

# *Venezuelan Foreign Ministry Rejects U.S. Government's Interventionist Statements*

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Caracas, July 19 (RHC)-- The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry has rejected the U.S. government's "unbelievable" comments on Venezuela that "shows its absolute bias towards the violent and extremist sectors of Venezuelan politics, which favor the use of terrorism to overthrow a popular and democratic government."

The ministry was referring to a statement issued by President Donald Trump, who said: "If the Maduro regime imposes its Constituent Assembly on July 30th, the United States will take strong and swift economic actions." Trump's threats were repeated by the U.S. State Department which released a statement calling on "the Government of Venezuela to abandon the proposed National Constituent Assembly."

"The thin democratic veil of the Venezuelan opposition has fallen, and it reveals the brutal interventionist force of the U.S. government, which has been behind the violence suffered by the Venezuelan people over the last four months. It is not the first time that we denounce and confront threats as ludicrous as those contained in this unbelievable document," the Foreign Ministry statement added.

The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry called on the people of the world to defend sovereignty, self-determination and independence. "The National Constituent Assembly will be elected by the direct, universal, and secret ballot of all Venezuelans, under the authority of the National Electoral Council, as contemplated in our legal framework. It is an act of political sovereignty of the Republic, nothing and no one can stop it. The Constituent Assembly will go on!" the statement concluded.

The threats come after record high numbers turned out to participate in the historic dry run vote for the ANC, which is aimed at easing tensions and creating a more representative constitution. Despite the mass show of public support, the event was largely ignored, as international leaders continued to criticize the Venezuelan government and demand immediate elections.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer called on Miraflores to cancel the National Constituent Assembly and convene what he called "free and fair elections."

EU diplomat Federica Mogherini likewise urged President Nicolas Maduro to suspend plans to convene the Constituent Assembly, noting that the move would be "an important gesture" toward de-escalating tensions.

This message was echoed by Spanish President Mariano Rajoy and Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, who penned an opinion piece for the Spanish newspaper El Mundo criticizing the Venezuelan government.

Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro chimed in Tuesday, saying that if the Constituent Assembly went ahead it would be "inappropriate," and he demanded that the constitutional process be canceled.

Joining the interventionist attacks, Colombia and Chile reportedly filed a lawsuit at the International Criminal Court in The Hague against Venezuelan President Maduro on charges of alleged torture and illegal imprisonment.

Maduro defended Venezuela's "dignity and sovereignty" against these threats Monday, telling Rajoy to "get your nose out of Venezuela" while reminding the "insolent" Mogherini that "Venezuela is a free, sovereign country ... not a colony of Europe."

"For Mariano Rajoy, (the opposition plebiscite) is a legal referendum in relation to the state and to the Constitution, but the referendum of the people of Catalonia to decide their status before the Spanish state is not legal," he added. In defense of the assembly, Maduro recounted the Battle of Ayacucho in Peru, a concluding military victory of the Latin American revolutionary wars, when the forces of Grand Marshal Antonio Jose de Sucre decisively forced the Spanish Empire to surrender and end its reign over South America.

"Ours is a Constituent Assembly for independence, sovereignty and national dignity," Maduro said. "Let Europe say what it wants to say, we do not care what Europe says. We care about this land, our dignity, the land of the liberators of the Americas!"

The dry run vote was held Sunday in anticipation of the official July 30 vote for the National Constituent Assembly.

Given the surge of right-wing protest violence, Tibisay Lucena, president of the CNE, said Sunday that the voting exercise was particularly important to ensure that the voters can exercise their right to vote in safe conditions. She explained that part of the exercise was to identify those localities within the municipalities where the safety of voters could be threatened during the electoral event.

"We continue to evaluate measures that protect the lives and physical safety of voters because there have been expressions of fear about going to vote ... We assure people that we will continue to look for measures so that they can come out and vote peacefully on voting day," Lucena said.

While there were some reports of violence, the dry run vote was largely carried out in a festive mood. Some 496 polling centers were authorized in all the municipalities of the country, 55 of which functioned as pilot centers, according to the National Electoral Council. Nearly 1,942 voting machines were deployed in the dry run to help voters learn how to use the machines.

"It is clear that the majority of Venezuelans want peace, dialogue and a future," Jorge Rodriguez, head of the Zamora 200 Campaign Command, said at a press conference, noting the unprecedented nature of the turnout. "Today a new machine has been born, one that will push forward a new history, a new dawn."

The dry run vote for the National Constituent Assembly coincided with a symbolic referendum called by the opposition which asked people to vote whether they want a constituent assembly or not; whether they want the armed forces to support the existing constitution and the decisions of the national assembly; and whether they want immediate general elections.

Venezuelans in other parts of the world as far as Miami, New York City and Spain also participated in the non-binding referendum.

Opposition leaders claimed that more than 7 million Venezuelans participated, 98 percent of whom opposed the assembly, but short of the 11 million they had hoped for in a country of just under 20 million eligible voters.

Meanwhile, the opposition has called for several days of actions, even calling for a parallel illegal government, in its efforts to overthrow the Bolivarian Revolution.

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