

# Venezuela Accepts Flight Carrying Deportees From U.S. for First Time in Weeks

*The Department of Homeland Security said that a deportation flight to Venezuela carrying 199 people had landed.*

**By Annie Correal and Shawn McCreesh  
New York Times**

The Trump administration sent a flight carrying deportees from the United States to Venezuela on Sunday, the first such flight since the Venezuelan government [reached an agreement](#) with the Trump administration on Saturday to resume accepting them.

Diosdado Cabello, Venezuela's interior minister, invited journalists to an airport near Caracas, the capital, on Sunday at 8 p.m. for the arrival of the flight, which the government said was part of what it is calling the Return to the Homeland. The Department of Homeland Security, which oversees U.S. Immigration and Customs, confirmed that a deportation flight to Venezuela had landed and that it was carrying 199 people.

The Trump administration has made it a priority to get the Venezuelan government to agree to accept flights carrying people deported from the United States. In recent years, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have entered the country amid a historic surge in migration, and during his campaign, President Trump vowed to carry out mass deportations and to send home migrants.

However, because the United States has limited diplomatic relations with the autocratic regime of Nicolás Maduro, the U.S. government has not been able to send regular deportation flights to Venezuela.

After briefly agreeing to accept flights after Mr. Trump took office, Mr. Maduro ceased doing so weeks ago, after the Trump administration revoked a Biden-era policy that had allowed more oil to be produced in Venezuela and exported.

Mr. Maduro then came under intense pressure from the Trump administration. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on social media that Venezuela would face new, "severe and escalating" sanctions if it refused to accept its repatriated citizens. This weekend, it announced it would take flights again beginning on Sunday.

The Venezuelan government's willingness to resume accepting the flights also appeared related to the plight of Venezuelan migrants the Trump administration recently [sent to a notorious prison in El Salvador](#) with little to no due process.

To do so, the administration invoked an obscure wartime authority from 1798 called the Alien Enemies Act and secured the agreement of El Salvador's strongman leader, Nayib Bukele. Once in El Salvador, the migrants were put in [the country's prison system](#), whose conditions, according to many experts, constitute human rights abuses.

In a statement on Saturday, a representative for the Venezuelan government said, "Migration isn't a crime, and we will not rest until we achieve the return of all of those in need and rescue our brothers kidnapped in El Salvador."

The deportees being repatriated on Sunday were not being flown directly to Venezuela.

Flight-tracking data showed on Sunday that a plane operated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was scheduled to arrive in the afternoon at Soto Cano air base in Honduras, where the U.S. military has long had a presence, and which the Trump administration has previously used as a transfer point for deportees.

A plane sent by the Venezuelan state airline, Conviasa, was scheduled to arrive at the Soto Cano base around the same time, for an apparent handoff.

Honduran officials did not immediately respond to a request to confirm Sunday's transfer of Venezuelan deportees at Soto Cano. But earlier, Honduras's deputy foreign minister, Tony García, said in a message, "Honduras will help serve as a humanitarian bridge between friendly governments that request our support."

It was unclear how many deportees were on Sunday's flight, but the planes sent by the United States and by Venezuela can each carry more than 200 people, according to Thomas Cartwright, who [tracks deportation flights](#) on a volunteer basis.

Sunday's deportation flight is only the fourth such flight that Venezuelan officials have agreed to accept since President Trump took office.

On Feb. 10, the Venezuelan authorities sent two Conviasa planes to pick up nearly 200 migrants from Texas.

On Feb. 20, American authorities [abruptly removed 177 Venezuelans that they had sent to Guantánamo](#), the U.S. military base in Cuba, flying them to the Soto Cano air base, where they were handed off to Venezuelan authorities, who flew them back to Venezuela on a Conviasa plane.