

Beat: News

U.S. expels 3 Venezuelan diplomats in tit-for-tat move

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USPA News - The United States has ordered three Venezuelan diplomats to leave the country after they were declared `persona non grata` in a tit-for-tat move for President Nicolas Maduro's recent expulsion of three American diplomats accused of fomenting anti-government protests, officials said on Tuesday. U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the three officials from the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, D.C. were given 48 hours to leave the United States after the order was given on Monday evening.

"The [Vienna] convention permits the United States to declare any member of a diplomatic mission persona non grata at any time and without the necessity to state a reason," Psaki said. The move is a direct response to last week's expulsion of three American diplomats in Venezuela, where weeks of anti-government protests have killed at least 16 people and injured more than 200 others. The protests have declined in recent days, but sporadic protests continue in the capital Caracas and elsewhere in the country. On February 17, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elias Jaua accused U.S. diplomats Brent Mary McCusker, Elsen Gordon, and Clark Christopher Lee of using a visa program as a cover to meet with youth organizers. He alleged the meetings were intended for "training, financing and creating youth organizations through which violence is promoted in Venezuela." The U.S. government, which described the accusations as "baseless and false," said the consular officers were conducting "normal outreach activities" at universities regarding student visas. "We have seen many times that the Venezuelan government tries to distract from its own actions by blaming the United States or other members of the international community for events inside Venezuela," Psaki said at the time. Psaki said the expulsion of its diplomats reflect "a lack of seriousness" on the part of the Venezuelan government to deal with the anti-government protests and said Venezuela's political future is for the Venezuelan people to decide. "We urge Venezuela's government to work to address its people's grievances forthrightly through real, meaningful dialogue," she said. It was not the first time that Venezuela had expelled American diplomats. Three U.S. embassy officials accused of plotting to "sabotage" the economy and electrical infrastructure of Venezuela were expelled from the country in October 2013, just months after Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro ordered the expulsion of two U.S. military attaches after claiming they had attempted to infiltrate the armed forces.

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