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By a guest author

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Venezuelan Embassy Protectors hail legal victory

By Embassy Protectors, Popular Resistance

The following is a slightly edited statement made by the Venezuelan Embassy Protectors on June 3.

Washington, D.C. — The federal charge of “interfering with certain protective functions” levied against four members of the Embassy Protection Collective was formally dropped today in a hearing before Chief Judge Beryl A. Howell in U.S. District Court. The defendants are Adrienne Pine, David Paul, Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers. They were arrested on May 16, 2019, when federal police raided the Venezuelan Embassy in violation of the Vienna Convention, which requires host countries to protect embassies and restricts them from entering without permission from the sovereign government.



Left to right: David Paul, Dr. Margaret Flowers, Adrienne Pine and Kevin Zeese outside the courthouse prior to the February trial.

Judge Howell sentenced the Embassy Protection Collective to no jail time. After a jury refused to convict them in February, resulting in a mistrial, the prosecutors offered to drop the federal charge and substitute a minor local misdemeanor charge of causing a disturbance. The protectors faced a year in jail and \$100,000 fine each. They are now on six months of probation.

The four protectors were in the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, D.C., for over a month last spring with the permission of the elected, constitutional government of Venezuela, as recognized by the United Nations and over 130 countries. The U.S. was attempting to overthrow the democratically elected Venezuelan government. When that failed, it took the unprecedented step of recognizing the then president of the National Assembly Juan Guaidó as president and handing Venezuela's assets in the U.S. over to him. All this violates international law.

The Embassy Protection Collective formed in April 2019 to stop the U.S. government from illegally giving Venezuela's main embassy in the U.S. to Guaidó's supporters. Guaidó's political party has little support within Venezuela and was behind violent protests in 2014 and 2017 that killed over 140 Venezuelans.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza and other members of the elected government, including President Maduro, expressed their full support for the U.S. peace activists. Many social movements within Venezuela also expressed solidarity with the protectors.

The protectors remained inside the embassy without incident until April 30 when the U.S. again attempted and failed to execute a coup. On that day, regime change actors, working with the U.S. State Department and Juan Guaidó's "ambassador" Carlos Vecchio, placed the embassy under siege, assaulting protectors, damaging and breaking into the embassy, and preventing food and supplies from being delivered.

Over 16 days, the number of protectors inside dwindled from 80 people to four to conserve food, especially after power and water were illegally cut off May 9. The four were the last protectors inside when the U.S. government conducted a SWAT-style raid.

Today's sentence marks yet another victory in the effort to protect the Venezuelan Embassy. The Embassy Protection Collective broke through the blockade and got supplies to the people inside who prevented the coup supporters from staying in the embassy. The embassy was not turned over to Guaidó. It remains empty today. Now the federal charges have been dropped.

The U.S. continues to threaten the Venezuelan people using tactics illegal under international law. The economic war has been heightened. The president and other members of the Venezuelan government are facing bogus drug-trafficking charges by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The U.S. put a bounty on Venezuelan officials, the U.S. Navy is surrounding Venezuela's coast, and U.S. soldiers have been sent to the Venezuelan border with Colombia. U.S.-backed mercenaries tried to enter Venezuela to kidnap or assassinate the President. None of this has deterred the Venezuelan people from defending their sovereignty and the revolutionary Bolivarian process.

The Embassy Protection Collective plans to host a webinar featuring social movement leaders from Venezuela in an effort to build international solidarity and opposition to U.S. imperialism. The U.S. activists hope their government will end its sanctions, blockade and aggression toward Venezuela and all countries being targeted and join in the spirit of international cooperation that prevails in this time of a global pandemic, recession and climate crisis.

The embassy protectors thank the many people in the U.S., Venezuela and around the world who supported them. They affirm their solidarity with all who are resisting injustice and state violence domestically and abroad.

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