

Press Releases: Interview With Christina Londono of Telemundo

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
February 22, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here with us. All eyes today are on the borders of Venezuela. The Maduro regime is not going to let the aid come in – that’s what they’re saying. When does U.S. patience run out, and what would that look like? (In Spanish.) Military intervention?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Christina, thanks for having me on. Tomorrow’s a big day, February 23rd. The United States and some other countries have provided an enormous amount of humanitarian assistance aimed at meeting an incredible crisis for the Venezuelan people. When you see the starvation, when you see the inflation, when you see the absence of medical care, it breaks your heart. The American people have responded with a tremendous amount of aid that’s now positioned around Venezuela. And tomorrow, we along with the, at the invitation of President Guaido, will work to move that aid to the people who so desperately need it.

You said that the Maduro regime has indicated they’re not going to permit it in. We’ve heard those statements too. I truly hope that the Maduro regime is listening, that they’re going to allow the Venezuelan people to receive food – I mean, it’s just crazy to be talking about a government, a leader who would deny food for his own people and medical care, and I hope he changes his mind. I hope he permits this to move forward. It’s a desperate need, one that has now begun to be met by the world. And what happens if he doesn’t I think the Venezuelan people will ultimately decide.

QUESTION: If he turns on his people, are you guys ready to intervene? Is the U.S. ready to defend the Venezuelan people from their own government if something should happen? (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: We’ve talked about the fact that every option’s on the table, but we are very hopeful that the Venezuelan people and the Venezuelan military will come to understand that Maduro’s days are past, that the regime that has created these conditions ought not be permitted to continue to

inflict this kind of pain and desperation on the Venezuelan people, such desperation that 10 percent of the Venezuelan population chose to leave the country. This is a rich nation with a long and wonderful history, and with the right leadership can be so again. So my fervent hope is that the Venezuelan people will resolve this without violence, with a political solution that gets what the Venezuelan people so richly deserve: a free, democratic nation that can be on the road towards economic recovery with all the liberty that the Venezuelan people deserve.

QUESTION: But you're not ready to give them an ultimatum or give them a time table – this happens and we're going to take other measures?

SECRETARY POMPEO: One of the things the Trump administration's been very clear about is we don't show our hand. We don't tell others what we may do. But I think the Maduro regime completely understands that America is committed to supporting President Guaido and the popular will of the Venezuelan people, and we're going to be hard at it, not only today and tomorrow as this aid begins to move across the borders, but in the days and weeks and months that follow. This is an objective that we have set to help the Venezuelan people succeed, and we're determined to achieve that outcome.

QUESTION: If you're moving against these regimes that are not democratic, many Nicaraguan people, Cuban people are saying, "Are you going to help us next?" (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, President Trump's administration has done so and will continue to do so not just in Venezuela but certainly Nicaragua and Cuba as well. And you see that. You see that in the policies. They're very different from the previous administration. They recognize that these governments are treating their people harshly, presenting real risks, security risks to the people, privacy risks, denying them basic liberties. And these are not the kind of things that ought to happen in the Western Hemisphere, and the United States under President Trump is working diligently in not just Venezuela but each of those two countries to achieve good outcomes for those people. The people need to lead those efforts. I'm convinced that they are determined to do it as well. The American people will support them.

QUESTION: So you're hoping for a domino effect?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I hope that each of those countries, that the citizens of those countries understand that the yoke of authoritarianism that has been foisted upon them is not necessary, that the corruption of those regimes is not necessary, that the bad behavior and difficult living conditions that those people find themselves in today is not necessary, that they can have a different life and that they'll contribute their efforts, their goodwill, and their humanity towards achieving a better political situation, both in Venezuela and Nicaragua and Cuba as well.

QUESTION: Last question: Mexico. I could not leave it out. They're not paying for the wall. There's still caravans of immigrants coming in. We haven't seen the new president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, here in the United States yet. Are the relationship – is the relationship tense? Are there problems

with Mexico? (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think the relationship between the two leaders is great. I know they've had multiple phone calls. I speak with Foreign Minister Ebrard with great frequency, and we have a wonderful relationship. There are clearly disagreements on policy. We wish they frankly did more to help us in Venezuela. We think it's in Mexico's best interest to do that too. And then you highlighted other areas. President Trump has made unequivocally clear that he views the border as a national security threat, and the humanitarian crisis that follows from that is real. We're working with the Mexican Government. I've met a number of times with Foreign Minister Ebrard to make sure that we understand each other's policies and how we can execute that along the border. But there are so many things that the United States and Mexico work on together. We have a trade agreement that's been developed – hopefully will come into effect by the end of this year. Many good things are happening between the United States and Mexico. They're a neighbor, an ally, and a country that I've put a lot of time and energy into developing a good relationship with, and I'm confident that that will continue.

QUESTION: Are you pressuring for more cooperation from Mexico? (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: I always want more cooperation from everyone that I work with. Yes, and I'm sure there are things they'd like us to do, and we're working to make sure that we're delivering on those for the American people as well.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, it's been a pleasure. Thank you so much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Wonderful to see you.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.