



# Venezuela: Amid Crisis, CEDICE Celebrates 30 Years of Fight for Freedom

**"The Battle Is Not Only on the Streets, It's With Ideas as Well"**

By Marcela Estrada

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As [economic](#) and [political](#) chaos overwhelms Venezuela, the Center for the Dissemination of Economic Knowledge ([CEDICE Libertad](#)) — a Caracas-based, libertarian policy institute — is forging ahead and celebrating its [30th anniversary](#) with a major conference. From April 24 to 25, the topic up for examination is “Latin America: liberty is the future,” and attendees are debating the role of ideas towards the social, political, and economic transformation.

At the Chacao Cultural Center in Caracas with 500-530 attendees, the high-profile presenters include Nobel Laureate Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru); former-Representative and leader of the the Venezuelan political opposition María Corina Machado (pictured); Director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity Ian Vasquez (United States); Executive Director of the Foundation for Progress Axel Kaiser (Chile), and University of Francisco Marroquín Professor and *PanAm Post* Columnist Carlos Sabino (Guatemala), among others.

The event has the sole purpose of discussing ideas and solutions to generate wealth, based on free enterprise and individual choice, as the only means to fight poverty — in sharp contrast to the nation’s leaders, who have resorted to opposite practices. According to the 2013 *Forbes* Best Countries for Business Index, Venezuela ranked [140th out of 145](#) countries, and [175th out of 178](#) in the Heritage Foundation 2014 Index of Economic Freedom.

Being in Chacao — the center stage for the latest street protests — CEDICE was able to count on a strong police presence that protected the advancement of the event. No presence of government-affiliated paramilitaries (*colectivos*) has been observed, only a man with an ironic placard that read “CEDICE and Vargas Llosa: collaborators with the government.”

Regarding the latest student protests that have shaken the country during the past two months, Vargas Llosa made [strong remarks](#).

“They [the student protesters] are the true heirs of the leaders of independence,” the Nobel Laureate asserted, and he assured that he didn’t come to Venezuela to create conflict, rather to show support for the peaceful demonstrations.

The Peruvian writer commented, “it’s saddening that Latin America’s richest country has such a high inflation. Venezuela has taken on a political and economic failure; the country is imitating Cuba.”

Vargas Llosa also spoke about Venezuela’s constant [infringement on human rights](#) and what the “risky” threat of [state indoctrination](#) through text books can imply for the future of freedom in Venezuelan society.

Venezuelan economist and director of Ecoanalitica Asdrubal Oliveiros participated in CEDICE’s anniversary and [condemned](#) the regime’s economic policies, describing Venezuelan state as “totalitarian,” arguing that the *Chavista* model “is not related to the generation of welfare, but rather to its maintenance in power.”

Oliveiros explained the danger that Venezuela’s current inflation rates pose to the most vulnerable groups, and [criticized](#) its subsidy policies, which, according to him, instead of benefiting the poorest, have been achieving quite the opposite.

“We have a socialism that gives away fuel to the richest,” he said, “but increases the price of transportation fares to the poorest... Venezuelan society is drunk with subsidies.”

[Joseph Humire](#), executive director of the [Center for a Secure Free Society](#), addressed the topic of insecurity, and its importance in the debate of economic freedom.

“We can’t leave out the topic of insecurity,” he explained, “otherwise, we would be giving complete control to the government.” According to Humire, there are reports that show the [relation](#) between restraints on economic freedom and citizen insecurity: “While economic freedom levels decrease, homicide rates increase.”

The *PanAm Post* also had the opportunity to speak with [Giannina Raffo](#), social media coordinator and executive assistant of CEDICE, about what this event means for the organization’s trajectory, and the fight for freedom in Venezuela.

“The battle is not only on the streets, it’s with ideas as well. If we lose our focus on the ideas we defend, we lose everything,” Raffo asserts.

Despite the latest political events, Raffo remains optimistic.

“We are close to losing our liberty, but we still have a chance to recover it.... That is why events like this one are so important.”

CEDICE may be turning 30 this year, but it hasn’t been easy for a libertarian think-tank to survive under a socialist regime.

“During the last 15 years, the organization has had to face the most difficult times,” Raffo explains. “Nonetheless, a crisis like this one has actually made us stronger, we have become more proactive with our mission.”

With Venezuela’s political and economic context, she says, CEDICE has its goal clearer than ever: “We want to inform and warn that socialism is not the way to grow or develop. Our mission is to educate about the ideas of liberty, and rescue the minds of the young, who are forced to believe that they can grow under a regime where there’s no freedom.”