

# Venezuela denies entry to Guatemalan president-elect, scuppering meeting with opposition leader

CARACAS (Reuters) – Venezuelan authorities on Saturday denied Guatemala's president-elect Alejandro Giammattei entry into Venezuela, where he was scheduled to meet with opposition leader Juan Guaido.

Giammattei, a conservative who won the Central American country's presidency in August, landed at Simon Bolivar international airport near the capital Caracas but was placed on a departing flight to Panama in part because he had not been invited by socialist President Nicolas Maduro, authorities said.

Guaido, who leads the opposition-controlled National Assembly, was recognized as Venezuela's rightful leader by dozens of other nations in January after invoking the constitution to assume an interim presidency, arguing Maduro's 2018 re-election was illegitimate.

"This is a message for president Guaido: we are with you. Even though they have not let us enter, we will make our voice heard today across the whole continent," Giammattei said in a video filmed on an airplane and posted by Guaido on Twitter.

Maduro calls Guaido a U.S.-backed puppet seeking to oust him in a coup.

In a statement, Venezuela's foreign ministry said Giammattei had attempted to enter on an Italian passport, which caught migratory authorities' attention.

"Once Mr. Giammetti made clear his visit was not for touristic or private purposes, and since he had not been invited by the national executive or with the coordination of the Guatemalan embassy, authorities proceeded to declare his inadmissibility," the statement read.

Giammattei later tweeted that he had landed in Panama without incident.

Maduro has overseen an economic collapse in once-prosperous OPEC member

Venezuela and is accused of corruption and human rights violations.

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