

# Pence Supports Unelected Politician's Claim to be Venezuela's 'Acting President'

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*Washington has moved to delegitimise democratically elected Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, with US Vice-President Mike Pence offering support to an opposition politician claiming to be the country's real leader.*

In a phone call to National Assembly speaker Juan Guaido, Mr Pence praised his "courageous leadership" and called on him to unite all opposition groups against Mr Maduro.

The National Assembly has no legitimate role in Venezuela since the establishment of the Constitutional Assembly, which was elected in August 2017 despite violent attacks from right-wing opposition groups seeking to stop people from voting.

However, following Mr Maduro's inauguration last week, the body declared Mr Guaido to be the country's "acting president" and refused to recognise Mr Maduro, despite him having won a second term of office last May with a thumping 67 per cent of the vote.

In a statement, Mr Pence branded Mr Maduro a "dictator with no legitimate claim to power who has oppressed the Venezuelan people for too long."

He endorsed Mr Guaido's claim to be interim president, which has also been recognised by the right-wing governments of Brazil, Chile and Colombia.

It is understood that Mr Guaido also has the support of the Organisation of American States, whose secretary-general Luis Almagro was recently expelled from the Frente Amplio party in his native Uruguay for backing intervention against Venezuela.

Mr Pence said that Washington would continue "to press for a full restoration of democracy" in the country.

The US has long sought regime change in Venezuela, implementing a raft of punitive sanctions and other measures. Last year it emerged that US President Donald Trump had given serious consideration to military intervention against Venezuela, including the possibility of a ground invasion to topple Mr Maduro.

Yesterday, the Washington Post published a column by Mr Guaido in which he accused Mr Maduro of being a dictator with links to drug trafficking and guerilla groups and demanded his overthrow.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the darling of liberals, has also branded Mr Maduro

a dictator, refusing to recognise his presidency. However, at a university debate yesterday, he refused to answer questions about his support for far-right Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

Mr Maduro dismissed Mr Guaido, who was part of the protest movement that tried to topple his late predecessor Hugo Chavez, as "a usurper."

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*Featured image: Venezuela's National Assembly speaker Juan Guaido (Source: Morning Star)*

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