

Pompeo visits refugees in Brazil, pressuring Venezuela's Maduro

BRASILIA (Reuters) – U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Venezuelan migrants at a refugee reception center in northern Brazil on Friday at the third stop of a regional tour to ramp up pressure to oust Venezuela's leftist President Nicolás Maduro.

"They want what all human beings want – dignity, they want a democratic, peaceful, sovereign Venezuela to call home, one where they and their children can find jobs and live," he said at an air base in Boa Vista, capital of Roraima state.

He blamed Maduro for a "man-made crisis" of unprecedented proportions in Venezuela and called the Venezuelan president a "drug-trafficker," in comments to reporters.

Pompeo also visited a soup kitchen serving hungry migrants with Brazilian Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo. Brazil's right-wing government two weeks ago declared Maduros's diplomats *personae non gratae* but stopped short of expelling them.

Pompeo praised Brazil's humanitarian efforts to receive 250,000 Venezuelans who have crossed the border, some of the more than 5 million that have left their country due to the political and economic turmoil.

He said Washington was announcing another \$348 million to help Venezuelan refugees, including \$30 million for those in Brazil, bringing total US contribution to more than \$1.2 billion

Brazil's border with Venezuela has been closed since March 18 due to the coronavirus pandemic, and the flow of migrants crossing into Brazil has dropped from an average of 600 a day to a handful of Venezuelans who walk along cross-country trails.

Pompeo visited Guyana and Suriname before Brazil and continues on Friday to Colombia, all neighbors of Venezuela.

International efforts to encourage democratic change in Venezuela appear to have stalled and Maduro has asserted his grip on power.

Pompeo's stopover was deplored by former Brazilian leftist President Luiz Inacio da Silva, who said the U.S. official had only visited Brazil to "provoke Venezuela."

"Whether we like him or not, Venezuela has an elected president. The United States needs to drop this habit of wanting to be the world's sheriff," Lula told Reuters in an interview.

Reporting by Anthony Boadle; Editing by David Gregorio

Our Standards: The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.

Source:

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-latam-pompeo-brazil-idUKKBN26935S>

[Disclaimer]