

# *Venezuela Orders U.S. to Slash Number of Diplomats*

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Caracas, March 3 (RHC)— The Venezuelan government has given the United States two weeks to cut the number of U.S. diplomats in the country from 100 to 17, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez announced on Monday.

The order follows a speech by President Nicolás Maduro on Saturday, in which he declared that several U.S. politicians -- including former President George W. Bush and former Vice President Dick Cheney -- are banned from entering Venezuela, and that U.S. tourists would henceforth have to apply for visas to gain entry into the country.

"They can't come to Venezuela because they're terrorists," Maduro said at a rally on Saturday, referring to the entry ban for Bush and other U.S. politicians.

Maduro announced during the rally that tourists from the United States wishing to visit Venezuela would have to apply for visas, and would have to pay the same amount as Venezuelan tourists have to pay for U.S. visas.

In February, the U.S. government placed travel restrictions on Venezuelan officials allegedly suspected of corruption and human rights abuses, as well as members of the officials' families. The restrictions marked a moment of heightened animosity between the two countries, which have not exchanged ambassadors

in five years.

The tensions escalated recently as Washington imposed unilateral sanctions on a number of Venezuelan government officials.

Also, the Venezuelan government recently uncovered an opposition plan to carry out a coup d'etat, saying the scheme was backed by Washington.

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