



## Venezuelan Opposition Escalates Violent Anti-Government Protests



Caracas, May 30 (RHC)-- Right-wing leaders in Venezuela have called for an escalation of protests as political tensions continue to run high after nearly two months of opposition demonstrations aimed at forcing President Nicolas Maduro out of office.

Opposition groups marched in Caracas towards the Ombudsman's office on Monday, while government supporters gathered in front of the Miraflores Presidential Palace under the banner of "Peace, Life and Constituent Assembly."

As the right-wing demonstrations got underway, opposition leader and vice president of the National Assembly, Freddy Guevara, called on supporters to "get ready for an escalation," saying anti-government groups will "significantly" increase "pressure" in the streets against Maduro.

Meanwhile, opposition leader Henrique Capriles, head of the opposition Justice First party who lost the last two presidential elections while representing the opposition MUD coalition, stoked the opposition protests — which have increasingly spilled over into violence — by accusing the government of being responsible for violence.

Capriles claimed that "the government's hand is behind the burned buses, the barricades, the acts of vandalism." A total of 51 buses were burned last week in an attack on a transport company in Puerto Ordaz. Capriles took to Twitter after the incident to blame the government, writing: "They burn, loot, destroy everything to try to detract from the legitimate protest of the people."



President Nicolas Maduro called on the opposition to condemn such “terrorist acts,” accusing right-wing leaders of generating violence. “The opposition, by silence, is complicit in criminal terrorism that murders innocent people in the streets,” the president said, arguing that it has been made clear that the opposition is to blame for violence. “The ultra-right is held hostage by terrorist groups that they themselves created.”

More than 60 people have been killed in incidents linked to protests since the opposition launched an ongoing wave of anti-government demonstrations at the beginning of April, according to government officials. In one of the latest violent incident, a former member of the National Guard was beaten to death by an opposition mob in the state of Lara in what Maduro condemned as a “hate crime ... by a group of criminals, murderers, violent protesters.”

Although the dozens of people killed amid protests have died from a range of different causes — including at least 18 shot by assailants during protests, 13 killed during looting, eight killed at violent barricades, and five killed by police — right-wing leaders have painted the death toll as the result of a violent crackdown on the opposition marches by government forces.

The opposition has rejected Maduro’s national Constituent Assembly — called to initiate a democratic process to rewrite the country’s constitution and promote dialogue as solution to the intense political deadlock. Instead, right-wing leaders have called for an “escalation” of protests against the legitimate constitutionally-elected government.

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