

Venezuela denounces attack against coast guard ship



Caracas, April 2 (RHC)-- Venezuela's Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez has rejected the attack carried out by the *Resolute*, a Portuguese-flagged passenger ship, against the Venezuelan coast guard ship *Naiguata*, which was patrolling northeast of Tortuga Island.

"Our ship ordered the *Resolute* to go to the Margarita port. Initially, the ship complied but then decided to collide and sink it," Padrino Lopez said from the Miraflores Palace in Caracas. "The collision caused extensive damage... a search and rescue operation had to be launched, without the Portuguese-flagged vessel responding to the rescue request made by the Venezuelan crew," outlet *El Heraldo* reported.

The Bolivarian National Armed Forces (Fanb) described the attack as cowardly and criminal given that the Portuguese-flagged ship did not attempt to rescue the Venezuelan crew and thus failed to comply with international regulations that regulate the rescue of life at sea.

On Tuesday, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez also expressed her rejection of an aggressive act whose objectives have not yet been clarified. "Venezuela rejects this international piracy criminal action against our Bolivarian Navy, which had dark and evil objectives! Our recognition to the brave and courageous officials who defended the territorial integrity of our Homeland!" Rodriguez tweeted.

The Resolute ship "is eight times heavier than our ship. It is as if a giant 100-kilo boxer grabs a child and hits him," Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro commented. The Venezuelan leader also indicated that authorities on the Dutch island of Curacao, where the Portuguese-flagged ship is currently moored, "must do an investigation."

Portugal's Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva said that the event does not constitute a diplomatic incident and assured his government will collaborate to clarify what happened.

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