

# SABATINO PIZZOLANTE

## *Circular for P & I Clubs*

DATE: 16<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2004

**Correspondents for:**

**North of England (through Globalpandi), Steamship Mutual, British Marine (through Globalpandi), Charterers Mutual Assurance Association Limited, Axa Corporate Solutions (through Globalpandi), Through Transport Club (TTC), ITIC, Raets P&I and InterCoastal P&I.**

### *Recall Referendum against President Chavez in Venezuela*

As scheduled on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2004, the Recall Referendum against President Chavez was held in the middle of long queues, where people remained up to 12 hours to express their vote. The first ever automated electoral process included not only the use of voting machines but also use of fingerprint-reading machines, that in many cases were not activated due to technical problems, causing unjustifiable delays in the long queues due to the low abstention of voters. The Recall Referendum is a mechanism contained in the new Venezuela's Constitution supported by President Chavez himself, specifically in article 72, according to which all of the public officials elected by the people can be removed from their positions with a number of votes equal or higher than the number of ballots they obtained when elected.

The referendum took place after a long battle by the opposition gathered in the so-called "Coordinadora Democratica", who as previous steps had to collect a number of signatures last November, and later on to attend to a process of ratification/exclusion of votes known as "reparos" that was held in May, opportunity at which the CNE made the announcement that enough signatures were collected, and the CNE immediately convened a recall referendum on the President. The referendum was organized by the Electoral National Council (CNE), and monitored by the Organization of American States, the Carter Center as well as other international observers, to ensure the integrity and transparency of the election.

Opposition needed to gather a minimum 3,758,774 "YES" votes, and at the same time to obtain more ballots than President Chavez. According to the Electoral Registry 14,037,900 Venezuelans have registered to vote.

Initial results announced very early morning by CNE showed that about 4.9 million people, or 58 percent of the turnout, voted to keep President Chavez in office, while 3.6 million people, 42 percent, were against him. Therefore, President Chavez will remain in power up to January 2007. Although by noon time the international observers backed the initial figures announced by the CNE, the opposition leaders grouped within the "Coordinadora Democratica" rejected the results claiming there was a "megafraud".

Generally speaking, the country is quiet but tense with pro-governmental people celebrating in the streets, with some demonstrations in major cities by the opposition, with a number of injured people by this time. Shipping and port activities should not suffer significant problems; however, as it is not clear yet what the next actions by the opposition will be, it would be advisable for the Members to warn their crews to be cautious when coming ashore at Venezuelan ports, at least by the time being.

**Should you need any assistance or further information regarding the topic stated above, please feel free to contact:**

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