

# *Venezuela Breaks Diplomatic and Trade Relations with Panama*

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Caracas, March 6 (RHC) -- The Venezuelan government has announced that it is cutting ties with Panama, citing the Central American country's complicity in a "conspiracy" against Caracas.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, during a ceremony marking the first anniversary of the death of the country's leader Hugo Chavez on Wednesday, said: "I've decided to break political and diplomatic ties with the current government of Panama and freeze all trade and economic relations from this moment on."

Maduro denounced Panama for taking part in a U.S.-led attempt to intervene militarily in Venezuela to carry out a regime change. The president said his decision would defend the sovereignty of Venezuela. "Noone is going to conspire with impunity against our country, to request an intervention against our country. Enough is enough."

The government of Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli on Tuesday proposed member countries of the Organization of American States, the OAS, a U.S.-dominated regional bloc, hold an urgent meeting on the political turmoil that has rocked Venezuela since early February.

"There's a right-wing government that's aiming to convene the Permanent Council of the OAS. It is a plan for the intervention of foreign forces in the country. I am going to respond forcefully and powerfully to any

attempt at intervention in Venezuela. I ask the people for their support." And Maduro added: "The OAS should stay out of here now and forever. Our path is UNASUR (the Union of South American Nations)."

Ongoing protests in Venezuela called by extreme right-wing groups have led to violent unrest that have left 18 dead and about 300 injured, including 51 police officers, since February 12th, according to official figures.

In this regard, Maduro said authorities captured several violent protest leaders on Wednesday attempting to blow up bridges, highways and roads in four states. "Leaders of the fascist violent groups have been caught and authorities seized weapons of war, explosives, molotov cocktails and other devices."

The perpetrators will be brought before the Prosecutor's Office later in the day, he said, adding, "they must be punished, the law must be applied severely."

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