

Venezuelan Government Demands Alex Saab Release, Return of Stolen Assets to Resume Mexico Talks

Alex Saab's Miami trial was postponed while the Maduro government accuses Washington of continuing to sabotage the dialogue process.

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Venezuelan National Assembly (AN) President Jorge Rodríguez reiterated that the dialogue process in Mexico will restart once government envoy [Alex Saab](#) is released by Washington and the US-backed opposition returns seized foreign assets.

"Enough hypocrisy. If you want dialogue, release Alex Saab. If you want [dialogue](#), return our assets abroad and our [gold](#) [withheld by the Bank of England] which you stole," Rodríguez [stated](#) on Wednesday during an AN [session](#) to inaugurate the 2022 legislative period.

The AN president added that the opposition led by self-proclaimed "Interim President" Juan Guaidó must recognize "the crimes committed against Venezuela." Rodríguez recalled the seizure of Colombia-based petrochemical [Monómeros](#) and US-based oil subsidiary [CITGO](#). Both companies were handed to Guaidó by Bogotá and Washington in early 2019 and are currently on the brink of being [taken over](#) by creditors.

Rodríguez went on to denounce that Guaidó and his allies "stole US \$382 million between 2020 and 2021" from Venezuelan frozen assets abroad. He detailed that \$8 million alone were used to pay salaries of the defunct 2015 National Assembly. According to the US State Department, the opposition leader has also [received](#) over \$1.9 billion for "humanitarian aid" since 2017, with another [\\$1.3 billion](#) coming from the US, Colombia, and Spain.

With a strong message against "impunity," the parliament's president requested accelerated [investigations](#) on Guaidó's "rotten pot" of criminal activities.

The former vice president likewise linked the government-opposition [dialogue's future](#) with

Alex Saab's release.

"Do not propose dialogue to later attack it as the United States Department of Justice did by kidnapping Saab, a Venezuelan diplomat and member of our delegation in Mexico," reaffirmed Rodríguez, who led the government representatives in the talks.

Norway-brokered negotiations in Mexico City between the Maduro administration and the US-backed opposition came to a [halt](#) last year following Colombo-Venezuelan businessman Alex Saab's [extradition](#) to the United States. The talks were due to enter their fourth round on October 17, a day after the extradition to Florida happened.

Saab was detained in July 2020 on a stop-off in Cape Verde reportedly en route to the Middle East to close food and fuel import deals on behalf Caracas. According to his lawyers, his arrest and subsequent extradition have been mired with [irregularities](#), including the continued disregard of his diplomatic status in court proceedings.

The Venezuelan envoy faces a lone count of conspiracy to launder money which could carry a 20-year jail term if found guilty. Previously, judge Robert Scola of the Southern District of Florida [dismissed](#) seven money-laundering charges at the request of the prosecution. This was allegedly part of a deal struck with Cape Verde to secure the extradition.

Saab's latest hearing, scheduled for January 7, 2022, was postponed to February 16 on the basis of a Covid-19 cases surge in Florida.

For his part, Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro restated that Washington sabotaged the dialogue process by extraditing Saab just as "the economy and criminal [US sanctions](#)" were being discussed. "We will wait to see what happens in the upcoming months [with Saab's case]," he said in an [interview](#) with Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet.

In turn, opposition frontman Juan Guaidó has [called](#) to resume the talks repeating his [slogan](#) of "free and fair elections" ahead of the 2024 presidential race. The US-backed politician currently holds no elected office after the former parliament's term expired in January 2021 and a newly [elected body](#) assumed the next five-year mandate.

However, the defunct Guaidó-led parliament has continued operating to access funds and retain control of Venezuelan foreign assets. On Monday, the former legislators [extended](#) their term and Guaidó's "interim presidency" until January 2023. The US Department of State was quick to [endorse](#) the move.

Guaidó's words on dialogue echoed the State Department's communique. "We call on Nicolás Maduro to reengage in the negotiations in Mexico, and to do so in good faith for the benefit of the Venezuelan people," [reads](#) the document.

Before Saab's extradition halted the Mexico talks, the first rounds of [negotiations](#) had led to the return of the hardline opposition to the electoral path in November's [mega-elections](#). Other advances, currently uncompleted, included a \$5.1 billion [injection](#) by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a joint pledge to defend Venezuela's Essequibo Strip.

Two previous dialogue efforts were likewise derailed before reaching any agreements. In [2017-2018](#), the opposition abandoned the table reportedly after then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson phoned lead opposition negotiator Julio Borges. Then in [2019](#), the US imposed [wide-reaching sanctions](#) when new talks were underway.

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Featured image: Parliament chief Jorge Rodríguez asked to ramp up the investigation into opposition leader Juan Guaidó's theft of Venezuelan assets abroad. (Twitter / @Asamblea_Ven)

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