
Venezuela Accuses Argentina of Meddling in Internal Issues

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ASUNCION – Argentine President Mauricio Macri's call on Monday at the start of a Mercosur summit for the release of political prisoners in Venezuela provoked an angry response from the Venezuelan foreign minister.

"You are interfering in Venezuelan matters," said Delci Rodriguez, who is representing President Nicolas Maduro at the Mercosur summit of heads of state.

She also accused Macri of defending "this political violence," as she showed photos of armed people, including a man with a bazooka, which she said had been taken during the "peaceful demonstrations" in Venezuela in 2014.

"These are the peaceful protests of 2014, for those who have not seen ... They burned the Attorney General's Office, they burned essential public services, they attacked Venezuelans' access to food, education, 19 universities were burned," Rodriguez said.

"I want to expressly ask here before the Mercosur member heads of state for the quick release of political prisoners in Venezuela, because in the states that are party (to Mercosur) there can be no place for political persecution for ideological reasons or for different thinking," Macri said in his opening remarks at the summit.

The leading political prisoner is Leopoldo Lopez, an opposition leader sentenced to 14 years behind bars on charges he instigated the violence that marred the anti-government protests in 2014.

"If we're going to talk about human rights, we're going to talk sincerely, we're on the front rank for this debate," said the Venezuelan foreign minister in her address.

"I understand that Macri wants to ask for the release of these violent people. I know it because one of his first announcements was to release those responsible for torture in the (1976-1983 Argentine military) dictatorship," she said.

Macri, the conservative scion of a prominent family of industrialists, took office in Argentina Dec. 10.
