. and Vallone Jr.

Whereas, The New York metropolitan area has the second largest Jewish population outside of Tel Aviv, accounting for approximately 12% or 1.97 million of New York City's population, according to a 2002 study by the North American Jewish Data Bank at the University of Connecticut; and

Whereas, There are approximately 15,000 Jewish people living in Venezuela, according to *CBS News*; and

Whereas, The Jewish population of Venezuela includes families that have lived in the country for over two centuries and many of these are survivors of World War II; and

Whereas, Many Venezuelan Jews fear for their safety due to threats made against them and recent attacks against Jewish institutions; and

Whereas, A synagogue in Caracas was ransacked and vandalized on January 31, 2009; and

Whereas, The assailants shattered religious objects and spray painted anti-Semitic epithets on the walls; and

Whereas, The assailants also allegedly stole a computer database containing names and addresses of Jews living in Venezuela; and

Whereas, The authorities have arrested 11 people, including 8 police officers, suspected of participation in the violent act, according to *The New York Times*; and

Whereas, Members of the United States Congress have called on Venezuela's President to protect the country's Jews following the attack on the synagogue in Caracas, according to the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs website; and

Whereas, Sixteen Republican and Democrat congressional members, including representatives Eliot Engel (D-NY), Joseph Crowley (D-NY) and Michael McMahon (D-NY), signed a letter demanding an end to the intimidation and harassment of the Jewish community; and

Whereas, A second attack occurred in February 2009, where assailants threw an explosive at a Jewish community center in Caracas, but thankfully no one was hurt in the blast, according to *The New York Times*; and

Whereas, Critics of the Venezuelan government believe that the government incited religious intolerance and violence against the country's Jewish community through its outspoken denunciations of Israel; and

Whereas, Jewish organizations have expressed concern that the expulsion of the Israeli Ambassador and Embassy staff by the Venezuelan government in early January 2009 may have contributed to hostility against Jews; and

Whereas, Many Venezuelan Jews fear that President Chavez's rhetoric will likely result in more anti-Semitic acts; and

Whereas, New York area Jews have demonstrated outside the Venezuelan Consulate in Manhattan to show solidarity with Venezuelan Jews who have been victims of attacks and anti-Semitism; and

Whereas, The American Jewish Committee (AJC), whose national headquarters is located in Manhattan, has long been active with the Latino communities in the U.S, and has engaged in international diplomacy efforts with the highest levels of government in Latin America; and

Whereas, One of AJC's goals is to further American Jewish relations with the Latino community in the U.S. and countries across Latin America; and

Whereas, AJC leaders frequently visit Latin American countries, maintaining international partnerships with the Jewish communities of Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela; and

Whereas, The Latin American Institute works with AJC partners to strengthen Jewish life in the region, deter terrorism, ensure that democracy and pluralism remain strong, and advance relations between Latin American countries, the U.S. and Israel; and

Whereas, Since 2004, AJC has been closely monitoring the unstable situation in Venezuela under the Chavez presidency and has lent its support in times of need; and

Whereas, AJC voiced its alarm at the unwarranted raid on a community day school by Venezuelan school forces on November 29, 2004 that left many Jewish students and their families traumatized; and

Whereas, Due to the ongoing tension between the Venezuelan government and its Jewish citizens, the safety of this vulnerable population is in serious danger and acts of violence against them cannot be condoned; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York urges the President and the United States Congress to take all appropriate actions to help ensure that Venezuela protects its Jewish citizens and their freedom of religious practice.

LS #7201

TC

4/6/09

5:30 p.m.