



Death and despair in last IS Syrian bastion

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CARACAS: German ambassador to Venezuela Daniel Kriener speaks to journalists after attending a meeting with Venezuela's opposition leader and self-proclaimed acting president Juan Guaidó (left), at the National Assembly in Caracas.— AFP

# Venezuela expels German ambassador

## Envoy accused of backing Guaidó; US tightens sanctions

**CARACAS:** Venezuela has expelled Germany's ambassador, hitting out at international support for opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the US stepped up sanctions in a bid to force out his rival President Nicolas Maduro. Separately, an American journalist was detained by Venezuelan security services for some 12 hours and due to be deported, in an incident condemned by advocacy groups as an attack on free speech. The foreign ministry gave German envoy Daniel Kriener 48 hours to leave for "interference" in Venezuela's internal affairs. He had greeted Guaidó at Caracas airport on his return to the country on Monday.

Guaidó said Kriener's expulsion will be seen "as a threat to the free world." Kriener was among more than a dozen foreign representatives to welcome the National Assembly leader - recognized as interim president by more than 50 countries - but so far the only one deemed "persona non grata." Kriener had helped to try to bring humanitarian aid to the country, Guaidó said in a speech to opposition lawmakers, adding: "It seems that the Maduro regime does

not forgive anyone who wants to help Venezuela."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that kicking Kriener out only "aggravates the situation." Caracas "is sending a message to the international community that such frontal support would have consequences, but it also carries a risk," said Venezuelan analyst Mariano de Alba. Meanwhile, journalist Cody Weddle, who worked in Venezuela for several years as a correspondent for a variety of US media, "has been released after being detained by Venezuelan authorities," Miami's WPLG Local 10 News, which he reported for, said on Twitter.

According to Venezuela's National Union of Press Workers he was picked up at 8:00 am, his work equipment was confiscated, and he was held for over 12 hours before finally being re-

leased and sent to Simon Bolivar International Airport to be deported. The union said it had been in contact with Weddle and he is fine. He has lived in Venezuela since 2014 and worked as a stringer for ABC News, the CBC of Canada, the Miami Herald and The Telegraph in Britain. Weddle is to be deported on Thursday, the union said. "A journalist who has been in Venezuela for five

### Washington revokes visas of 77 people linked to Maduro



years, deported for reporting the news," the guild said. Washington continued to tighten the screws on its campaign of sanctions to force Maduro from power, revoking the visas of 77 people linked to the regime, including officials and their families. "We will continue to hold all of the Maduro regime accountable until democracy and libertad (liberty) are fully restored," US Vice President Mike Pence said in a speech.

The move brings to more than 250 the num-

ber of Venezuelans targeted by US visa bans, a State Department official told AFP. National Security Advisor John Bolton said the US also is putting foreign financial institutions on notice that they will face sanctions if they facilitate "illegitimate transactions that benefit Nicolas Maduro and his corrupt network." The US is already trying to cripple Maduro's access to finances via sanctions on state oil company PDVSA and handing control to Guaidó of Venezuelan bank accounts in the United States.

However, UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said sanctions have worsened Venezuela's crippling economic and political crisis, which has forced 2.7 million people to flee since 2015. "Venezuela clearly illustrates the way violations of civil and political rights - including failure to uphold fundamental freedoms, and the independence of key institutions - can accentuate a decline of economic and social rights," said Bachelet, a former president of Chile. "This situation has been exacerbated by sanctions," Bachelet said in her annual report to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.—AFP