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**Venezuelan President Renews Calls for Regional Integration Amid Diplomatic Attacks**

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President Maduro insisted on the need of a high-level regional meeting to discuss all subjects of common interest, including Venezuela.

The newly-inaugurated Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro issued a call for Latin American and Caribbean unity and proposed a special regional presidential summit to debate all issues of common interest.

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Since Maduro was sworn in Thursday, Venezuela has had to endure a series of diplomatic attacks from countries aligned to United States foreign policy in the region. Paraguay severed diplomatic relations, Argentina issued a statement reiterating the government's belief that Maduro's second term is illegitimate, etc.

Despite the attacks, Maduro urged for a high-level meeting to "allow us to overcome the environment of intolerance, of ideological aggression that hurts our continent, that counters the dream of our liberators, that betrays the dream of unity of our liberators."

President Maduro ratified Venezuela's commitment to sovereign regional

integration and a “diplomacy of peace.” However, the rise of right-wing government in the region has undermined what was once a regional goal. Last year, six countries temporarily withdrew from the Union of South American Nations (Unasur). Colombia announced its permanent withdrawal and over 6 months later there has been no diplomatic solution and Unasur remains paralyzed.

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The disintegration of Unasur, led by members of the Lima Group, was crucial to further isolate Venezuela. Both the Maduro administration has not been passive, instead it has strengthened ties with Caribbean nations and geopolitical players like China and Russia.

On Friday, he is expected to hold several bilateral meetings.

Latin American governments, accompanied by U.S. or Canadian representatives, often meet to discuss Venezuela. President Maduro wants a high-level meeting where they can discuss Venezuela before him, to speak “face to face.”

In regards to the government of Colombia, which has been particularly aggressive, Maduro said he wished to talk to President Ivan Duque “so he can talk about Venezuela and I’ll talk to him about Colombia.”

Maduro has been a vocal critic of the systemic murder of social and community leaders in Colombia’s rural areas. Last year, over 400 were killed with impunity. The Venezuelan head of state also said he was willing to explain to Duque how, after the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) left the country, Venezuela was capable of eradicating coca cultivation.

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