Venezuela says presidential opposition candidate has left country

AFP – The Venezuelan government said Saturday opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, who disputed President Nicolas Maduro's July 28 reelection, has left the country to seek asylum in Spain.
Gonzalez Urrutia had been in hiding for a month, ignoring three successive summons to appear before prosecutors, saying attending the hearing could have cost his freedom.

"After taking refuge voluntarily at the Spanish embassy in Caracas a few days ago, (Gonzalez Urrutia) asked the Spanish government for political asylum," Venezuela's vice president said on social media, adding that Caracas had agreed to his safe passage.

Madrid's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said on X that Gonzalez Urrutia "at his request" had departed on a Spanish military plane, adding that Spain was "committed to the political rights" of all Venezuelans.

Gonzalez Urrutia's lawyer Jose Vicente Haro also confirmed to AFP that the opposition candidate had left for Spain, declining to comment further.

Venezuela has been in political crisis since authorities declared Maduro the victor of the July 28 election.

The opposition cried foul, claiming it had evidence Gonzalez Urrutia had won by a comfortable margin.

Numerous nations, including the United States, European Union and several Latin American countries, have refused to recognize Maduro as the winner without Caracas releasing detailed voting data.

After the election, Venezuelan prosecutors issued an arrest warrant for Gonzalez Urrutia over his insistence that he was the rightful winner of the election.

– Disputed election results –

Lawyer Joel Garcia, who has defended opposition figures in Venezuela, said if Gonzalez Urrutia was charged with everything the government has accused him of, he could face a jail sentence of 30 years.

Authorities said Maduro had won reelection to a third, six-year term with 52 percent of the vote.

The opposition published its own voting records, which it says showed Gonzalez Urrutia winning 67 percent of the vote.

Venezuela's electoral authority has said it cannot provide a full breakdown of the election results, blaming a cyber attack on its systems.

Observers have said there is no evidence of any such hacking.

Post-election violence in Venezuela has claimed 27 lives and left 192 people injured, while the government says it has arrested some 2,400 people.

Prior to the election, Gonzalez Urrutia was a little-known retired diplomat.

He became the last-minute presidential candidate after main opposition figure Machado was banned from running by state institutions seen as loyal to Maduro.

After Venezuela's last election, in 2018, Maduro was proclaimed winner amid widespread accusations of fraud.

He has led the oil-rich but cash-poor country since 2013.

His tenure, which has suffered from domestic economic mismanagement as well as international sanctions, has seen GDP

drop 80 percent and more than seven million of the country’s 30 million citizens emigrate.

AFP