

US Hints at Sanctions Against Venezuela CLAP Food Programme as Maduro Incorporates Militia

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The Venezuelan President looks to combat corruption and improve the programme which benefits 6 million Venezuelan families.



President Nicolas Maduro held a televised meeting alongside Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez (L) and Food Minister and Militia Commander Carlos Leal Telleria (Presidential Press)

Merida, May 29, 2019 (venezuelanalysis.com) – Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has announced the incorporation of the [National Bolivarian Militia](#) into the subsidised [CLAP](#) (Local Supply and Production Committees) food programme.

The move comes as rumours circulate of upcoming US-led sanctions against the leaders of the programme, which currently benefits six million Venezuelan families according to government sources.

Speaking from a CLAP packaging warehouse in Vargas State, Maduro announced that the body will be involved “directly in the tasks and functions of supervising and controlling the food mission (...) in the 1,141 parishes of the country.”

“We have to strengthen all of the food distribution mechanisms to make sure that our people are properly fed,” Maduro continued, before adding that the militia is also embarking on food production projects.

The Bolivarian Militia is a popular defense organization and the civilian branch of the Venezuelan Armed Forces. Created by Hugo Chavez in 2007, it has been expanded by Maduro to include two million civilians organized into 51,743 Popular Defense Units throughout the country. The government has vowed to extend the militia to three million citizens by December this year. The leader of the Militia, Major General Carlos Leal Tellería, was named Food Minister in April.

According to Maduro, one of the reasons behind the measure is to combat “the silent enemy” of corruption in the programme.

“The main enemy [of the CLAP] is North American imperialism and its internal lackeys. We will defeat them with more production, better packing and supervision etc. Now there is a silent enemy in the CLAP, which is like a weevil, which is corruption, the people who steal the products from the CLAP boxes for the black market. We must put a stop to this,” he told the nation.

Government officials have previously gone on the record stating that over 200 local CLAP leaders have been detained for corruption. Maduro added that CLAP deliveries would be incorporated into the Patria electronic system, through which social benefits and bonuses are delivered.

The [CLAP](#) programme was created in 2016 as the Venezuelan government looked to shield the most vulnerable sectors from the economic crisis. The [boxes](#) contain a range of basic foodstuffs including cornflour, cooking oil, rice, beans, and pasta. According to a recent interview by CLAP chief Freddy Bernal, the boxes, which cost a mere US \$0.40, come with a 98 percent subsidy from “regular market” prices. They are distributed by the communal councils and are prioritized by sector.

“If it weren’t for the CLAP, millions of families would be in an unsustainable crisis because of the US sanctions,” Bernal explained.

While government officials look to increase the coverage of the CLAP programme to 12 million families and the frequency of deliveries to every 15 days, many sectors of the country continue to have irregular, delayed, or non-existent coverage of the scheme. Recent [gasoline shortages](#) have exasperated distribution problems in the interior of the country.

The CLAP structures have also been used to sell other products, such as meat or cleaning supplies, at subsidised prices. (VTV)

The attempts to strengthen the CLAP come on the heels of reports that the US Treasury Department is preparing direct sanctions against the food programme for the first time. US authorities accuse the programme of being a front for

corruption, money laundering, and “political control” and are considering slapping sanctions against companies and individuals involved.

“They know that this program is corrupt, we know it, and we are investigating the details. A lot is to come,” US Special Envoy to Venezuela Elliott Abrams told Efe in an interview on May 22. “We don’t have a date for the sanctions but the (legal) accusations will come in good time,” he went on to say. [Abrams](#) is known for his leading role in the Reagan administration’s Central America policy, including the Iran-Contra scandal, and later for advising George W. Bush in the lead up to the war in Iraq.

US financial sanctions have hampered both the [purchase and payment of](#) the goods which constitute the boxes, most of which come from Mexico, Turkey, or Brazil, while Venezuelan authorities claim that Washington’s measures are also blocking the shipment of the goods.

Caracas claims that only 2 of the 12 shipping companies involved in CLAP imports are currently delivering as a result of sanctions. Maduro also mentioned that a number of ships were blocked from leaving their ports on Monday, describing the action as “sabotage”. He did not offer further details.

According to a Reuters [report](#), international shippers Hamburg Sud and King Ocean Services have both added a US \$1,200 surcharge per cargo container for all shipments from the United States to Venezuela this past May 15. The report adds that this move aggravates prices which are already considerably higher than the corresponding ones for similar journeys to other Latin American ports. The alleged surcharge is accredited to the “risk involved of coming to Venezuela with sanctions.”

Last month Washington banned all direct flights to and from Venezuela, as well as landing [sanctions](#) on nine non-Venezuelan tankers and four shipping firms which they claim transport oil to Cuba.

The US Treasury Department has imposed successive rounds of sanctions against Caracas in recent months, targeting several sectors of the Venezuelan economy. A January [oil embargo](#) cut off all oil exports to the US and imports of refining products, contributing to the current widespread [gasoline shortages](#) at the pumps

United Nations Special Rapporteur [Idriss Jazairy](#) has argued that US sanctions violate human rights and international law. A [report](#) from the Center for Economic and Policy research also concluded that sanctions against Venezuela amount to “collective punishment” and have been responsible for over 40,000 deaths since 2017.

Edited by Ricardo Vaz from Caracas.