

Utahns unite for Venezuela!

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On Saturday, February 22, hundreds of Utah's Latin American citizens assembled on the steps of the State Capitol to show their support of the students who are currently protesting in Venezuela against their government and the reign of current president, Nicolás Maduro.

The event included prayers, speeches, and performances of Venezuelan folk songs as a show of support to the numerous protesters, including those who have been arrested or killed by soldiers of the Venezuelan army, who are actively attempting to suppress the revolt.

"They [the students] can not protest without fear for their own lives," Thomas Reams says as he addressed the crowd in both English and Spanish. "Right now they are out there fighting for their freedom."

Protesters were asked to sign a petition that is to be taken to Washington on behalf of the Venezuelan Association of Utah, which organized the event.

"On Wednesday, we met with the Utah senators to ask them to take a petition to Washington," says Arleny Dimond, the principal of the association who is also a student here at Salt Lake Community College. "We need all of the international organizations and human rights organizations, such as the UN, to take a stand against what is happening to the Venezuelan people."

In addition to the multitude of speakers and musicians who came out to the event, the participants also banded together to spell out the letters "SOS" on the front lawn of the capitol building to be taken as a photo by a passing helicopter.

The SOS is in reference to the Twitter hashtag "#sosvenezuela" which has been attached to the numerous videos and reports on the protests that have been posted on the website. Twitter has been the primary means of getting information about the current state of Venezuela, since the nation has been put on media lockdown by Maduro.

Other key phrases uttered at the event included a chant in reference to the instigators of the nationwide protests, the Gochos of the Venezuelan state of Tachira, which is located in the Andes Mountains at the Columbian border.

Roughly translated, the chant is as follows. "The navy has a ship, The air force has a plane, and the Gochos have the balls to save the nation!"

Despite the air of camaraderie among the protesters, quite a few were surprised by the sheer number of people who joined the protest.

"Last time we did something, we barely had enough people to fill the upper stairs," says Andres Diaz, one of the featured speakers at the protest. "Today, we filled the whole thing. It's great to see the unity!"