

# *Iran says baseless U.S. claims aimed at obstructing Venezuela's oil plans*

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Tehran, May 2 (RHC)-- Iranian Foreign Ministry has dismissed "baseless" allegations made by a U.S. diplomat about the Islamic Republic's trade ties with Venezuela, saying such claims are aimed at creating obstacles in the way of the South American country's plans in the oil sector amid the cruel U.S. sanctions.

Elliott Abrams, the envoy who leads U.S. efforts to topple Venezuela's leftist leader Nicolas Maduro, claims that Venezuela is paying Iran in gold to rebuild its troubled oil industry and denounced growing cooperation between Tehran and Caracas.

Speaking at the Hudson Institute, a conservative Washington think tank, Abrams added that Iran has been sending "more and more planes" to Venezuela, including this week. "Our guess is that they are being paid in gold. Those planes that are coming in from Iran that are bringing things for the oil industry are returning with the payments for those things: gold," he said.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi on Friday said such baseless claims aim to prepare the ground for the U.S. administration to exert more pressure on the Venezuelan government and to obstruct and interfere in trade relations between Iran and Venezuela.

"The U.S. administration failed to implement its policies in Venezuela, including economic sanctions, military threat and recently the formation of a transitional council, due to resistance of the country's [Venezuelan] government and nation," he said.

It "is now leveling such accusations in a bid to obstruct the Venezuelan government's plan to reconstruct the country's oil refineries and produce oil products such as petrol that is currently in short supply due to the cruel US sanctions," the Iranian spokesperson added.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has imposed unilateral sanctions on Venezuela, which has the world's largest proven oil reserves, to choke off the country's oil exports in the aftermath of President Maduro's 2018 re-election. Despite the sanctions, customers in China, India and elsewhere have continued importing, so Venezuela's oil exports only fell by about one-third.

Caracas' crude exports last year plummeted 32% to 1.001 million barrels per day, according to Refinitiv Eikon data and state reports. Rosneft was the largest receiver and intermediary with 33.5% of total exports, followed by state-run China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) and its units with 11%, Reuters said.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza in February filed a lawsuit against the United States at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for Washington's sanctions decreed by Caracas as "crimes against humanity."

"Our government is seeking refuge with international law," the top Venezuelan diplomat said. "We are convinced the consequences of the unilateral measures (by the United States) constitute crimes against humanity against the civilian population."

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