

Homophobic attack by Venezuela gov party lawmaker
By Sowetan LIVE
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Venomous political attacks have become the norm in Venezuela, and now a governing party legislator has unleashed a homophobic-laced tirade in the country's legislature aimed at discrediting the opposition.

The lawmaker displayed photos in the National Assembly on Tuesday showing a top aide to opposition leader Henrique Capriles dressed, along with other men, in women's clothing, apparently at a party. He suggested, without elaboration, that the photos proved the aide's involvement with drug traffickers and male and female prostitution.

Legislator Pedro Carreno, a member of the movement built by the late President Hugo Chavez, didn't say where he got the photos, although the aide's apartment was searched last week by military agents.

The aide, Oscar Lopez, is in hiding. The government said it was investigating him on unspecified corruption charges, which the opposition calls part of a new wave of political repression.

President Nicolas Maduro hurled more invective Wednesday, alluding during a public event to lascivious material that he insinuated was seized from Lopez.

"Just 1 percent what was discovered was shown" in the National Assembly, Maduro said. "The videos and photos of orgies are not publishable."

Maduro also accused Capriles of using his office as governor of the central state of Miranda to "prostitute youths." Lopez is Capriles' chief of staff there.

A leader of the opposition's pro-tolerance movement, Tamara Adrian of Pro Inclusion, called the behavior despicable.

"Venezuela is the only country in Latin America where the National Assembly has never discussed such issues as same-sex marriage. And if anyone asks why, the answer was clear yesterday," she said Wednesday in talking about Carreno's outburst.

Capriles said Wednesday he was "honored" to be attacked by a government that he says is going to be brought down by its own corruption and what he says was the theft of the April 14 presidential election.

"If I was a homosexual I would acknowledge it with pride to the four winds," Capriles said.

Carreno, a former military officer, is angry with Capriles for accusing him of being forced out of the armed forces for corruption and has challenged him to provide proof or resign as Miranda governor.

"Respond, you homosexual," Carreno said during Tuesday's legislative session. "Accept the challenge, you faggot."

Carreno then claimed there is a police report saying Capriles was caught having oral sex in public in 2000.

Analyst Luis Vicente Leon, director of the Datanalisis polling firm, called the increasingly personalized attacks by government officials a sign of Maduro's weakening position in the face of worsening inflation, rampant violent crime and foreign currency, food and medicine shortages.

Maduro won the presidency by a 1.5-point margin after squandering a double-digit lead after becoming the hand-picked successor of Chavez, who died of cancer March 5 after 14 years in power.

Carreno backpedaled some Wednesday, offering an apology in a TV interview if he offended anyone with his remarks about homosexuals.

"The problem isn't the sexual inclination (of his adversaries), but that they have a hidden life," he said.

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