

# *Venezuela Says U.S. Sanctions Give Free Rein to Right-Wing Violence*

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Caracas, December 20 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Venezuelan Foreign Minister Rafael Ramirez has described recently passed U.S. sanctions against the country as a message sent to violent right-wing groups that they can operate with impunity in Venezuela.

The sanctions, approved on Thursday by U.S. President Barack Obama, will affect a number of Venezuelan government officials who will have their U.S. visas revoked and any assets held in the United States confiscated.

According to the U.S. government, the sanctions are a response to the alleged repression of protesters earlier this year, when opposition supporters took to the streets, setting up armed barricades, preventing the free movement of citizens and essential goods, as well as firebombing public buildings and buses. Forty-four people were killed and more than 800 injured during the unrest. Most of the victims were killed by right-wing protesters.

"The most serious aspect of the U.S. sanctions isn't related to the fact that they are going to cause damage to us, but rather they are an incentive to the groups which are on the margins of the law and the

margins of the Constitution in Venezuela,” said Ramirez in an interview with teleSUR.

Despite U.S. claims, the Venezuelan government has consistently denied the excessive force used against protesters. It maintains that any action taken was in order to protect the lives of ordinary citizens and that U.S. support for the opposition is part of a strategy to affect regime change in the oil rich Latin American country.

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