Venezuela opposition candidate asks Maduro to ‘step aside’

AFP – Venezuelan opposition presidential candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, who has claimed he defeated Nicolas Maduro in last month’s election, said Monday he was ready to negotiate a transition – and asked the incumbent to “step aside.”
“Mr. Nicolas Maduro, respect what all Venezuelans have decided… You and your government should step aside… I am ready for dialogue,” Gonzalez Urrutia, a retired diplomat, said in a video message posted on social media.

“Every day that you hinder the democratic transition, Venezuelans suffer from a country in crisis, and without freedom. Clinging to power only makes the suffering of our people worse. Our time has come.”

Since the contested election, Gonzalez Urrutia and fellow opposition leader Maria Corina Machado – who was barred from running herself – have been in hiding as prosecutors have opened an investigation against both of them.

Gonzalez Urrutia has not been seen publicly in weeks, while Machado appeared at an opposition rally in Caracas on Saturday.

Saturday’s protest was the latest since the July election, in which Maduro claimed a third, six-year term.

The country’s CNE electoral council declared Maduro the victor within hours of polls closing, giving him 52 percent of ballots cast, and ratified the vote in early August. It did not provide a detailed breakdown.

The opposition says its own tally of polling-station-level

results showed Gonzalez Urrutia, 74, had won more than two-thirds of votes.

Officials sources have reported 25 people have been killed, 192 injured and 2,400 arrested in election-related protests.

Maduro has accused the opposition of fomenting a coup, telling his supporters on Sunday: “They will never be able to defeat us, because we carry with us the force of history, the force of the nation, the force of God. We won.”

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