

# US offers \$5M bounty for top Venezuela judge, Maduro ally



FILE - In this Jan. 31, 2020 file photo, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, right, speaks with Supreme Court President Maikel Moreno at the Supreme Court in Caracas, Venezuela. Maduro is at the court to give his annual presidential address. On Thursday, March 26, 2020, the U.S. Justice Department made public it has charged in several indictments against Maduro and his inner circle, including Moreno, that the leader has effectively converted Venezuela into a criminal enterprise at the service of drug traffickers and terrorist groups as he and his allies stole billions from the South American country. (AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos, File)

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CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The Trump administration offered a \$5 million reward Tuesday for information leading to the arrest of the head of Venezuela's high court, accusing the judge of taking bribes.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Supreme Tribunal of Justice President Maikel Moreno, a close political ally of socialist President Nicolás Maduro, actively participated in transnational organized crime.

Moreno has allegedly received bribes in over 20 criminal and civil court cases, Pompeo said.

Moreno quickly rejected the reward, saying it was based on lies aimed at undermining him and will only strengthen his “autonomy and independence” as the head of Venezuela’s high court.

“This is not the first time a mouthpiece of the U.S. empire has tried to attack me,” Moreno said in a statement posted on Facebook. “They will never succeed because the independence and sovereignty of our homeland is not up for discussion.”

The Trump administration this year launched a “maximum pressure” campaign to oust Maduro as Venezuela’s economic and social crisis deepens in the once-wealthy oil nation. U.S. officials earlier this year charged Maduro as a narcoterrorist, offering \$15 million for his arrest.

Maduro has rejected the U.S. charges against him, saying the are politically motivated.

The White House recognizes opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s legitimate leader. U.S. federal prosecutors earlier this year charged Moreno with money laundering offenses associated with the bribery.

“The United States continues to stand with the people of Venezuela in their fight against corruption and for the peaceful restoration of democracy,” Pompeo said in a statement.

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