

Robertson's words draw rebukes Broadcaster suggests assassination of Venezuela's Chavez: Broadcaster suggests assassination of Venezuela's Chavez

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Pat Robertson's suggestion about assassinating Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez continued to reverberate, with a wide spectrum of religious leaders decrying his televised remarks.

Robertson, the founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network, first denied that he meant assassination, then apologized on August 24. "Is it right to call for an assassination?" asked Robertson on his Web site. "No, and I apologize for that statement. I spoke in frustration that we should accommodate the man who thinks the U.S. is out to kill him."

Two days earlier, Robertson had said, "We have the ability to take him out and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability. We don't need another \$200-billion war to get rid of one, you know, strong-arm dictator."

Editor-author Jim Wallis, a socially liberal evangelical, said that the apology was not enough—the 75-year-old broadcaster and minister should retire.

"Pat Robertson is an embarrassment to the church and a danger to American politics," Wallis wrote in an online newsletter. "It's time for Christian leaders of all stripes to call on Robertson not just to apologize but to retire."

Robertson, Christian Coalition founder and a onetime candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, has made headlines with controversial statements before, as when he prayed that seats on the Supreme Court would become vacant, said

feminism inspires women to kill their children and become lesbians, and suggested in 2003 that a nuclear device be set off at the State Department, reflecting his disdain for U.S. foreign diplomacy.

Conservative evangelicals distanced themselves from Robertson. Southern Baptist president Bobby Welch said the SBC “does not support or endorse public statements concerning assassinations of persons, even if they are despicable despots of foreign countries, and neither do I.”

National Association of Evangelicals top officials Ted Haggard and Richard Cizik said the remarks were irresponsible. “It complicates circumstances for foreign missionaries and Christian aid workers overseas who are already perceived, wrongly, especially by leftists and other leaders, as collaborators with U.S. intelligence agencies,” Cizik added.

A minister who has worked closely with Robertson’s ministries and admitted he had held him in high esteem, said he was dismayed when he heard the first reports. The remarks “were at best indiscreet and probably crossed a serious moral and ethical line,” said Rob Schenck, who heads the National Clergy Council, based in Washington, D.C.

Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, called Robertson’s statement “appalling to the point of disbelief,” and William J. Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., declared, “In seeking to be a patriot, the Reverend Robertson has forsaken being a priest or prophet of the Christian faith.”

The Reuters news agency reported that Chavez said in a televised speech August 28 that he would take legal steps against Robertson and could seek his extradition. “I announce that my government is going to take legal action in the United States,” Chavez said. “To call for the assassination of a head of state is an act of terrorism.”