



Guaidó, former Venezuelan opposition leader, lands in U.S. for ‘refuge’

## Description

**VENEZUELA:** Juan Guaidó, the U.S.-backed Venezuelan opposition figure who led an abortive uprising against the authoritarian socialist government of President Nicolás Maduro in 2019 but has since seen his support crater, arrived in Miami on Tuesday seeking “refuge” in the United States.

The 39-year-old engineer, who was at one time recognized by the United States and more than 50 other countries as Venezuela’s rightful leader, said he had entered Colombia on Monday “on foot.” Colombian President Gustavo Petro was hosting an international summit in Bogotá on Tuesday aimed at jump-starting a dialogue between Venezuela’s government and its adversaries.

Guaidó made it to Bogotá but said he was “expelled” from the country.

“The persecution of the dictatorship unfortunately spread to Colombia today,” Guaidó said in a video recorded inside an airplane and posted to his Twitter account. “There have been tough hours.”

Por las amenazas directas a mi familia e hijas del régimen de Maduro, que se extendieron a Colombia, estoy tomando este vuelo. Hasta lograr elecciones libres en Venezuela continuaremos luchando. Mañana les daré más detalles. [pic.twitter.com/atam1f4n6E](https://pic.twitter.com/atam1f4n6E)

— Juan Guaidó (@jguaido) [April 25, 2023](#)

He arrived in Miami on a commercial flight Tuesday morning, alone and toting a backpack. He told reporters he feared for his wife and two children, who he said had been threatened and were in danger. He declined to provide details.

He noted that he was following millions of Venezuelans in leaving their country: “Today I know how that feels.”

Guaidó entered the United States on a tourist visa, according to a senior member of his team who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. He had not decided whether he would seek asylum.

Jon Finer, the principal deputy U.S. national security adviser, said the United States “took steps to facilitate his departure” from Colombia.

“He conveyed to us that he was under threat,” Finer said in Bogotá, where he was attending the summit. “He’s someone who’s been a partner to us for a period of time.”

Colombian Foreign Minister Álvaro Leyva told reporters in Bogotá that Guaidó apparently crossed the border on his own and that the Colombian government was unaware of his presence until he started making public statements.

It was a “high-level U.S. official” in the Colombian capital, Leyva said, who “told us where he was and allowed immigration to go there” and meet with him.

Colombian officials denied that Guaidó had been “expelled.” They said he did not request admission or asylum.

He was “accompanied the whole time by people from the United States,” who bought his plane ticket to Miami and escorted him to the airport, Leyva said.

Before his departure, Guaidó had planned to seek the opposition’s support for a presidential run against Maduro. He had hoped to attend the Bogotá conference. “I hope this summit can ensure that the Maduro regime returns to the negotiating table in Mexico and agrees to a credible timetable for free and fair elections to solve the current situation,” he said on social media.

Colombia’s Foreign Ministry said that Guaidó entered the country “irregularly” and that immigration authorities escorted him to Bogotá’s El Dorado International Airport for a flight to the United States, where Guaidó’s mother and brother live. The ministry said it did not provide the plane.

It was yet another blow to Guaidó, who for a time managed to unite Venezuela’s historically fractious opposition into a single movement against Maduro and the socialist state founded by Hugo Chávez. When Maduro claimed victory in 2018 in an election widely seen as fraudulent, the United States, the European Union and several Latin American neighbors rallied to Guaidó. As National Assembly president, they said, he was Venezuela’s senior democratically elected official. The assembly, then

controlled by the opposition, voted to appoint him the country's interim president, pending free and fair elections.

But since the failure of the 2019 uprising — he called on soldiers to turn against the government, but few did — his support steadily declined. The opposition was buffeted by corruption allegations and returned to fighting largely within itself. In January, the National Assembly voted to end Guaidó's interim presidency and appoint a committee to run what's left of the "interim government."

"What happened is that his own party took away his candidacy," Diosdado Cabello, a powerful Venezuelan official who has held several senior posts in the Maduro government, said Monday. "That is going to come out. And faced with this situation, he had to find a way to flee this country."

"It is the fate of those who play with the hope of the people."

More than 7 million people have fled Venezuela since 2015 amid a failing economy, spiraling inflation and shortages of water, energy, food, medicine and other basic goods.

Maduro's government and the country's oil industry remain under heavy sanctions. Maduro and Cabello, among others, have been indicted on charges of narcoterrorism in U.S. federal court. During Guaidó's 2019 uprising, U.S. officials crowed that Maduro was heading to an airport, ready to flee the country.

But four years later, Maduro has strengthened his grip on this beleaguered country. And the election of Petro and other leftists across Latin America has made his neighborhood more hospitable.

State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said Tuesday's events should not be interpreted as a change of U.S. policy. "We continue to be clear-eyed about that, that we expect the regime in Venezuela to make significant progress when it comes to some of the humanitarian and human rights concerns that we've consistently raised," he told reporters in Washington.

The summit was attended by representatives of 19 nations in Latin America and Europe. Neither Maduro nor Venezuelan opposition leaders were invited. The U.S. delegation was headed by Finer and included former senator Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), President Biden's special representative for Latin America.

Petro, in an opening address, proposed the establishment of timetables for free and democratic elections in Venezuela and the gradual lifting of U.S. sanctions against Maduro and his government.

Earlier, in a fiery statement from Caracas, Maduro said that "if any of you want a return to Mexico and negotiations between this minority sector of opposition and the government of Venezuela, all you have to do is issue an official document demanding the return" of what he said were billions of dollars

belonging to Venezuela that were “being held hostage” by the United States in a foreign bank.

He called the demand “nonnegotiable,” but said he would “travel to Mexico immediately” once it was met.

David Smilde, a Tulane University sociologist who studies Venezuela, said Guaidó’s departure from Colombia was unlikely to affect the summit, but could impact how any results are received.

“It will allow hard-liners in Venezuela, the United States and Spain to oppose whatever agreements are reached as some sort of manipulated product of Maduro’s diplomacy.”

*Durán reported from Bogotá. DeYoung reported from Washington.*

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