

# Venezuelan official dismisses cut in U.S. anti-drug funding

**Responding to the U.S. decision to reduce anti-drug assistance, Venezuela's foreign minister said the nation is not interested in funding coming from 'the devil.'**

The Miami Herald  
Feb. 07, 2007

**CARACAS** - (AP) -- Venezuela's foreign minister dismissed the U.S. government's decision to cut anti-drug aid to the South American nation, saying it does not need money from "the devil."

"Venezuela is a sovereign country. [U.S. officials] can take their resources and do whatever they think they need to do," Foreign Minister Nicolás Maduro told reporters Tuesday. "We will continue fighting against drug trafficking."

U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said Monday that President Bush's proposed 2007-08 budget eliminated \$2.2 million in counter-drug aid originally requested for Venezuela.

President Hugo Chávez, who often refers to Bush as "the devil," broke off cooperation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in August 2005 accusing its agents of espionage, and has refused to draw up a new agreement since.

Maduro said Chávez's government does not need "money from the devil" and accused the U.S. government of offering aid only to countries that "submit to its commands."

Venezuela is a major transit route for cocaine headed from neighboring Colombia to the United States and Europe.

Venezuelan officials say they are fighting drug trafficking with increasing success, but Washington claims that because of corruption and a weak judicial system the amount of drugs smuggled through Venezuela is increasing.

Washington also has watched uneasily the close alliance between Chávez and Bolivian President Evo Morales, who have spoken of plans for Venezuela to help its Andean neighbor industrialize coca, the base ingredient for cocaine, into legal products.

Maduro met Tuesday with his Bolivian counterpart, David Choquehuanca, to discuss bilateral cooperation programs.

In comments to the press afterward, Choquehuanca said his country would not permit that "our sacred leaf, the coca leaf, be satanized."