

# Press Releases: Venezuela: Maduro Government Must Stop Silencing Opposition Voices

Press Statement  
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Acting Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
April 10, 2017

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The United States views with grave concern the Venezuelan government's actions to bar Miranda State Governor Henrique Capriles—a prominent, democratically-elected member of Venezuela's political opposition and former presidential candidate—from participating in the country's public life for 15 years.

We note the largest public demonstration of the year on Saturday, as well as protests today, and echo the Venezuelan people's calls for prompt elections, respect for the constitution and the National Assembly, and freedom for political prisoners. We urge demonstrators to express themselves non-violently and call on government security forces to protect peaceful protest, not prevent it. The freedom of assembly is a universal human right which the Venezuelan authorities must respect.

We firmly support the consensus of the Organization of American States Permanent Council, which affirms it is essential that the Government of Venezuela ensure the full restoration of democratic order. We urge President Maduro to reconsider the decision to bar Capriles and ensure Venezuelans can exercise their right to elect their representatives in free and fair elections in accordance with the Venezuelan constitution and consistent with international instruments, including the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

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## Press Releases: Remarks at a Press Availability

Press Availability  
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Lucca, Italy  
April 11, 2017

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**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Good morning. I've got a statement. I want to share it first, and then I'm happy to take a couple of questions.

Last week, Bashar al-Assad's regime killed even more of its own people using chemical weapons. Our missile strike in response to his repeated use of banned weapons was necessary as a matter of U.S. national security interest. We do not want the regime's uncontrolled stockpile of chemical weapons to fall into the hands of ISIS or other terrorist groups who could, and want to, attack the United States or our allies.

Nor can we accept the normalization of the use of chemical weapons by other actors or countries, in Syria or elsewhere. The U.S. is grateful for the statements of all of our partners who have expressed support for our timely and proportional response. As events shift, the United States will continue to evaluate its strategic options and opportunities to de-escalate violence across Syria.

Many nations look to the Geneva process to resolve the Syrian conflict in a way that produces stability and gives Syria and the Syrian people the opportunity to determine their own political future. And our hope is Bashar al-Assad will not be a part of that future. If the Astana ceasefire negotiations become effective towards achieving a durable ceasefire, then the Geneva process has the opportunity to accelerate. To date, Astana has not produced much progress.

It is also clear Russia has failed to uphold the agreements that had been entered into under multiple UN Security Council resolutions. These agreements stipulated Russia as the guarantor of a Syria free of chemical weapons, that they would also locate, secure, and destroy all such armaments in Syria. Stockpiles and continued use demonstrate that Russia has failed in its

responsibility to deliver on this 2013 commitment. It is unclear whether Russia failed to take this obligation seriously or Russia has been incompetent, but this distinction doesn't much matter to the dead. We can't let this happen again.

To be clear, our military action was a direct response to the Assad regime's barbarism. The United States priority in Syria and Iraq remains the defeat of ISIS. We are calling on our G7 partners to sustain the fight against ISIS well after the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa. Whether in Iraq and Syria, online, or on the ground in other countries, we must eliminate ISIS. G7 support will be critical. To stabilize Syria we will need the G7's direct participation helping settle the conflict in Syria, protecting the civilian population, and committing to reconstruction that eventually will lead to normalcy for a unified Syria.

Happy to take a question or two.

**MODERATOR:** Gardiner. Gardiner.

**QUESTION:** Sir, obviously, over the last day or so there's been some conflicting messages coming out of the administration, from Sean Spicer, from yourself. Is this a little bit of growing pains? Can you settle some of those conflicts here in terms of messaging, in terms of whether you want Bashar al-Assad out now, later; whether this was a humanitarian intervention or one based upon the national security interests of the United States; whether you will intervene only in chemical weapons or barrel bombs – all the rest?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, I think as I just indicated, the strike that was undertaken was in direct response to the use of the chemical weapons by the Syrian regime under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad. And as I indicated, we do believe that it is in the national interest because of the threat that unsecured chemical weapons pose given the chaotic conditions on the ground in Syria. We have a fight going on against ISIS, we have an internal civil war, we have a large presence of al-Qaida individuals, so it is important to us that whatever weapons are there are found, are secured, and destroyed ultimately.

In terms of the future of Bashar al-Assad, it is important to us that we undertake a political process that leads to the final conclusion of how Syria will be governed. It is our policy for a unified Syria that is governed by the people of Syria. I think it is clear to all of us that the reign of the Assad family is coming to an end; but the question of how that ends and the transition itself could be very important, in our view, to the durability, the stability inside of a unified Syria, and its stability and durability of the outcome going forward.

So that's why we are not presupposing how that occurs, but I think it is clear that we see no further role for the Assad regime longer-term given that they have effectively given up their legitimacy with these type of attacks.

**MODERATOR:** Nick.

**QUESTION:** We all in this room have followed Secretary Kerry around and saw in Geneva and other places how he repeatedly pressed Russia to step off its support for the Assad regime, and many, many times, obviously, failed to get them to do that. What makes you think that this time will be different? What are you taking to Moscow that you think will finally effect that change that the U.S. has been pushing for for so many years?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, I hope that what the Russian Government concludes is that they have aligned themselves with an unreliable partner in Bashar al-Assad. They had signed the chemical weapons accord themselves – the Syrian Government; the Russian Government had signed that accord; and now Assad has made the Russians look not so good under these circumstances.

I think it's also worth thinking about Russia has really aligned itself with the Assad regime, the Iranians, and Hizballah. Is that a – is that a long-term alliance that serves Russia's interest, or would Russia prefer to realign with the United States, with other Western countries and Middle East countries who are seeking to resolve the Syrian crisis?

We want to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people. We want to create a future for Syria that is stable and secure. And so Russia can be a part of that future and play an important role, or Russia can maintain its alliance with this group, which we believe is not going to serve Russia's interest longer-term. But only Russia can answer that question.

**MODERATOR:** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.

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## [Celebrating the 196th Anniversary of Greek Independence](#)

Dear Friends,

I am so proud to join you in celebrating the 196th Anniversary of Greek Independence, and with President Trump, to have welcomed so many of you to the White House yesterday.

Greek Independence Day means so much to all of us. As we gather with friends

and family in celebration, we are reminded of the values and ideals that inspired our democracy. The belief that government should be by the people and for the people was a revolutionary concept that has since paved the way to our prosperous and free Nation. This weekend, as we celebrate our shared desires for freedom, sovereignty, and self-governance, I can tell you that nobody will work harder to preserve these ideals than President Trump.

As White House Chief of Staff, I see a President working each and every day to follow through on his promises. This is a man who approaches the job with such incredible energy and tenacity. Axios! As we find renewed strength at home, our friends abroad will find us to be an ever stronger ally. The President knows just how important our enduring alliances are, and Greece is no exception.

My friends it is such an incredible honor, as a Greek American, to join you in renewing our devotion to representative democracy and “liberty and justice for all.” May God bless all of you as you commemorate Greek Independence Day, and may God bless the United States of America.

Efharisto poli,

Reince Priebus

White House Chief of Staff

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## [President Donald J. Trump Delivers the Weekly Address](#)

Today marks President Donald J. Trump’s 50th day in office and while delivering his Weekly Address, he spoke about an issue of paramount importance to families across our Nation: healthcare.

Seven years ago this month, Obamacare was signed into law over the profound objections of American people. Our citizens were told they would have to pass Obamacare to find out what it was and how bad it was.

Now we know that the hundreds of pages were full of broken promises. And this is why we must repeal and replace Obamacare – to deliver relief to American

workers, families, and small businesses, who right now are being crushed by Obamacare, by increasing freedom, choice, and opportunity for the American people.

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## Meet the Special Guests Attending President Donald J. Trump's Address to a Joint Session of Congress



President Donald J. Trump has invited several guests to attend tonight's address to a Joint Session of Congress. These special guests will be seated with First Lady Melania Trump in the Executive Gallery of the House Chamber. Watch the Joint Address at [WhiteHouse.gov/joint-address](https://whitehouse.gov/joint-address).

### **John Crowley & Megan Crowley**

At 15 months old, Megan was diagnosed with Pompe disease and not expected to live more than a few short years. To look for a cure, her father, John Crowley, founded a biotechnology company that identified the treatment that halts the progression of Pompe and is credited with saving Megan's life. Today, John is the CEO of Amicus Therapeutics, a New Jersey biotechnology company with more than 250 employees at the forefront of therapies for rare and orphan diseases. Megan, age 20, is now a sophomore at the University of Notre Dame.

### **Jessica Gregory & Sheila Gregory**

Jessica was diagnosed at birth with spina bifida, and has undergone 11 surgeries at Children's National Health System. Today, she is a dynamic, 18 year-old honor student at Largo High School and is planning for college and a career as a public interest reporter. Sheila and her husband are the proud parents of six—Jessica, two other daughters, and three sons—and reside in Prince George's County, Maryland. Sheila is a community leader focused on helping teen mothers and mentoring children and youth.

### **Denisha Merriweather**

After struggling with coursework as a child and often switching schools, Denisha moved in with her godmother and enrolled in the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program. She began attending a private school, Esprit de Corps Center for Learning, and went on to be the first member of her family to graduate from high school and college.

## **Jessica Davis & Susan Oliver**

Jessica and Susan are the widows of Detective Michael Davis and Deputy Sheriff Danny Oliver, Placer County, California police officers who were killed in the line of duty in 2014 by an illegal immigrant. Their names have been invoked in the Davis-Oliver Bill, congressional legislation which aims to increase cooperation between local and federal officials to enforce our nation's immigration laws.

## **Carryn Owens**

Carryn is the widow of Chief Special Warfare Operator William "Ryan" Owens. Chief Owens died heroically last month in an operation in Yemen which yielded valuable intelligence which will protect U.S. national security. Carryn is the proud mother of their three children.

## **Maureen McCarthy Scalia**

Maureen is the widow of late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, with whom she raised nine children. This month, President Trump nominated Judge Neil Gorsuch to succeed Justice Scalia on the Supreme Court.

## **Jamiel Shaw, Sr.**

Jamiel Sr.'s son, Jamiel Jr., was a high school football star before he was tragically shot by an illegal immigrant in 2008. A running back for Los Angeles High School, Jamiel Jr.'s tragic death in a gang-related incident ended his life at the age of 17.