

# *Venezuelan President Urges Restart of Political Dialogue*

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Caracas, May 17 (RHC), – Venezuelan President, Nicolas Maduro, urged opposition leaders on Friday to return to political talks intended to stem unrest around the country or face the "repudiation" of the nation.

Leaders of the Democratic Unity coalition (MUD) broke off dialogue this week, alleging government officials reticence to meet their demands.

Unrest has flared again in Caracas in recent days, as security forces clashed with masked protesters during attacks on government buildings.

Since violent anti-government protests began in February, 42 people have been killed and more than 800 injured.

"We don't accept blackmail from anyone," Maduro said during a ceremony with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Caracas.

"They (the MUD) say they want immediate results. The dialogue itself is a positive result. What are they looking for? In private, they've said things that are impossible."

The opposition is particularly pressing for the release of former Caracas police commissioner, Ivan Simonovis, who is serving a 30-year prison term for his involvement in a 2002 coup against the then president Hugo Chavez.

Foreign ministers from Brazil, Ecuador and Colombia, who have been mediating the talks, were due to return on Sunday, but may now find themselves shuttling between the two sides.

"It would be very sad if they abandon the table, but the country would carry on, no one's going to stop working," Maduro said. "There would, though, be national repudiation of their anti-democratic attitude ... I urge sense and reflection."

Venezuela has been the scene of violent anti-government actions since early February, staged by hardline opposition groups, seeking to launch a coup d'état against the government with the backing of the United States.

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