

# *Avianca Suspends Flights to Venezuela as U.S. Tightens Sanctions*

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Bogota, July 28 (RHC)-- The second largest airline in Latin America announced Thursday that it will suspend all flights to and from Venezuela effective immediately citing "security and operational limitations."

The airline had previously announced that they would be suspending flights on August 16th, but changed the date to Thursday, leaving passengers scrambling for new arrangements.

The Colombian airline decided to suspend its service to and from Venezuela on the same day that the U.S. announced sanctions against 13 Venezuelan senior officials and the opposition scheduled what turned out to be a flop of a "48-hour strike."

German Efromovich, the company's chairman and main shareholder, has known links to the region's right-wing elites including Argentina's Mauricio Macri and Colombia's Alvaro Uribe.

In fact, according to El Tiempo, Argentina's judiciary is currently investigating Efromovich and Macri for a business deal involving presumed illicit association, fraud against the public administration, among other

things.

It's not the first time that Avianca's chairman has been involved in legal issues this year. Just last month it was reported by Revista Semana that he is also connected to Colombia's land grabbing scandal involving Hacienda la Gloria, in which state-owned lands were taken from campesinos by paramilitary groups and sold illegally on the market. A judge later ordered Efromovich to return the lands to the displaced campesinos and all private titles to the lands under his name were revoked.

Avianca is the latest in a string of airlines and companies to suspend services and trade with Venezuela, but despite this fact, other airlines like Iberia, Air France, Air Europa and TAP continue to operate without issues.

According to Avianca's web site, passengers who had pending flights will get a full refund and they will also attempt to transfer the tickets to other airlines "depending on availability."

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