US Walks Out of UN-Linked Disarmament Body As Maduro Regime Assumes Presidency

May 29, 2019

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CNS News

<https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/us-walks-out-un-linked-disarmament-body-maduro-regime-assumes>

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N.-linked Conference on Disarmament staged a symbolic walkout from the chamber in Geneva on Tuesday to protest the presidency of Venezuela’s Maduro regime.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus declined to say whether the administration would act similarly at other international forums presided over by the regime – which it does not recognize – saying it would decide “on a case-by-case basis.”

While the walkout was symbolic, she told a briefing, “we think it’s an important symbol to show that the United States does not stand with an illegitimate regime and that we won’t be party to it.”

Ambassador Robert Wood and his delegation left the chamber as Jorge Valero, the representative of the Maduro regime, assumed the rotating presidency and began to speak.

The U.S. and more than 50 other countries recognize the head of the National Assembly, Juan Guaido, as Venezuela’s interim president in accordance with the constitution, pending new elections.

Wood later Tuesday pointedly posted a photo of him meeting with Guaido’s representative in Switzerland, Maria-Alejandra Aristeguieta.

After walking out, he read out his statement which he said he had not been prepared to deliver inside the chamber while Valero presided.

He condemned the Maduro regime’s presidency “in the strongest terms.”

“We will boycott the CD for the next four weeks, the duration of Venezuela’s presidency,” he said. “The CD cannot move forward when held captive under the yoke of illegitimate leadership.”

“The United States and other countries that value freedom and share a commitment to the goals and mandate of the CD have a moral obligation to support the Venezuelan people as they strive to reclaim their democracy, uphold their Constitution, and maintain their sovereignty,” Wood said.

“We must support interim president Juan Guaido and the National Assembly, and support his representative in Switzerland as she seeks to assume her rightful place within the Conference of Disarmament.”

“History has shown that a regime that oppresses its people and blatantly disregards the rule of law at home has contempt for international obligations and norms.”

Later Wood tweeted, “Today I told journalists that the former Maduro regime in Venezuela is dead; it just doesn’t want to lay down. The regime has sucked the life out of the Venezuelan people through its morally bankrupt, economically incompetent & profoundly corrupt policies.”

After Wood left the chamber, several countries expressed regret at the walkout over a matter which they said was not relevant to the CD’s work.

Russia, a close ally of Maduro, objected to what it called unnecessary and artificial politicization of the CD, and attempts to turn it into a platform to settle disputes among countries. Cuba, another key ally, took a similar position.

North Korea, Iran and the Assad regime were among those welcoming the Maduro regime’s assumption of the presidency.

Some Latin American countries which like the U.S. recognize Guaido stayed away on Tuesday, although France, Germany and the Netherlands – which like most European Union member-states also recognize the interim president – did take part in proceedings.

Outside the chamber later, Valero was quoted as telling reporters, in relation to the U.S. walkout, that the CD “is not a forum for coup-mongering.”

Representatives of the Maduro regime and Guaido have been meeting in Oslo this week.

Ortagus said previous attempts to have negotiation have failed – “because the regime has used them to divide the opposition and gain time” – but that the U.S. was hopeful that the talks in Norway “will focus on the departure of Maduro as a precondition for progress.”

“As we have repeatedly stated, the United States believes the only thing to negotiate with Nicolas Maduro is the conditions of his departure.”

The CD was established in 1979, with an agenda that includes weapons of mass destruction, reduction of armed forces and budgets, and the goal of eventual complete disarmament.

While not formally a U.N. body, it is serviced by the U.N., and its budget is included in that of the U.N. American taxpayers account for more than one-fifth of that U.N. budget.

The CD presidency rotates among its 65 member-states, which assume the gavel in alphabetical order.

The U.S. downgraded its participation earlier this year when the Assad regime took the helm, and boycotted Iran’s presidency in 2013.

The CD is the forum which in 1992 drafted the text of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the international treaty which the U.S. and allies [accuse Russia](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-united-states-france-germany-united-kingdom-attack-salisbury/) and the Assad regime of violating in recent years. Both are members of the CD.