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Venezuela Gives U.S. 15 Days to Reduce Number of Embassy Personnel

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“They were given a period of 15 days to present the plan regarding the rank classification of officials who will remain in our country accredited by their government in Venezuela,” said the minister after meeting with the charge d’affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, Lee Clenny.

The meeting, described by Rodriguez as “cordial” and “friendly,” was aimed at providing details of a group of diplomatic measures announced by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro last Saturday during his speech at the end of an “anti-imperialist” demonstration.

Among the measures, Maduro ordered the reduction of U.S. diplomatic personnel in Caracas from 100 to a level similar to the 17 maintained by Venezuela in Washington.

In addition, he said, every meeting of U.S. diplomats in Venezuela must be made with the knowledge of his government.

Furthermore, the president made it obligatory for Americans visiting Venezuela to have a visa, a measure adopted, he said, after the capture of a U.S. pilot whom Caracas suspects was engaged in “espionage.”

In his Feb. 28 speech, Maduro said that entry into the country will be denied to a group of U.S. politicians he called “terrorists,” a list that includes former President George W. Bush, former Vice President Dick Cheney and Congressman Marco Rubio of Florida.

The U.S. government said on Sunday that the accusations leveled against it are “false,” but it

made no comment on the order to reduce the size of its embassy staff.

Relations between Venezuela and the United States have been at a low point since in 2010 the two countries recalled their ambassadors while Hugo Chavez, who died in 2013, was still president.

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