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By Judy Cantor-Navas | February 21, 2014 2:27 PM EST



Salsa greats and social activists Rubén Blades and Willie Colon have, separately, been the most outspoken of the many music artists who have expressed solidarity this week with protestors in Venezuela. In the case of Blades, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro spoke back. Earlier this week, another Venezuelan official publically mocked Rihanna's less committed Tweet of solidarity.

After three anti-government student protesters died in confrontations in Caracas Feb. 12 and the troubled country exploded into ongoing violence, Blades posted a detailed critique of both the government and its political opposition, and expressed hope for

the future of Venezuela. Luisa Ortega, the Venezuelan attorney general, today announced an official count of eight people dead and 137 wounded in protest-related violence, according to EFE news agency.

Siding with the protesters, Blades cited President Nicolás Maduro's innate inability "to direct such a complex country."

Maduro quickly responded, addressing Blades' remarks in a discourse that was reportedly aired on Venezuelan state television and radio and posted on Youtube Feb. 19. While disputing the artist's views about his country, the president confessed that he "loved" Blades and had grown up with his music. He invited him to come to Venezuela and sing with him "for peace."

With the caveat that he hoped the video was for real, Blades replied to Maduro on his website yesterday (Feb. 20). He assured him that "I have not joined in, consciously or unconsciously, any plot orchestrated by the CIA." Blades, a veteran of political life who served as Panama's Minister of Tourism from 2004-2009, turned down the president's invitation to visit him in Venezuela.

Fellow salsa great Willie Colon recorded the pioneering salsa album "Siembra with Blades" in 1978. Colon, who has 2.62 million followers on Twitter, has been re-tweeting photos of protesters beaten by Venezuela's National Guard and circulating a petition asking President Obama to sanction the Venezuelan government. He has also been speaking out vehemently and frequently against Maduro. "Nicolás the blood of the students will choke you!" he tweeted today in Spanish. A responding video from Maduro has not yet surfaced.



Willie Colón

@williecolon

[@NicolasMaduro](#)

¡NICOLÁS

LA SANGRE DE LOS ESTUDIANTES TE AHOGA!

12:46 PM - 21 Feb 2014

339 RETWEETS 23 FAVORITES

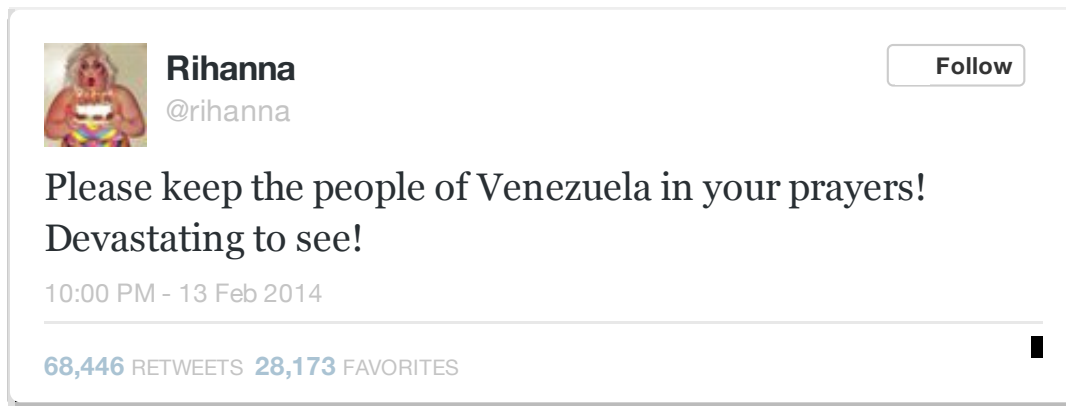
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Last night, Latin stars Marc Anthony, Enrique Iglesias and Marco Antonio Solís joined Venezuelan natives Chino y Nacho and Oscar D'Leon for expressions of solidarity with the Venezuelan people at Univision's Premios Lo Nuestro awards.

"It's time we raised our voice for a country that has lost respect for life, a country where ideological fanaticism has divided the people," said Chino as the duo gave the award for Best Tropical Album. The crowd chanted "Venezuela, Venezuela."

"You are not alone," said Marc Anthony, who won Tropical album of the year, addressing Venezuelans from the stage. In the press room, Iglesias called the situation a "catastrophy" and allowed himself to be draped in a Venezuelan flag.

Alejandro Sanz and Jared Leto are among other music stars who expressed solidarity with the Venezuelan protestors this week on Twitter. On Feb. 13th, Rihanna sent a message to her over 31 million followers:



She was criticized Wednesday by Roy Chaderton, the Venezuelan ambassador to the Organization of American States, in remarks he made decrying manipulation of the facts by the press and others in the United States.

“Everybody has something to say about the situation in Venezuela,” he mused sarcastically, according to Spanish-language reports. “[Even] Rihanna seemed worried about the situation in Venezuela.

“We’re waiting for a statement from Justin Bieber,” the Venezuelan official deadpanned.

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