

# *Venezuela and Panama Pledge to Reestablish Diplomatic Ties*

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Caracas, May 6 (Xinhua-RHC) -- Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and Panamanian President-elect Juan Carlos Varela have pledged to waste no time in normalizing relations and relaunching diplomatic, economic and trade ties cut off two months ago, Venezuela's Foreign Ministry has announced.

Maduro spoke with Varela late Sunday, just hours after the Panamanian presidential challenger was declared the winner of a close race, the ministry said in a statement.

Both reiterated "their firm commitment to continuing to promote Latin American and Caribbean integration within the framework of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)."

The ministry emphasized that Maduro telephoned Varela within minutes of his declared victory to congratulate him and Panama on behalf of Venezuela.

"Their conversation allowed the two presidents to recall the time when, as Foreign Relations ministers, they worked together on the creation of CELAC," the ministry added.

Ties between the two countries were suspended in March by Maduro's government, after Panama's outgoing President, Ricardo Martinelli, a close U.S. ally, was perceived of aiding Venezuela's anti-government factions.

Varela was Martinelli's vice president, but the two had a falling out three years into their term, with Varela accusing the pro-business Martinelli of corruption.

Varela, of the Panamenista Party (PP), won Sunday's elections with 39.14 percent of the votes, according to official figures released after nearly 90 percent of the votes were counted.

Ruling Democratic Change (CD) party candidate Jose Domingo Arias, whose running mate was Martinelli's wife, came in a close second, with 31.69 percent of the votes, while opposition candidate Juan Carlos Navarro, of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), garnered 27.83 percent of the votes, according to the official data.

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