

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:  
APPROPRIATIONS  
FOREIGN RELATIONS  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE  
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

April 5, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Steven Mnuchin  
Secretary of the Treasury  
U.S. Department of Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretaries Pompeo and Mnuchin:

The crisis in Venezuela continues to destabilize the region and threaten U.S. national security. Given that the United States and over 50 other nations now recognize Interim President Juan Guaidó—and therefore no longer recognize the regime of Nicolás Maduro as the official Government of Venezuela—it is time for the Executive Branch to take important and necessary steps to further isolate Maduro and make clear to the world his regime’s illegality, criminality, and depravity. I urge the Executive Branch to impose sanctions against the Maduro regime for its material support of terrorism; to designate the regime, as well as the estimated hundreds of armed irregular militia groups (*colectivos armados*) that it controls, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs); and to designate the Maduro regime as a Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO).

First, the Maduro regime’s alarming record of providing material support and safe haven to State Department-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations should compel the Executive Branch to impose counterterrorism sanctions against the regime under Executive Order 13224. In its most recent *Country Reports on Terrorism*, the State Department noted its 12th-annual consecutive determination that Venezuela, under the Maduro regime, “was not cooperating fully with U.S. counterterrorism efforts” and maintaining a “permissive environment to known terrorist groups.” The previous year’s report noted the regime “allowed for support of activities that benefited known terrorist groups,” adding that “[i]ndividuals linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army [ELN], and Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) were present in Venezuela, as well as Hizballah supporters and sympathizers.” Indeed, Colombian Defense Minister Guillermo Botero recently noted José Aldemar Rojas, the ELN terrorist and explosive expert responsible for an apparent suicide car bombing against a police academy in Bogota that killed 22 people and injured dozens on January 17, 2019, had a history of operating in Venezuela to train ELN terrorists.

Second, the Maduro regime—as well as the network of *colectivos armados* that the regime established and controls—also merit designation as Foreign Terrorist Organizations under Section 219 of the *Immigration and Nationality Act* (8 U.S.C. 1189).

While even General Vladimir Padrino López, Minister of Defense for Venezuela's National Armed Forces, last year condemned *colectivo* gangs, saying that "we reject those groups that who call themselves '*colectivos*' and go brandishing weapons," Maduro recently contradicted General Padrino to openly endorse and empower these irregular armed groups that are terrorizing the Venezuelan population. The truth is the Maduro regime built up this network of *colectivos* as its own private security force to protect its grip on power and violently resist any effort to dislodge it from power. Indeed, the regime has coordinated with allied state governors in recent years to create a nationwide *colectivo* movement consisting of perhaps hundreds of groups with total membership numbering in the tens of thousands, including violent felons released from prison to carry out Maduro's lawless demands where the Venezuelan military will not.

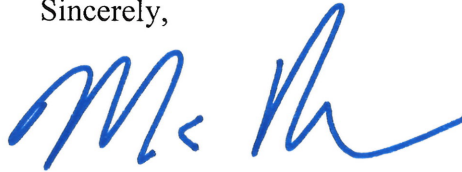
In an alarming development, the Maduro regime and its network of terroristic *colectivos* continue to take illegal and increasingly threatening actions against legitimate Interim President Guaidó and his Administration, the country's duly-elected National Assembly, and the Venezuelan people. After Guaidó became Interim President in January, the regime has increasingly unleashed *colectivos* to attack and terrorize the country's population, including the *colectivos*' use of deadly force to frustrate the Venezuelan people's February 23rd effort to bring humanitarian assistance from Colombia and other neighboring countries. In recent weeks, *colectivos* have attempted to menace members of the Venezuelan National Assembly. Indeed, Interim President Guaidó recently warned that the Maduro's security apparatus and *colectivos* may intend to forcibly kidnap him after the regime's puppet Constituent Assembly purported to strip Guaidó—who serves also as President of the legitimate Venezuelan National Assembly—of his immunity from prosecution under the country's laws.

Third, the Maduro regime support for international narcotics trafficking and narco-trafficking terrorists should merit its designation as a Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO) under Executive Order 13581 (50 U.S.C. 1701 note). The Maduro regime actively participates in the trafficking of cocaine and other illicit products. Planes filled with cocaine operate out of Venezuelan airfields, under the protection of the Venezuelan military, to deliver cocaine to airstrips in Central America. That cocaine is then handed over to drug networks that destabilize Central American countries, including, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, exacerbating the migration patterns we are seeing on America's southern border. And the cocaine that the Maduro regime is helping to move eventually winds up on the streets of the United States.

It is clear that the Maduro regime is involved in transnational criminal activity at the highest levels. Two of Maduro's nephews are currently serving 18 years in a U.S. prison for conspiring to import cocaine into the United States. In February 2017, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions against Tareck al-Aissami, who served as Venezuela's vice president until June 14, 2018, for being a "Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficker." And in May 2018, the Treasury Department designated Pedro Luis Martin Olivares (Martin), former Chief of Financial Intelligence to the predecessor of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN), as a significant foreign narcotics trafficker pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (Kingpin Act).

As you know, I represent a state where many Venezuelan-Americans live with the grim reality of family members in their native Venezuela who are suffering amid man-made disaster created by the Maduro regime, including lack of food, medicine, and other basic needs. On behalf of them and millions in Venezuela, I thank you for your consideration of these requests. I look forward to working with you to support the Venezuelan people's efforts to restore democracy and constitutional in their order at this critical time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized, flowing script.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator