

Iran slams U.S. over illegal seizure of Venezuelan plane

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Tehran, February 13 (RHC)-- Iran has censured the United States for the illegal seizure of a Venezuelan cargo plane formerly owned by an Iranian firm, saying the move amounts to "hijacking." In a statement on Monday, the U.S. Justice Department said the government had seized a Boeing 747-300 cargo plane officials said was previously sold by the banned Iranian airline Mahan Air to Venezuelan state airline Emtrasur, likewise under U.S. sanctions.

It claimed the American-built plane was seized since it breached American export control laws, adding that the Venezuelan-flagged plane had arrived in Florida and would be disposed of. The cargo aircraft arrived in the US after being grounded at the Ministro Pistarini International Airport in Ezeiza, Argentina, for 20 months.

“The Justice Department is committed to ensuring that the full force of US laws deny hostile state actors the means to engage in malign activities that threaten our national security,” said Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen, the head of the department’s national security division, in a statement.

On Tuesday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kan’ani condemned in the strongest terms Washington’s “illegal seizure” of the cargo plane. The Islamic Republic strongly supports Venezuela’s legal and diplomatic efforts to restore ownership of its assets illegally confiscated by the US, the Iranian official stated.

At a press conference, he condemned the seizure as a “hijacking” act committed “as the result of unilateral coercive measures from the United States.” Kan’ani also said what Washington had committed “is in violation of the basic principles of the UN Charter and international law.”

Venezuela also condemned the “blatant theft” of its aircraft by the US government, slamming Argentina for allegedly conspiring with the States to “violate all laws that regulate civil aeronautics, as well as the commercial, civil and political rights that assist [Emtrasur], placing aeronautical safety in the region at risk.”

“Free and sovereign Venezuela will give a forceful, direct, and proportionate response to this attack, for which it will use all available resources within the framework of the constitution, diplomacy, and International Law,” Caracas said in a statement.

The seizure took place as Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro was on a trip to Iran on June 10, 2022. He was in the Islamic Republic to announce a 20-year deal with Iran.

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