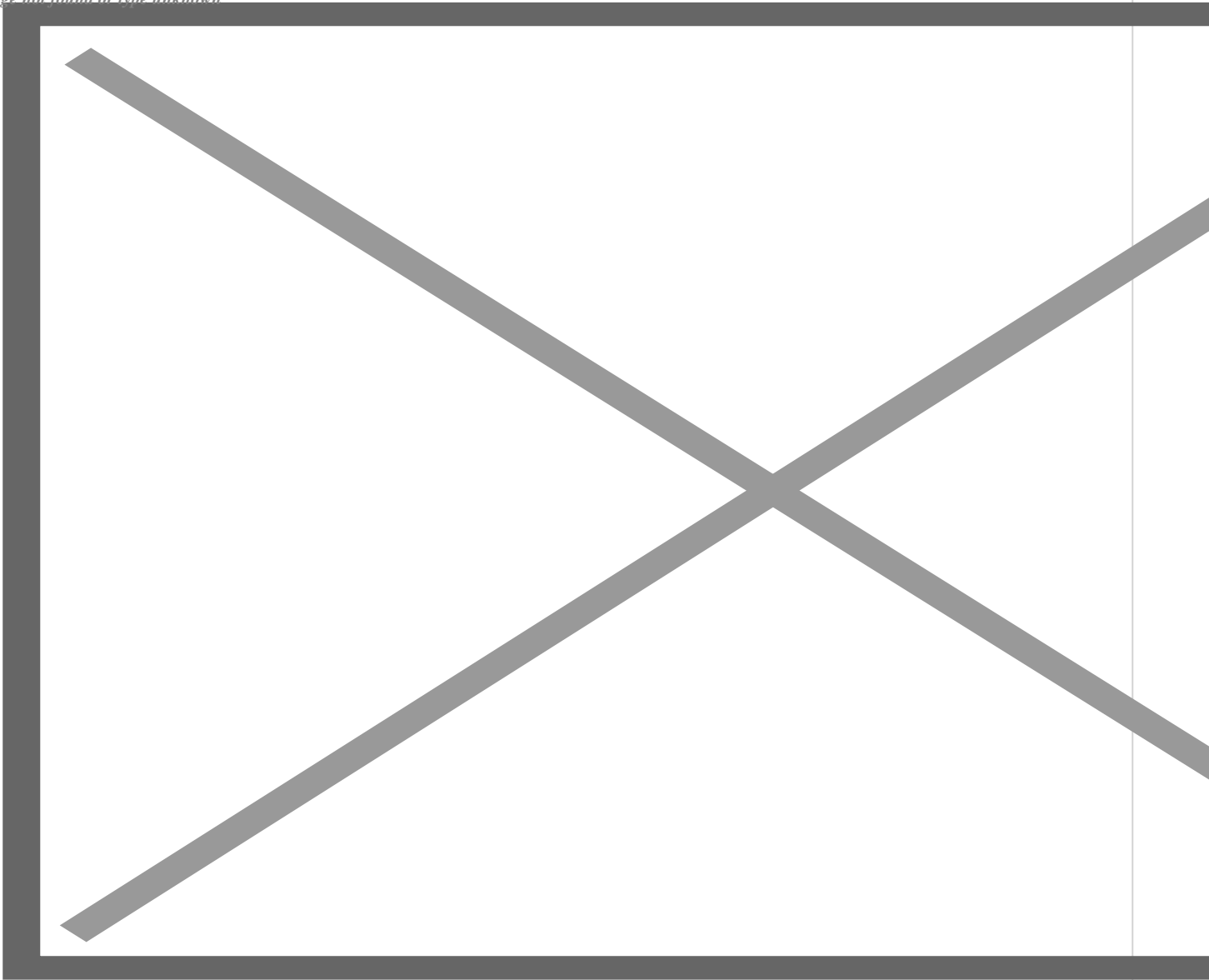


Venezuelan government and opposition launch talks in Mexico

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The government of President Nicolas Maduro is pressing for the lifting of sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe against Venezuela [Leonardo Fernandez Vilorio/Reuters]??

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Mexico City, August 14 (RHC)-- Venezuelan government and opposition members are starting talks in Mexico City to seek elusive consensus on how to overcome the economic and social crises gripping the country, according to the AFP news agency.

Representatives of the two sides signed an agreement on Friday in Mexico City, officially inaugurating the start of the dialogue mediated by Norway and hosted by the Mexican government.

The government of President Nicolas Maduro is pressing for the lifting of sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe against Venezuelan officials and institutions for what they see as criminal activities and the state's suppression of democracy.

For its part, the opposition in the oil-producing South American country wants Maduro to release dozens of people it considers political prisoners and provide guarantees its candidates can run in regional elections due in November. It has also requested that humanitarian aid, such as COVID-19 vaccines, be allowed in.

Norway also helped broker previous talks in 2019 that ultimately came to nothing. In 2016, the Vatican supported similar talks that also failed. Expectations for success during the first round to take place in Mexico have been tempered by past experience.

"Conditions in Venezuela are simply not there for upcoming talks to provide a 'big bang' moment that will dislodge [Maduro] from the presidential palace and immediately restore democracy," Maryhen Jimenez, an academic at the Latin American Centre at the University of Oxford, wrote in Americas Quarterly.

Returning to the negotiating table is a change of tack for the opposition, which accused Maduro in the past of using dialogue to gain time and relieve international pressure.

Venezuelan government officials abandoned the 2019 talks in Barbados and Norway after the U.S. stepped up sanctions against the Maduro administration.

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