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## FEATURED Q&A

# Are Maduro & the Opposition Nearing Peace in Venezuela?



Venezuelan authorities last week released opposition lawmaker Édgar Zambrano, who had been jailed since May. // File Photo: Venezuelan National Assembly.

**Q** Venezuelan authorities on Sept. 17 released prominent opposition figure Édgar Zambrano, who had been imprisoned since May. President Nicolás Maduro's government said the release was an attempt at "peaceful coexistence" with opponents, though opposition leader Juan Guaidó called the release the result of popular pressure against Maduro's government. Just a day earlier, Maduro's party and small opposition parties reached a deal on reviewing the cases of other prisoners and on reforming the National Electoral Council. Are the two sides getting nearer to a negotiated peace? How cohesive is the opposition, and what negotiating power does it have? What role have international talks led by Norway and Barbados had in the process? Is Maduro closer to the beginning or the end of his term as president?

**A** Gustavo Roosen, member of the Advisor board and president of IESA in Caracas: "On the eve of the U.N. General Assembly, when the international community would address Venezuela, Maduro's government considered it necessary to show a more positive face. That is why he set up a negotiation with small groups from the left that do not represent the opposition or the government of Juan Guaidó. The release of Édgar Zambrano is another publicity show for international observers. There are more than 500 political prisoners at this time. Those who follow the Venezuelan crisis closely are aware of the number of occasions in which Maduro's regime has decided to buy time to perpetuate itself in power. It has frequently agreed to participate in talks with the opposition that have led to no agreement. Recently, the

Continued on page 3

## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Trump Bars Top Venezuelan Officials From U.S.

U.S. President Donald Trump signed an order barring top members of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government from entering the United States. The order applies to high-ranking government and military officials and their immediate families.

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### POLITICAL

## U.S., Honduras Sign Asylum Deal

The United States will be able to send asylum seekers to Honduras under a new agreement that the two countries signed Wednesday. The agreement comes amid U.S. President Donald Trump's push to stem the flow of migrants to the United States.

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### ECONOMIC

## Argentina a 'Top Priority' for IMF: Incoming Chief

Kristalina Georgieva, who takes over Oct. 1 as the IMF's executive director, met with Argentina's finance minister.

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Georgieva // File Photo: International Monetary Fund.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Trump Bars Top Venezuelan Officials From Entering U.S.

U.S. President Donald Trump signed an order Wednesday barring top members of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government from entering the United States, Reuters reported. The proclamation bars the entry of all Venezuelan government officials with a position of vice minister or higher, all mem-

“We will stand with the Venezuelan people every single day until they are finally freed from this horrible and brutal oppression.”

— Donald Trump

bers of the military with a rank of colonel or above, members of the pro-Maduro Constituent Assembly and their immediate family members. Additionally, the ban also includes anyone acting “on behalf of or in support of” Maduro, along with people who receive “financial benefit” from the government, BBC News reported. On the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York, Trump told Latin American presidents who recognize opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate president, as do the United States and several other nations, that they were members of a “historic coalition.” Trump said, “Venezuelans are starving and they're dying from lack of medicine, doctors, help.” He added that socialism has “destroyed” oil-rich Venezuela and that the United States was doing everything possible “to isolate Maduro and his cronies.” Last month, the Trump administration imposed sanctions that froze any property that Maduro's government has in the United States and also barred U.S. companies from doing business with Venezuela. Also on Wednesday, Trump met with Guaidó's representatives to the U.N.

General Assembly instead of Maduro's, the Associated Press reported. The United Nations continues to recognize Maduro as Venezuela's president. “We will stand with the Venezuelan people every single day until they are finally freed from this horrible and brutal oppression,” said Trump. “They will be freed. It will happen.” Trump's meeting with Guaidó's delegation to the United Nations drew an angry response from Maduro's foreign minister, Jorge Arreaza. He called the meeting “shameful,” saying that Trump “doesn't like Latin Americans” and accused him of “trying to distract the public from his own scandals,” Fox News reported.

## U.S. Announces Migration Deal With Honduras

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday announced a migration deal that will allow the United States to send asylum seekers to Honduras, one of the world's most violent nations, The Washington Post reported. Officials at the Department of Homeland Security reached an agreement with the government of Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, who recently was accused in connection with a major U.S. drug trafficking case. Under the deal, U.S. immigration authorities would be allowed to send migrants



Hernández and Trump oversaw the signing of the agreement on Wednesday in New York. // Photo: Honduran Gov't.

who reach the U.S.-Mexico border to Honduras, a country where gang wars have pushed hundreds of thousands of citizens to flee to the United States. More than 250,000 Hondurans have crossed the U.S. border during the past 11 months, with many filing protection claims that have added to the backlog of asylum cases

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Argentina a ‘Top Priority’: Incoming IMF Director

Argentine Finance Minister Hernán Lacunza met Wednesday with the International Monetary Fund's incoming director, Kristalina Georgieva, at the IMF headquarters in Washington, where Georgieva told him that she “wanted the first meeting of her administration to be with Argentine officials,” Argentina's treasury ministry said in a statement, Reuters reported. Argentina is a “top priority” for Georgieva, the statement added. Georgieva begins her term on Oct. 1.

## Dine Brands Opens IHOP Restaurants in Ecuador, Peru Openings Also Eyed

Dine Brands International, the franchisor of IHOP and Applebee's, has opened three IHOP restaurants in Ecuador, with an additional 12 expected to open in the Andean nation by 2024 through a deal with new franchisee Corporación El Rosado, Franchising.com reported Wednesday. There are also plans to launch 25 IHOP restaurants in Peru within 10 years, with the first scheduled to open in Lima by the end of this year. Several countries in the region, including Mexico, Guatemala and Panama, already have IHOP restaurants.

## Mexico Banking Start-up Klar Raises \$57.5 Million in Debt, Equity Seed Funding

Mexico City-based digital banking start-up Klar announced Wednesday that it has raised \$50 million in debt financing and \$7.5 million in equity financing. Klar announced in a statement that Washington-based fintech venture firm Quona Capital led the financing round. The new funding will help Klar to launch its product in Mexico, where it aims to reach 100,000 new users next year. The start-up, led by co-founders Stefan Moller, Daniel Autrique and Gianluigi Davassi, has offices in Mexico City and Berlin.

in U.S. courts, according to the report. The accord with Honduras follows similar but not yet implemented deals with the other so-called Northern Triangle countries—Guatemala and El Salvador. The three nations combined are the largest source of illegal immigration to the United States, the Financial Times reported. “To anyone considering crossing our border illegally ... If you make it here, you will not be allowed in,” Trump said Tuesday before the U.N. General Assembly in New York. “You will be promptly returned home,” he added.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

### Colombia Seeking to Boost Trade With Asia: Duque

Colombia is seeking to increase its level of trade with Asian countries, President Iván Duque said Wednesday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York. Colombia wants to strengthen trade ties with China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore, Duque told Bloomberg Television in an interview. The Andean nation also wants to secure funding for infrastructure projects such as roads and ports, said Duque. “Colombia is looking to diversify its exports and consolidate markets,” he told Bloomberg Television. “We will continue to call investors worldwide to look at Colombia as the place in Latin America.” Duque added that he wants to send Colombian agricultural products, such as beef, bananas and avocados, to China. Duque added that Chinese companies have expressed interest in constructing a port on Colombia’s Caribbean coast, and some have also expressed interest in participating in the project to construct a subway system in Bogotá. Last week, the capital’s metro company, Empresa Metro de Bogotá, extended the deadline for consortiums to present their proposals for the subway system’s first line to Oct. 3, Reuters reported. China is Colombia’s second-largest trading partner after the United States, Bloomberg News reported.

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personal U.S. sanctions against the regime have forced it to seek a way out through a negotiated route. The restrictions that the United States has imposed on Venezuela’s foreign trade and the Maduro government’s money flow—and the actions this week by the Lima Group and by the TIAR signatory countries—are also weakening the regime’s ability to administer a country in a serious crisis. The organized opposition representing Guaidó’s transitional government had accepted the negotiations within the framework that Norway suggested as the only way to agree to the cessation of usurpation, a transition process and free elections, which is the only way to restore democracy in the country. Due to the sanctions, these negotiations may pay off.”

**A Beatrice Rangel, member of the Advisor board and director of AMLA Consulting in Miami Beach:** “Politics is the art of the possible. It is now quite clear that bringing down a regime penetrated by transnational organized crime is a tough act when you have no power resources (such as territorial control and weapons). It is also clear that the Venezuelan regime is subject to enormous pressures that will ultimately provoke its collapse. The name of the game for the regime thus is to buy time while keeping enough power to secure temporary well-being through what will probably be a short-lived impunity. For the opposition, the name of the game is to be there to profit from the regime’s collapse. Under such circumstances, a modus vivendi becomes essential, and this is what we currently have in Venezuela: an understanding among the warring parties that both need to survive in order to keep or seize power. We will thus see a lot of confidence-building measures exchanged among the parties. Meanwhile, nobody is addressing the humanitarian crisis, and people are dying in the streets or on the road trying to escape the worst human-made tragedy ever to fall upon the Western Hemisphere.”

**A Steve Ellner, retired professor of the Universidad de Oriente in Venezuela and associate managing editor of Latin**

**American Perspectives:** “The agreement reached between the Maduro government and anti-government moderates on Sept. 16 demonstrates the degree to which the Venezuelan opposition is divided. The media long ignored these internal differences, while Washington granted Juan Guaidó unconditional support, even though his Voluntad Popular party represents a relatively small and radical fringe of the opposition. The radicals have consistently opposed anything resembling ‘coexistence with the regime’ and now (along with Washington, but not our European allies) insist that the only item up for negotiations is the terms under which Maduro will leave office. In contrast, opposition moderate Timoteo Zambrano has long supported focusing discussions on the revamping of the National Electoral Council and the release of political prisoners, two demands that were tentatively met on Sept. 16. Another key negotiator on that day, former presidential candidate Claudio Fermín, staunchly opposes the government’s statist economic policies, but criticizes Guaidó for supporting sanctions and military intervention and argues Venezuelans can resolve their conflicts without intervention by ‘external factors.’ These latest developments were predictable given Guaidó’s erosion of active support, as shown by his loss of mobilization capacity, beginning with his failed call for a general strike in May. Many government opponents recall the five times the opposition has announced a ‘final offensive’ against Maduro and, as Zambrano states, they would rather concentrate on pressing economic problems. Nevertheless, without the support of non-radicals such as Acción Democrática and two-time presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, the moderates’ chances of success are limited. But the Sept. 16 initiative is the only hope for beginning to ease the extreme polarization

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that has done much damage to Venezuela since the early years of Hugo Chávez's rule."

**A Peter DeShazo, visiting professor of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies at Dartmouth College and former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs:** "Talks between the opposition and the regime of Nicolás Maduro have been largely fruitless and are unlikely to resolve the deadlock in Venezuela. Maduro engages in the talks to buy time and to encourage and exploit disunity in the ranks of the opposition. Using political prisoners as pawns only underscores the

**“ Maduro needs to be shown the exit but also incentivized to take it.”**

— Peter DeShazo

authoritarian grip of the regime. It is hard to imagine that Maduro would negotiate away his hold on power by reforming institutions or allowing free and fair elections. For a negotiated settlement to the deadlock to happen, the current dynamic must change. Maduro needs to be shown the exit but also incentivized to take it. A number of factors could influence a political breakthrough. For one, the opposition needs to be united. Venezuelan civil society can also play an important role. Internationally, countries supportive of a transition to democracy should redouble their efforts to persuade Maduro's key foreign patrons—China and Cuba above all—that continued support for an economically moribund and deeply isolated regime in Latin America is not in their best interest. More creative efforts to promote dialogue between sectors of chavismo, including the armed forces, and the opposition are needed. Targeted sanctions and incentives focused on individuals may help. While Maduro may think time is on his side, the horrific

status quo of suffering in Venezuela further reduces his support base. With Venezuela's crisis worsening and threatening regional stability, the international community must give higher priority to promoting a peaceful transition to democracy."

**A David Smilde, senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America and professor of sociology at Tulane University:**

"The parties and leaders currently negotiating with the Maduro government represent only a small number of the opposition seats in the National Assembly (AN), were not elected to leadership positions in that body, nor were they designated by the leaders that were. As such they do not represent the opposition coalition more broadly and cannot negotiate on its behalf. There are some positive aspects of the agreements they have reached—the reincorporation of Socialist deputies into the AN, the release of political prisoners and the designation of new rectors in the National Electoral Council can only be applauded. But there has been no mention of the elephant in the room: presidential power. The origin of the current crisis is that Maduro was not legitimately elected, and allowing Venezuelans to choose their leadership in fair elections has to be at the center of any accord. The recent agreements are related to the Barbados talks in a perverse way. The Norwegian diplomats did what expert mediators do: cut through the noise, focus on the central issue and put the two sides in a situation in which they either make a deal or have to reveal they do not want one. It was precisely because of the success of the Barbados talks that Maduro wanted out. The United States ramping up sanctions in early August, just as the parties were set to resume talks, gave Maduro a great excuse to withdraw. Guaidó's pulling out on Sept. 15 gave Maduro some breathing room, and Maduro grabbed the opportunity to launch a new negotiation process that does not challenge presidential power."

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