
Obama to Sign Venezuela Sanctions Bill

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WASHINGTON – President Barack Obama plans to sign into law a bill expanding sanctions on Venezuelan officials accused of violently oppressing protests against the country's leftist government, the White House said Thursday.

The administration shares Congress' concerns about the situation in Venezuela, White House press secretary Josh Earnest said.

Obama will continue working with Congress to prevail upon Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to respect basic freedoms and democratic norms, Earnest said.

The House of Representatives voted Wednesday to impose travel and financial sanctions on individual Venezuelan officials who U.S. lawmakers say are responsible for repression of opposition protests.

The Senate approved a similar measure on Monday.

Once enacted, the legislation will bar the issuance of U.S. visas to the named officials and the freezing of any financial assets they may have in the United States.

For months, the Obama administration resisted demands for sanctions against the Venezuelan government, hoping for a dialogue between the Maduro government and its opponents.

But following the breakdown of talks mediated by a group of Latin American nations, the White

House imposed an initial set of sanctions in July.

Violence associated with months of anti-government protests that began in mid-February left 39 people dead and upwards of 800 injured.

Fatalities included both opponents and supporters of the government, as well as public employees and bystanders.

Around two-dozen members of the security forces are awaiting trial in connection with instances of murder, torture and violations of human rights in the course of the protests, according to the Venezuelan Attorney General's Office.
