

Venezuela Rejects Swiss Sanctions and Panama Accusations of Funding WMD and Terrorism

Venezuelan institutions claimed the allegations were false and demanded to see proof.

By [Paul Dobson](#)

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Venezuelan authorities hit back at their counterparts in Panama and Switzerland this week after they approved new measures targeting Caracas.

Panama's Economic and Finance Ministry announced this past March 27 that a [warning](#) was being issued to the Central American country's banks advising them to limit and "diligently" supervise financial transactions involving [55 top Venezuelan officials as well as 16 private businesses](#) allegedly associated with the Maduro government.

The list includes President Nicolas Maduro, National Electoral Council President Tibisay Lucena and rectors Tania D'Amelio and Socorro Hernandez, National Constituent Assembly members Diosdado Cabello and Hermann Escarra, Education Minister Elias Jaua, and Culture Minister Ernesto Villegas.

In an official statement, Panamanian authorities categorized the individuals and businesses as being "high risk in the area of money laundering, financing terrorism, and financing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." No evidence was, however, presented to support the allegations.

Venezuela possesses no nuclear weapons and is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as various other treaties banning the acquisition and development of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Similarly, many of those accused by Panama of allegedly financing terrorism belong to institutions which were themselves the objects of [violent opposition attacks](#) during last year's anti-government protests - including the [Supreme Court](#), the National Electoral Council, and regional government offices - which the Maduro administration has repeatedly described as "terrorism".

Speaking Monday, Venezuelan Attorney General Tarek William Saab, who is included on Panama's list, fired back, describing the accusations as "fake news" and calling on them to provide evidence.

"Show the accounts, my accounts for example, show where my name, my photo appears," Saab challenged.

Penitentiary Affairs Minister Iris Varela, who also appears on the list, similarly denied the accusations and called on the Central American authorities to publish a “complete list” of all Venezuelan citizens who own assets in the country, placing special emphasis on those mentioned in the Panama Papers.

“Why don’t they do it [publish the complete list],” she questioned. “Simply because they have assets and fortunes that belong to the [Venezuelan] opposition.”

The recent measures follow close on the heels of an [announcement](#) last month that Panama will not recognise the results of Venezuela’s upcoming presidential election, mirroring steps taken by the Trump administration and other regional conservative governments in rejecting the May 20 vote.

Meanwhile, Switzerland also moved to apply sanctions against seven high-ranking Venezuelan functionaries last Wednesday, [freezing](#) their alleged assets in Swiss banks and applying travel bans.

In response, the Venezuelan government delivered an official letter of protest to the Swiss charge d’affaires Monday, calling the sanctions a violation of the UN Charter’s ban on unilateral coercive measures and charging Switzerland with “subordination” to Washington and Brussels’ hardline Venezuela policy.

“This erratic action... on the part of a historically neutral country like the Swiss Confederation does not create conditions for dialogue and strengthens extremist positions that seek violent solutions,” reads the text of the letter.

Venezuela’s Supreme Court also issued a [declaration](#) Monday rejecting the moves as “illegal”. Supreme Court President Maikel Moreno was named in both Swiss and Panamanian measures.

The latest international actions targeting Venezuela have, however, won praise from members the country’s right-wing opposition, including Popular Will party Political Coordinator Carlos Vecchio, who applauded the Panama measures as “the right path at this stage”.

Vecchio is currently in Paris meeting with center-right French President Emmanuel Macron as part of a European tour aimed at drumming up support for more sanctions against Caracas.

During the meeting Tuesday, Vecchio, together with First Justice party leader Julio Borges and ex-Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma – who is currently fleeing the Venezuelan justice system – [called](#) on Macron’s government to apply “more sanctions” against Venezuela and to “halt Petro, gold, and capital legitimization operations,” referring to the South American country’s new crypto-currency. They also urged the French president and other European leaders “not to dialogue” with Caracas.

Planteamos al gobierno de Francia apoyar Intervención Humanitaria, juicio de Corte Penal, más sanciones, detener operaciones con Petro, oro y legitimación de capitales para salir de dictadura que oprime a nuestro pueblo . y

Desconocer fraude electoral. Con dictadura no se dialoga

— Antonio Ledezma (@alcaldeledezma) [April 3, 2018](#)

Opposition presidential frontrunner Henri Falcon, who [defied](#) the main opposition in launching his candidacy and has opposed economic sanctions in the past, has yet to issue a public statement with regard to the latest measures from Panama and Switzerland.

So far, only the [US](#) and the [UK](#) have approved economic sanctions against Caracas, while [Canada](#) and the [European Union](#) have rolled out sanctions against top Venezuelan officials

International sanctions against Venezuela have been denounced by the UN [Human Rights Council](#) as well as by UN Independent Expert Alfred de Zayas, who [labeled](#) the US-led measures “crimes against humanity” and called for the International Court of Justice to investigate.

According to Datanalisis, 55.6 percent of Venezuelans [oppose](#) economic sanctions against their country, while just 42 percent support individual sanctions targeting top officials.

Edited and with additional reporting by Lucas Koerner from Caracas.

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