

Washington indicts Venezuela's president and top leaders amid COVID-19 pandemic



Washington, March 26 (RHC)-- U.S. Attorney General William Barr on Thursday announced indictments against President Nicolas Maduro and other Bolivarian officials, whom the Trump administration accuses of having ties to drug trafficking. Additionally, the U.S. government is offering \$15 million for "any information leading to the arrest" of the Venezuelan president.

A reward of \$10 million USD will be awarded to those who provide information for the arrest of National Constituent Assembly (ANC) President Diosdado Cabello, Vice President Tareck El Aissami, former General Hugo Carvajal, and former military chief Cliver Alcalá Cordones.

The U.S. attorney general did not provide any evidence of drug trafficking, but claimed U.S. authorities have observed the trafficking operations at work in Central America.

Observers say that the indictments -- filed against a sitting head of state -- are a bold move. Yet Washington has spent more than a year attempting to remove Maduro from power. After Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó declared himself 'interim president' more than a year ago, Washington was quick to recognize him as the Latin American country's legitimate leader. Rounds of sanctions

against the Maduro government followed, and military action has always been "on the table."

Political observers say that Washington's chances of actually arresting and prosecuting Maduro are slim, although Barr did say that the Justice Department is "exploring all options" when it comes to apprehending the Venezuelan leader. Short of arranging his kidnapping by the Venezuelan opposition, Barr only said that U.S. authorities could strike while Maduro and his associates are traveling, itself a remote possibility amid the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The U.S. has indicted only one sitting head of state before Maduro: Panamanian ruler Manuel Noriega in 1989. As with Maduro, Washington did not recognize Noriega as Panama's legitimate leader at the time.

Once an ally of the U.S., Noriega was eventually captured by U.S. special forces following an invasion of Panama in 1989, and convicted by a Miami court three years later. When asked on Thursday whether military action could be used to capture Maduro, Barr refused to comment.

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