# Venezuelan opposition demands Maduro end ‘persecution’

AFP- Venezuela’s opposition candidate called Saturday for President Nicolas Maduro to end “violence and persecution,” hours after the country’s high court said its upcoming ruling on the disputed July 28 election cannot be appealed.

Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, who claims to have won the election by a wide margin, posted a social media video demanding Maduro allow free political expression.

“I ask you on behalf of all Venezuelans to put an end to the violence and persecution and to immediately release all compatriots arbitrarily detained,” Gonzalez Urrutia said, referring to post-election unrest that left 24 dead and 2,200 people arrested.

“Demanding respect for our constitution is not a crime, demonstrating peacefully to uphold the will of millions of Venezuelans is not a crime,” the 74-year-old former diplomat added.

The message from Gonzalez Urrutia, who has not been seen publicly in more than a week, came after the Supreme Court said its upcoming ruling on the contested election would be “final.”

The court “is continuing the assessment begun on August 5, 2024, with a view to producing the final ruling… Its decisions are final and binding,” the body’s president Carylsia Rodriguez said.

Most observers say the high court is loyal to the government of Maduro, who has claimed a narrow victory in the election.

Opposition leaders say Gonzalez Urrutia won overwhelmingly and

have produced what they say are official tallies from voting sites as evidence.

Maduro himself summoned the high court on August 1 to "validate" his victory.

The court heard from all candidates, including Maduro, this week – except for Gonzalez Urrutia, who has said he fears arrest.

Key opposition leader Maria Corina Machado – a past presidential candidate who was banned from running this time – has said she is living in hiding.

Both Gonzalez Urrutia and Machado are being investigated by the justice department – another state institution seen as loyal to Maduro – for crimes including "inciting disobedience."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Saturday said "respect for the will of the Venezuelan people remains the only way for Venezuela to restore democracy, and resolve the current political and socioeconomic crisis with guarantees for all."

Borrell said the 27 members of the bloc "unanimously" request the publication of polling records and an independent verification, echoing similar calls from countries around Latin America and the United States.

The National Electoral Council (CNE) ratified Maduro's victory on August 2, saying he had won 52 percent of the vote, but it refused to release exact tallies from election sites, saying the data had been hacked.

The opposition, in contrast, published printed tallies – the legitimacy of which has been denied by Maduro – that they say show Gonzalez Urrutia receiving 67 percent of the vote.

The opposition and many observers say the alleged hacking of

the results is a government fabrication, made up to create an excuse to not publish election records.

Maduro on Friday rejected those accusations, saying there had been “brutal” hacking, with “30 million attacks per minute on the electronic systems of the CNE and of Venezuela.”

Opposition lawyer Perkins Rocha said that by turning to the high court Maduro was effectively acknowledging that “no one believes” the CNE, adding that “Maduro knows he can count on a (court) that kneels before him.”

During his time in office, Maduro has overseen a national collapse, including an 80 percent drop in the once-wealthy oil-rich country’s GDP, amid domestic economic mismanagement and international sanctions.

According to the United Nations, more than seven million Venezuelans have fled the country of 30 million since Maduro took over in 2013, mostly to other Latin American countries and the United States.

AFP