

MICHAEL T. McCAUL, TEXAS
CHAIRMAN

BRENDAN P. SHIELDS
STAFF DIRECTOR

GREGORY W. MEEKS, NEW YORK
RANKING MEMBER

SOPHIA A. LAFARGUE
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR



One Hundred Eighteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

November 7, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Secretary Blinken,

I write with grave concern over the Administration's recent decision to dismantle sanctions on Nicolás Maduro's regime. The continued pattern by this Administration to prematurely lift sanctions on criminal regimes allied with America's adversaries undermines U.S. interests and national security objectives. I am hereby writing to request further information and urge a change from the current failed strategy of appeasement.

As you know, on October 17, 2023, negotiators for the Maduro regime and members of the Venezuelan opposition signed a partial agreement seeking to protect the then-upcoming, opposition presidential primary from regime interference. In exchange for the mere signing of an unenforceable agreement, the Administration lifted substantial sanctions on Venezuela's oil, gas, and gold sectors—the regime's financial lifelines. The following week, a majority of the Venezuelan opposition elected Maria Corina Machado as their presidential candidate, despite continued efforts by the regime to sabotage the primary process. Within days, the Maduro regime further reneged on its agreement commitments by cancelling the primary election results and interrogating organizers of the primary. In addition, the regime continues to signal that it will not permit Mrs. Machado to participate in the presidential election.

The regime will enrich itself from this Administration's sanctions relief while the Venezuelan people remain without a viable path for free and fair elections. This outcome is, unfortunately, all too familiar and predictable. It fits as part of a pattern of failed appeasement by the Administration of anti-American forces that is routinely exploited by our adversaries like China, Russia, and Iran.

I understand that the Administration has given the Maduro regime until the end of November to begin lifting electoral bans on opposition presidential candidates and start releasing political prisoners and wrongfully detained Americans. In testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee on October 31, 2023, you stated that “if the regime has in fact violated the agreement, then of course [the Administration] will take the necessary action.” However, the Administration has failed to provide details on what such action would entail.

In the interest of accountability and to facilitate adequate Congressional oversight, I request clarity on the Administration’s policy toward Venezuela with answers to the following questions no later than 5:00pm on November 15, 2023:

1. Can you confirm that it is the Administration’s position that lifting bans on all opposition presidential candidates remains a key condition of free and fair elections? On numerous occasions, the Administration has stated that “competitive elections” will lead to the restoration of Venezuela’s democracy. Please clarify the differences, if any, between a competitive election and a free and fair election—and the implications for U.S.-Venezuela policy.
2. Can you confirm that the Administration is committed and poised to reimpose all sanctions lifted pursuant to the signing of the October 17 agreement by November 30, 2023 if the Maduro regime fails to lift all legal bans on Mrs. Machado to participate in 2024 elections, as well as establish conditions for free and fair elections, by November 30, 2023? If so,
 - a. Will applicable sanctions be reimposed on or before December 1, 2023?
 - b. Will the Administration commit to not issuing waivers for any transactions or activities that would have been otherwise prohibited initiated during the period during which sanctions were lifted?

Sincerely,



Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee